

2023

Saudi-Arab Emerging Video Game Cultures, Archetypes, Narratives, and User Experiences

Omar AbdulAziz S. AlKhamees

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Saudi-Arab Emerging Video Game Cultures, Archetypes, Narratives, and User Experiences

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Associate Professor Brian Yecies

Dr. Christopher Moore

This thesis is presented as part of the requirement for the conferral of the degree:
Doctor of Philosophy (220)

University of Wollongong
School of the Arts, English and Media

May 2023

Abstract

Arab representation in media has been a major focus of many works of renowned scholars, such as Edward Said (1978), Shaheen (2000), Karim (2005) and others. Journalism, film, television, and ancient literature have all been studied in these works. A recent addition to the study of Arab representation is the medium of video games. This was first examined by Reichmuth and Werning (2006) and Machin and Suleiman (2006) and extended by many works that are discussed in this thesis. The vast majority of the literature on Arab representation in video games focuses on Western video games and the reaction of Arab developers to these representations. Lack of specificity is another characteristic of this field. Both characteristics manifest in repeated comparative studies, where scholars select one local culture as an archetype, then embark on a comparative study of the global gaming community. In so doing, there is an unfair generalisation of Arab identity across broad and diverse regions, in terms of ethnic, ideological, national, historical, and even linguistic components. The present investigation critiques the shortcomings of this previous literature, while testing some alternative methods and approaches needed to re-examine the lack of access, language barriers and the aforementioned generalisations that have limited this field until now. Rather than assuming a single archetype for Saudi culture, this thesis departs from previous scholarship by examining the various aspects of the transformation process leading to what could be called an emergent “Saudiness”.

Specifically, this study examines the construction and depiction of Saudi-Arab identity through the narratives and audiovisual content of video games, paying close attention to recent developments in Saudi cultural and media policy and the mandates set forth by the *Vision 2030* development plan (SCEDA, 2016). Using theories on participatory culture (Jenkins, 2009) and spreadable media (Jenkins, Ford, and Green, 2013) as well as a content analysis of previously understudied material shared by a cohort of Saudi gamers, this research investigates the particular markers and strategies used to distinguish the spectrum of cultural aspects and elements with which Saudi gamers identify. To achieve this, the analysis focuses on three distinct archetypes of Saudi Arabs in video games: (a) the Saudis in Western video games, as suggested by previous works; (b) the Saudi citizen archetype, as recommended by state policy; and (c) the Saudi culture, as represented by Saudi gamers and Saudi game producers -- who in many cases reject the idea of a single archetype. In sum, this research sheds new light on the interactions between centralised and decentralised media in Saudi Arabia, as well as the Saudi gamers' sense of agency, demonstrating how Saudis perceive Saudi representations in video games as part of a complex spectrum of interactions within a larger global gaming community.

Acknowledgments

I would like to begin by acknowledging and thanking everyone whose knowledge and efforts are seen within the lines of this work. My supervisors, Associate Professor Brian Yecies and Dr. Christopher Moore, who made this work possible, are deserving of my deepest appreciation. Their direction and counsel saw me through all phases of composing my work. Additionally, I would like to thank the University of Wollongong, where I was able to indulge my academic curiosity in comfort. I would also like to acknowledge the efforts and work of the pioneers in the home computer and gaming industry of Saudi Arabia and GCC, Mr. Al-Sharekh and Mr. Bawareth. Their important contribution, through providing a missing chapter of the evolution of the gaming industry in Saudi Arabia, was an essential part of this work. An extended recognition is due to Mr. Arnaud de Klerk, an archaeogamist who opened his collection of valuable early generation Sakhr and Al-Mithali video games as well as a collection of printed material of that period.

In addition, I would like to thank the three precious Ms in my life: my mother Maryam, who brought me into the world and taught me my first words; my wife Melika, my partner in all aspects, who is standing beside me and is always offering me her unwavering support; and my little Mariam, whose curiosity brings her father much joy. This gratitude is also advanced to my father, Abdulaziz, who has always been the finest role model and educator. I am also grateful for my family's unwavering support and patience while I worked and pursued my ambitions. Your help has allowed me to reach this point.

To everyone who helped me during these few years, your contributions are important and much appreciated.

Certification

I, Omar AbdulAziz S. Al Khamees, declare that this thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the conferral of the degree Doctor of Philosophy (220), from the University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Omar AbdulAziz S. Al Khamees

1 May 2023

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Since its introduction to the Saudi market in the early 1980s, video games have become an increasingly popular medium in the country. With a rise in both market share and consumer base, the culture of the Saudi gaming community has developed unique characteristics and practices. The Saudi gaming culture is multifaceted, with varying degrees of influence derived from both the local multicultural heritage and the larger worldwide gaming community. However, cultural influence is not restricted to these two sources, since numerous elements play a role in moulding the Saudi gaming community's realities. As the country with the largest Arab GDP (WorldBank, 2020), it is expected that the spending power and preferences of the average Saudi consumer would differ from those of other Arab countries. Occupying 17.7% of total online purchases of Saudi consumers in 2019 (CITC, 2019), and an estimated market of \$946 million in combined spending on mobile, console and PC games in 2021 (Elliott, 2021), the video game market is one of the largest in the region. This impacts a variety of factors, including increased access to global and local gaming content. In addition to its economic standing, Saudi Arabia's geopolitical and cultural significance distinguishes it from other states in the region. Saudi gamers' choices and practises are influenced by a variety of variables, including their political dispositions different to that of neighbouring countries. Furthermore, research indicates that Saudi Arabia's religious and historical significance contribute to a stronger sense of identity than neighbouring nations (Martin et al., 2016)¹. This further reinforces the need for a separate enquiry, as it is necessary to gain a thorough understanding of the cultural context of gaming in Saudi Arabia. As this thesis investigates the many issues of gaming conditions in Saudi Arabia, supported by both primary and secondary sources, it will unearth an unexplored trove of information. Most importantly, this exploration demonstrate how the emergent Saudi culture is more nuanced than previously portrayed by the scholarship on Arab representation in video games.

With the literature review and methodology having chapters of their own, this introduction will only act as a guide to situating this work in the context of the scholarship on the topic. The introduction will explain the premise this work is based on, areas of investigation, the gaps it addresses, and provides a general overview of the workflow of chapters. *Saudi-Arab Emerging Video Game Cultures, Archetypes, Narratives, and User Experiences* is research on the self-representation of Arabs in Saudi Arabia as viewed through the Saudi gaming community in Saudi Arabia, outside the scope of comparative approach

¹ It important to clarify that the strong sense of identity examined here does not conflict with Al-Rojaie (2016) notes on the incohesive national identity of Saudi Arabia, as individuals national identity is varies according to their affiliations. (More on the topic on page 38 and Chapter 8 & 9).

permeating in previous works on the topic². This work could be considered a continuation of the works on Arab/Muslim representation in video games published between 2006 and as recent as 2022. However, with attention to the above definition of this work, the scope of autonomy is a key issue that set this work apart from previous work as it is “self-representation outside comparative studies”. Without diving directly into the literature review, as there is a dedicated chapter for this, it is important to define the premise of this work and how it is different from previous work. First, although reviewing previous works that investigate the topic of Arab misrepresentation in western and Japanese video games, the thesis is dedicated to autonomous self-representation. This means that it examines content generated by Saudi game developers, Saudi gamers and hobbyists, with attention to surrounding conditions that influence the gaming experience. This sets it apart from works like Šisler (2008, 2009, 2017), (Naji & Iwar, 2013) and others. Second, this work is a narrow approach to the topic, where it targets a specific segment of Arabs (Saudi Arabs). Third, unlike many previous works, this thesis relies heavily on primary sources with attention to providing criteria of sample selection of both interview sample, game content. Finally, and most importantly, this thesis remaps areas of research, providing future researchers a better understanding of the nuanced issues in this emergent culture. Thus, the thesis could be considered a continuation of previous works, and a much-needed reproach to many issues in the scholarship of Arab representation in video games.

Research Questions:

Forming the questions that guided this research came after a contrast between the status quo of the scholarship on Arab representation in video games and the current conditions of video gaming in Saudi Arabia as observed in preliminary observational research within Saudi Arabia. The observational trip included gaming cafes, gaming conventions, gaming extracurricular clubs, gaming retailers and other game related venues. This is well explored in Chapter 3. It became apparent that the state of scholarship has missed a great opportunity to explore a colourful and diverse emerging culture in Saudi Arabia. Due to the approach of previous works, there was a neglect of nuanced issues which are particular to the Saudi gaming experiences. The assumption of “reaction to western production” as a base of the gaming experience is the base of many works, as this thesis will discuss extensively. To avoid this assumption, the thesis seeks to identify the atmosphere surrounding this emergent culture. The questions take into account representation, regulation, cultural history, and the evolution of this industry over time in this fascinating geopolitical matrix of concerns. Thus, the scope of this research is encompassed of these three questions:

1. What are the most prominent cultural conditions of Saudi gaming experiences?
2. How do these experiences shape autonomous self-representation?

² As will be examined in detailed through the thesis (page 39), comparative approaches as criticised by Shaw (2010) and others is a game analysis approach where a Arab video games are held in juxtaposition to western and Japanese games in terms of Arab representation and production; not as an independent form of expression.

3. What specific aspects of game content and game paratext are utilised by the Saudi government, Saudi game developers, and Saudi gamers to promote autonomous self-representation?
4. What are the strategies used, by these three groups, to initiate cultural exchange via the medium of video game, and how are they linked to a wider global community?

The scope of this research could be considered as a narrow approach to the larger scope of Arab and Muslim representation in video games. With so much shared cultural aspects among Arab nations, there is also much difference. Needless to say, that the words Arab and Saudi Arab are not entirely interchangeable. This was addressed by many works such as Shaheen (2003, p. 172) on phrases like “All Arabs look alike to me” and “I can’t tell one [Arab] from another”³. However, this is not why this thesis narrows the focus to only Saudi Arabs. The reason that promoted narrowing the research scope is due to the feasibility of this approach. From a practical standing point, limiting the scope of research to Saudi Arabs, allows the research to examine the unified (shared) factors in the research sample. Examining media and cultural policy, public and governmental reaction, the shared historical experiences, shared educational systems, and shared homeland in addition to how all these factors influence autonomous self-representation in video game are more manageable under one country. Another benefit of narrowing the scope of research is data and content collection. For example, examining Saudi press in this research was instrumental in drawing conclusions on many issues such as the use of the 90’s Saudi video game developers’ strategy in utilising cultural peg in game paratext. Another example is understanding the governmental and the public’s reaction to video games. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that there are compromises attached to this narrow approach which accompany a work of this nature. One of these issues is selecting a representative sample for the interview. Without using subjective terms, such as “conservative” or “religious”, some individuals are not open to have an open conversation with researchers. To be more precise, a large segment of female gamers in Saudi Arabia are not open to share openly with a male researcher. Although possible through video or audio conference, there was a concern on the openness of female participants. With much deliberation, a conclusion to exclude this important and large segment from the sample and only include male gamers was reached. A note has been made of this in the methodology chapter supported by secondary research explaining the issue. Another note was made in the conclusion, suggesting a space for expanding this research by a capable female Saudi scholar.

The Research Sample

The sample in the context of this research is (1) the collection of game content and (2) interview participants. Sampling could be considered the biggest factor in the gaps in the study of the subject. In previous research, sampling both game titles and interview participants on the topic of Arab representation of video games affected the direction of investigation in different ways. First, the small number of post-1999 games (26 Arab games) chosen in the initial research were of a particular kind. The political nature of the selected shooter games, couple with a ludologist approach, led to the conclusion of genre effect on representation. This will be discussed in chapters 2, 3, 5, and, most importantly, 9.

³ This is also criticized by many interview participants will be addressed within the thesis.

Furthermore, the sampling was from various countries with different governmental policies and geopolitical interests. The other issues are connected to a shared generalisation in sampling interview participant. This issue will be discussed in Chapter 3: Methodology. Chapters 2 & 3 will explain how the majority of the interview samples in previous works, such as Al Faraj's work on Arabs and identity inclusivity (Clément, 2019), included people with different cultural, religious, displacement backgrounds. To mend these issues, the thesis details the criteria of selection taking into consideration historical sub-cultural diversity within Saudi Arabia, income, regional diversity, and other factors detailed in Chapter 3. As for game content selection, this research increases the number of game titles and the historical range. The game title selection considered for this research is significantly higher in games made between 1985 and 2020. There was also an additional section for modified games (game Mods), streaming content created through Game Mods, and a guide to practices of the gaming modding community in Saudi Arabia.

Framework and Areas of Investigation

This work gives special attention to the fluid nature of culture and the effect of globalisation. Within this thesis the term globalisation is used as defined by Stiglitz and chosen by Mir (2019, p. 38) in *Globalisation and the Arab Culture*: [globalization] is the closer integration of the countries and peoples of the world which has been brought about by the enormous reduction of costs of transportation and communication, and the breaking down of artificial barriers to the flows of goods, services, capital, knowledge, and (to a lesser extent) people across borders". With the evolutionary nature of the gaming experience in Saudi Arabia, the research chose to address the topic through the lens of global acculturation. The use of global acculturation frameworks such as Berry's (2008) *Acculturation and Globalisation*, and *Acculturation of Global Consumer Culture* by Cleveland & Laroche (2007) was taken after considering two factors. These factors are (1) the methodologies in previous research and (2) due to the nature and consideration taken in forming frameworks on acculturation. First, due to the comparative nature of previous research methodology on representation of Arabs in video game, cultural aspects in Arab games were highlighted in correspondence to the representation of Arabs in western games. As will be discussed with great detail in *Chapter 2: Literature Review*, western games consider the Middle East, in an orientalist timeless perception. This took the direction of the research on the topic to specific cultural aspects that are in essence "timeless". Furthermore, while criticising schematisation in western video games, as discussed in Chapter 2, previous studies would engage with the topic in a similar manner. The second factor is the consideration given to the balance between stereotyping and cultural neutralisation in forming acculturation frameworks. The AGCC framework, for example, has consideration to both cross-cultural approach and cultural hybridity. This will be discussed in a dedicated chapter. Chapter 7, will highlight the importance of having a balance between the two approaches, as emphasised by Ott, (2022) and others. Thus, this thesis considers the fluid nature of culture and the change that happens over time through a process of acculturation. By taking this approach, this research will shed more light on the unexamined area in previous works on the topic.

One of the areas of investigation that sets this thesis apart from previous work is examining the media and cultural policy. In this research, this is done by examining Arab identity archetype, promulgated by state cultural and media policy. This is followed by an examination of the effect of policy on Saudi gamer experiences and their behaviour as well as the autonomous Saudi Arab representation resulting from these policies. Generally, cultural and media policy on video games in the Arab world is a very understudied area of investigation. Apart from works such as that by Sisler & Mohseni (2017) and Šisler et al. (2017) addressing policy on video games in Iran (not an Arab country), there is little done on the topic. Most works, such as Clément (2019) builds on an interview with Ridwan Kasmiya Afkar Media's CEO. While Kasmiya's views on the video game market are important to the scholarship, they are vastly generalised. In addition to that, Kasmiya's statements are strictly his views on the market during the period where he released his games 2002-2010. The thesis addresses issues and provides substantial evidence that includes governmental policy documentation, press releases and market reports. The evidence that this research brings to light, adds to the scholarship and clarifies some of the misconceptions brought by Kasmiya's statement. Developers' conception of policy is very important to the research, yet very subjective. For example, during the 1990's copyright dispute between two Saudi Game developers, Al-Alamiah (Sakhr) and Bawareth, both sides gave their idea of what constitute as intellectual property in the research interview⁴. Almost 30 years passed on the ruling, yet both parties have different views on intellectual laws and the outcomes of the lawsuit. Thus, the thesis relies on direct reporting using policy documentation from concerned governmental bodies. In terms of Saudi gamers, the investigation explores the relationship between audience feedback to the reasoning behind certain policy components. It investigates the concerns and attitudes of Saudi gamers over video game policy in the country. It assesses participants' comprehension of cultural and media policy challenges and the necessity for corresponding legislation. In addition, the research examines important issues related game content filtering, the enforcement of policy, and the potential of circumventing these restrictions. The research also evaluates participant perceptions of these regulations' effectiveness in terms of vendor compliance. In addition, the research explores the effect of parents in implementing content restriction. All these issues are essential to better understand the Saudi gaming experience and further the resulting autonomous representation of the Saudi Arab.

Another area of investigation that was overseen by most works on the topic is game paratext. In addition to be a relatively new area of investigation (Švelch, 2020), there is little on how this affects the topic of Arab representation. Al-Rawi, (2018) bases his work on the YouTube post of what could be perceived as a gameplay clip from a modified ISIS game, as he describes it. The majority of attention was given to the ideological content of the video, not the effect of paratext and practices of game streaming. In its extended conceptualisation, game paratext covers a range of practices associated with Arab representation. Thus, the topic was prioritised in a chapter of its own exploring the use of game paratext from 1984 to 2019. The methodology section highlights a suggested methodology to follow in sampling

⁴ Although an interesting topic, video game copyright laws are not the focus of this research. This thesis is about the effect of various factors, including policy, on the autonomous representation.

and selecting game paratext from different in Saudi Arabia. The thesis investigates paratext in printed press, game streaming as a game paratext, competitive gaming as game paratext, ethnocentrism as a strategy in marketing games between 1984 to 1995, Saudi governmental media strategy in utilising game paratext and users' practices and reaction to the use of paratext. This thesis investigates the expanding paratextual space and compares it to the reality of convergence culture. It focuses on the growth on the epitextual side and the contribution of the culturally rich gaming community to this expansion. This study explores the origins of the growth and the interaction between the three major contributors to the paratextual space expansion: the gaming industry, the peripherals industry, and the gaming community. The research investigates the effect of compliance and cooperation (or the absence of it) between these three sides. This approach contrasts to the methodology used in earlier research on Arab representation, where the focus was directed to traditional textual or ludic game content analysis from the manufacturer/developer perspective. Outside of the limits of in game content, the paratextual method provides the ability to investigate a more holistic picture of the current image of Saudi-Arabs gaming culture. Admittedly, the pursuit of this study venue was not anticipated at the beginning of the investigation into Saudi-Arab representation; nonetheless, its requirement became glaring throughout the interview process. When asked, "what do you think of Arab representation in video games?", several said, "We won the 2018 Fifa eWorld Cup final".

A major theme in studies of video game reception in the Arab world is the inherited comparative style. With much focus on comparing representation in of Arab games to western representation of Arabs, a great majority of reception games in concerned within the pool of games involved (Chapters 2 & 3). The genre and game titles are limited, which results in limited of issues and fan base. Coupled up with a generalisation of Arab identity across all Arab nations and Arab diaspora, the research outcome is limited to generalised notions and mostly focused on reactions. While this thesis does not prioritise reception as a focus point, it outlines the methodologies that can be used in future research on video game reception in the region. It gives specific criteria for sampling and highlights issues that should be taken into consideration in conducting research of this nature. Amongst these, the extent of ethnocentric consumer behaviour, nationalist ideologies, national identities between state media and multicultural diversity, education amongst the many criteria and research content highlighted for future works on reception. The research examines interviewees' relationship with a global consumer identity and how this relates to acculturation concepts. Despite the fact that global consumer identity is not restricted to these frameworks, significant suggestive data is unearthed to evaluate a pro-globalization attitude. In contrast, the thesis examines ethnocentrism in the consumption habits of interview participants, and whether or not they have any commitment to the ethnocentric moral imperative of purchasing and favouring local goods over global product. In addition, the research explores self-identification within a historical framework, focusing on attitudes of inclusiveness towards other Arab states. This determines whether participants identify with a larger and older geographical region. And most importantly for this study, the research will investigate participants' responses to localisation practises in both domestic and international video games. This prompted the investigation to explore what additional localisation alternatives Saudi gaming communities used to avoid undesirable activities. Most prevalent are game cloning and game

modification. Through the responses of interview participants, this study reveals several behaviours and issues that have eluded scholars of Arab re-presentation in video games.

Aims of Investigation:

In addition to continuing previous work on the topic and filling research gaps, this thesis serves three main goals. First, it presents the international community with an undiscussed context of cultural conditions of gaming experience in Saudi Arabia. The selection of content and areas of investigating and the presentation is set in a way that could be read by someone unfamiliar with such nuances. Much of the aspects surrounding gaming in Saudi Arabia are well known to the Saudi gaming community. However, terms like Hajwalah games, the difference between a Mulhag gamer and an Istirahah gamer, and the Zanga Games convention, are terms yet to be explored by the international community of scholars. Furthermore, among the goals of this thesis is suggesting methodologies and frameworks to address the topic Arab representation in video games. Many frameworks have been utilized to address this topic between 2006 and 2019. For example, Some scholars, such as Šisler et al. (2017), suggest using Kraidy's (2005) critical transculturalism framework⁵. However, these works are susceptible to the same constrained caused by a small sample size of video. The thesis presents guides and criteria for selecting game and interview samples. Lastly, the study confirms the significance of collaboration with local researchers, since they are essential to research of this kind. Beyond the language considerations of being able to speak and access local news and legal documentation, local researchers are better capable of comprehending cultural signals and the limitations of expressions in local interview participants. A certain amount of trust must be created with participants, since many are unwilling to speak openly about several cultural, policy, and economical concerns. In other situations, participants revealed that the inability to comprehend foreigners makes them less communicative. Using a local researcher is essential due to his or her ability to recognise the intricacies of cultural concerns and to prevent stereotyping and generalisation. This was a significant obstacle when expanding on prior literature. This research is an effort to correct misunderstandings and initiate a new chapter in the study of this emerging culture.

Saudi Culture and the Local Perspective:

Before embarking on the exploration of vastness of Saudi culture, I have to emphasise that the research tries earnestly to remain objective. Although Chapter 3 contains notes from field observation of the local culture, which might be considered a subjective look to Saudi culture, the rest thesis remains held to believe that diversity is key in studying Saudi culture. Through the observation of the gaming community, I have concluded that Saudi Arabia has a more complex local culture than was initially perceived. Thus, it is extremely difficult and unjust to select one variant of this magnitude and present it as Saudi Arabia's one local culture. By stating this, it should be noted that it is understandable how the international scholarship outside Saudi Arabia made this presumption. This is due to the fact that

⁵ This framework was introduced by Kraidy (2005, p. vi) to resolve the absence of a unified definition of hybridity. Thus, this thesis chose the acculturation framework instead, as a more encompassing framework that addresses individual behaviour (see Chapter 7).

countries located in the global south have always given a sense of a unified national identity. I found that our observations concur with Al Rojaie's assessment of the character of Saudi local culture. "Unlike in other Arab countries, including some of the Gulf States such as Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman, Saudi populations in the newly formed state did not have a cohesive national identity. Rather, they were more likely to affiliate themselves with tribal, social, regional, and political groups, including a tribe, clan, region, sect, former emirate, or even former country; some people, particularly in Hijaz in the western region of Saudi Arabia, had migrated from other countries, both Arab and non-Arab, to the holy cities and lived there for generations" (Al-Rojaie, 2016, p. 27). Thus, addressing the local culture became more challenging than simply describing what was considered by many to be local culture and comparing it to a global culture. Through interview findings in chapters 7, 8, and 9, the reader will be exposed to what that means to local Saudi gaming community, as they voice their experience with this issue. I also bring to the reader's attention the notion that the interviewee selection took into careful consideration this particular aspect, as will be discussed in Chapter 3. Regrettably, the scope of this study does not permit further expansion on the immensity and diversity of Saudi Arabia's many cultures, the implications of this diversity on research on other topics, and most importantly, the risk of presuming an archetype of culture for comparative research.

The Thesis Title

The research's original working title was "representation of Saudi Arabs in video games." However, during the analysis of the numerous non-Saudi works addressing the topic, it became clear that there is a presumption of a cohesive and unified national culture in Saudi Arabia. While this is discussed in detail in the literature review (Chapter 2), it is crucial to note here that this issue arose as a result of dealing with cultural archetypes, resulting in a title change. As explored by Ali & Brooks (2008), Richter et al. (2016), and others, Cultural Archetypes could be defined as predefined cultural models with specific cultural values. The research took on the task of exploring the Saudi culture through, first-hand observation, review of governmental cultural policy, examining the cultural aspects as seen in the local printed press, and most importantly, the local culture as seen by a cohort of Saudi gamers. All these sources lead to point out that culture in Saudi Arabia should not be summarised in a single archetype. This is backed by numerous works on Saudi culture that emphasize the country's lack of a cohesive national identity (Durrer et al., 2017; Thompson, 2019). This will be a reoccurring theme in all chapters of this thesis. In the chapters, I will discuss how the assumption on a coherent national identity is largely built on archetypal comparisons. While the word "cultural archetype" might not be used verbatim in these discussions, the chapters by large argue on the practises of overgeneralising specific cultural values over the Saudi population. Chapter 2 reviews the works which addressed video games in the Arab world, showing a large gap in cultural analysis of the Arab gaming community. Conversely, the chapter shows that comparative studies have led to the selective approach, causing said gap. The third chapter introduces a methodology that solves the problems presented by earlier comparative studies. Chapter 4, demonstrate that archetype examination is less effective in examine the continuously changing nature of gaming culture in Saudi Arabia over time. Chapter 5 examines the issue of cultural archetypes in extensive detail. The chapter presents arguments demonstrating the virtues of both approaches. In the end, the chapter

introduces “Saudiness” as a term explaining how Saudi culture is too complex to be summarised through archetypal cultural comparisons. Although chapter 6 devotes less space to this topic, it reinforces the broader argument of the alternative method of evaluating Saudi culture. Following a continuous argument against archetypal similarities is Chapters 7, 8, and 9. The chapters reveal that the effects of global hybridity, the absence of a cohesive national identity, and the shifting nature of the gaming business all challenge the archetypal comparisons methodology. In sum, the arguments against archetypal comparisons, manifests in various terms across the chapters such as national identity, comparative approaches, the new Saudiness, hybridity as well as other multifaceted topics.

As for experience, the conventional methods of gaming experience such as Online Game Experience Questionnaire by Choi & Kim (2004), Play Experience Scale (PES) by Pavlas, et al., (2012), Player Immersion in Computer Game Narrative Questionnaire by Qin. et al. (2009) and Game User Experience Satisfaction Scale (GUESS), were found to have less out-of-game cultural parameters. These scales did not provide many investigative tools for the investigation of Saudi Arabia's complicated cultural challenges. In addition to that, the use of investigative tools with predefined cultural values, would be in line with archetypal comparisons that this research argues against. Thus, the research opted for qualitative analysis of the experiences collected through the interview of a cohort of Saudi gamers. Although limited to a male audience, the outcome of such investigation provided a trove of experience scattered throughout the chapters. Chapter 5 explores the experience of Saudi gamers with governmental cultural policies. Chapter 6 recounts the experiences of Saudi gamers with the larger global consumer culture. Chapter 7 examines the experience of Saudi gamers with game paratext, gaming conventions, and online streaming services. This is expanded upon in Chapter 8 with the experiences and reactions of Saudi gamers to Saudi creators' efforts to promote local culture on the worldwide market. In Chapter 9, Saudi gamers discuss their experiences with game modification, game cloning, and linguistic and cultural features of localized games. In sum, the experiences presented through interviews in these chapters provide substantial information to address a dearth of local Saudi gaming experience.

Chapter Summaries

The organisation of chapters in this thesis provides a coherent flow to a rather labyrinthian topic (see figure 2.1). The present chapter provides a targeted review of the relevant literature and methodologies that have shaped the context of scholarship on the thesis topic. The Introduction explains the premise my study is based on, areas of investigation, the gaps it addresses, while also providing a general overview of the workflow of subsequent chapters. *Chapter 2: Literature Review*, summarises the works attending to the topic of Arab representation in video games from 2006 up to 2019. It also summarises the methodologies followed in these works. The chapter categories these works into paradigms according to the source influence of Arab representation and the use of Arab cultural symbols and values. Since the examination of representation of the majority of these works is associated with game development, the typology of these works usually tends to compare local and international developers somewhat unevenly. Chapter 2 explains the principles of previous approaches to the topic, as they will be referred to during the dissertation. *Chapter 3: Methodology* only address the methodology

used in this research, as the methodologies of previous works are discussed in Chapter 2. The chapter contains the following issues: Areas of interest and initial observation trip (locations, events, participants), Game Selection, Paratextual content selection, interview participant selection and interview design. In doing so, Chapter 3 provides key details on the original ground covered by the present study, thereby setting the scene for the history that underpins the field of inquiry. *Chapter 4: Progression of Gaming in Saudi Arabia*, offers a broad historical background to gaming culture in Saudi Arabia. This chapter examines the gaming culture in Saudi Arabia through the lens of journalism by both Saudi and international publications that have shaped its reception among the public. It examines and compares references to Saudi gaming culture in Saudi Arabia, which until now, has remained understudied. This chapter narrows the scope of exploring the untold story and distinctive characteristics of Saudi gaming culture, which is critical for locating this knowledge and industry development within a wider global context. It will also explain the expansion of gaming space during the period from 1985 to 2020 only in terms of consumer acculturation, which is a concept used to explain how Saudi gamers and members of the general public acquire knowledge and skills regarding both domestic and international gaming cultures. *Chapter 5: Saudi Media Policy and Game Content Regulation* builds upon these previous chapters by exploring regulatory bodies in Saudi Arabia that are connected to gaming and game content. It argues that cultural policy in Saudi Arabia has an impact on the current condition of gaming – in ways that are somewhat invisible to the international creative industries community. It examines both aspects of internal cultural policy issues and their complicated linkages with global trends. It explores how from the inside, Saudis prefer how their cultural policy should look, while broader international research on cultural policy and UNESCO policy prioritises certain aspects of cultural policy from the outside. This complex dichotomy, which many non-Saudis (especially Western scholars) misunderstand, is unpacked in this chapter, demonstrating how Saudi lawmakers and policymakers mediate this nuanced space. Through an analysis of candid statements offered in original interviews conducted for this study, I argue Saudi gamers perceive local and international cultural policies in a manner that is distinct from other cultures. While this finding may seem somewhat obvious, the timing of this discovery is unique as the interviewees for this study viewed foreign culture through the creative arts in never-before-seen ways. Simply put, they viewed their own culture through the lenses of history, religion, and language – but in a modern global context. This original argument and finding are supported by the manner in which Saudi gamers discussed other countries (primarily Western and Japanese) in the context of art and media production. Nevertheless, as I have discovered, they discussed local culture in terms of historical narratives, religion, and language in ways that hitherto have yet to be fully understood.

These first five chapters begin to address the research questions by arguing how developments in and among the gaming industry in Saudi are comparable to state-of-the-art game policies in other countries. However, they characterise the Saudi gaming community's experience as a novel form of “Saudiness” that is both unrestricted and reserved in nature. My original study describes how such transformations in Saudi Arabia have led domestic gamers to negotiate their sense of self between the domains of regional and international cultures, which have undergone significant changes of their own under the weight of cultural and media policy directed at gaming. My comparison to other countries such as Japan, Germany, The United Kingdom and other Middle Eastern Countries locates industry and

cultural developments in Saudi in ways that shed new light on this topic of emerging video game cultures, archetypes, narratives, and user experiences.

Chapter 6: Acculturation of Global Consumer Culture in the Saudi Gaming Community and the next four chapters extend this line of inquiry by examining the cultural symbols and cultural values exchanged between the local community/local culture and the global community through a scope of consumption culture. Chapter 6 provides a critical rebuttal to the prevailing academic position of the global north regarding Arab gaming culture. The argument asserts that the process of acculturation, particularly between global and local cultures, is a complex phenomenon that exceeds the purview of previous scholastic literature on the depiction of Arab culture in video games. The acculturation process is a two-way phenomenon in which both parties make contributions. The topic of Arab representation in video games has previously been investigated in scholarly literature. Scholars have categorised Arab game developers and the gaming community into two distinct groups: (1) the counter-construction paradigm, as identified by Shaw (2010), and (2) assimilated consumers, as outlined by Clément (2019). Inferences consistent with Pieterse's conclusions on postmodern hybridization can be drawn from the small sample sizes of the preceding video game-related studies. This chapter's conclusion supports the viewpoint presented in its body. The findings of this chapter indicate that Berry's (2008) framework for examining the acculturation process is a more accurate representation of the gaming community in Saudi Arabia than previously believed. This has four potential outcomes: assimilation, separation, integration, and deculturalization or marginalisation. Despite distinctions in the extent of cultural integration, knowledge generated in each of these four groups emerges from within my own interviews conducted for the present study, drawing significant linkages between historical and modern activities in the gamer space. Utilising the acculturation process as a theoretical framework for research enhances our understanding of the intricate characteristics of the gaming community in Saudi Arabia, which was absent from the vast majority of previous studies. *Chapter 7: Paratext of Gaming in Saudi Arabia*, examines the paratextual context of Gaming in Saudi Arabia. This chapter contends that the paratextual spaces of video games play a significant role in the cultural exchange between international and Saudi gaming communities. The argument examines what comprises a game's paratext, using key works in game studies as a support mechanism. This chapter argues a seldom-discussed topic in game studies, namely the intersection of culture and paratext. Beyond ludic and textual analysis, game paratext in Saudi Arabia provided a new perspective on the gaming industry's acculturation. To support this claim, the chapter investigates the contributions made by government, corporations, and end-users to the cultural exchange within the gaming paratext domain. It begins with a definition and review of what is considered paratext in video games. Then the chapter explains why is paratext especially important to research on emergent gaming cultures and developments. Then it examines the areas of expansion in terms of game paratext in Saudi Arabia, starting from 1985 to 2019. *Chapter 8: An Attempt at the Global Market* addresses the usage of cultural symbols and cultural values by the local community, in the process of self-representation to a wider global community. This chapter follows the argument presented in Chapter 6, which examines the global acculturation process as a bidirectional process. This chapter examines the outputs of Saudi game developers that combine a diverse local culture with global gaming culture. It focuses on elements of Saudi game design, which combines Western game design with local aesthetics

and narrative to create a hybrid in-game culture. Arab designers use global gaming patterns to educate about their culture, which may be a surprise to some readers given the lack of attention to this phenomenon in previous studies. In addition, the chapter describes how game composites reconcile global market narratives with history in ways that international games, Such as *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception* (Naughty Dog, 2011), *Homefront* (Kaos Studios, 2011) and *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Blacklist* (Ubisoft, 2013), do not. The chapter argues that Saudi gamers foresee a common future that will unite the gaming community in new and exciting ways. In addition, Saudi game developers employ urban hybrid cultural symbols to demonstrate their advancement. The section then focuses on how Saudi gamers and game developers utilise alternative techniques to convey historical cultural markers, which accentuates local specificity within a global context. The argument recalls evidence of the cultural peg/link approach, which is also covered in detail in chapters 2, 4, 6, and 7. Suffice it to say, game developers transmit cultural symbolism through games and gamers amusingly riff on this by comparing their history to that of Westerners. This finding lead me to examie interviewees' divergent historical identities, which play a key role in the lived acculturation process. Put simply, as this chapter argues, Saudi gamers identify with a larger "homeland" as they travel further back in time.

Answers to the research questions culminate in *Chapter 9: Localization by Other Means*, through a close examination of the cultural symbols and fluid values that move between the local gaming culture/community and the global gaming culture. This chapter specifically examines how various processes and practices of localisation affect the local gaming experience and production of game content. Due to their dissatisfaction with “localised” Western games, Saudi players have adopted new strategies for enjoying and customising most of the games they play. These include game modification and replication, which gamers in other parts of the world also engage. The chapter contends that this is due to the centralisation of content and the approach of transnational corporations to meet the needs of local markets. The chapter emphasises areas where the industry standard does not account for local market user demand based on findings from interviews. Among these practises are the reassignment of local dialects, the use of imperfect written and spoken Arabic, and, in some cases, the employment of non-Arabic-speaking actors to speak Arabic. The primary argument of this chapter is that Saudi-Arab gamers view Arabic as a cultural symbol, which is different to their views of similar cultural symbols in Western games. They express admiration for local practises such as game modification and game replication in light of the fact that many participants find the objectionable misuse of Arabic and other cultural symbols. In other words, they seek more input and control of games that purport to represent “Saudianness” and Arabic cultures more broadly. The thesis concludes by analysing how local Saudi developers navigate the numerous and nuanced legal terrain associated with the emergence of this new Saudi culture and its impacts on the emergent gaming community.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Prior to the examination of Arab representation in video games, the issue of Arab representation in media in general has been the subject of extensive research, as shown by the works of Said (2003), Shaheen (2000), Karim (2005), and others. This is significant since many publications on the subject of Arab representation in video games draw on the conventional techniques provided by these renowned works. Reichmuth and Werning (2006) and Machin and Suleiman (2006) examine the portrayal of Arabs in Western video games. Arab representation in video games is a recent addition to the subject. The 2006 works spurred interest in the area and prompted a number of further publications, most notably Sisler's (2008), who expanded on his findings in later works. The problem has been addressed and reevaluated in light of developments in the field and the introduction of new methods to game studies, beyond the narratologist vs. ludologist approaches (Arsenault, 2014) and the spatial approach (Jenkins et al., 2004), among others. Expansion of the game market, technical improvement, and economic reasons all contributed (Clément, 2019) to the need for more research on the subject..

As proposed in the introduction of this thesis, the comparative approach of studying the topic (west vs. Arab), among other concerns, led to research gaps. This research focuses on autonomous self-representation in Arab video games, even though that the topic is typically covered within, what is labelled by some, regional game studies. Notwithstanding this, the vast majority of the works referenced in this chapter were considered at one point a form regional game studies. Having said that, I would like to make the point that the label of Regional Game Studies has recently been subjected to criticism. There will be a brief discussion of the criticism and a proposition of a better classification to define the works addressing the topic at hand (Chapter 6). This chapter will introduce three paradigms of logic addressing the topic, and where each group of works falls short in addressing the problem at hand.

The Umbrella of Regional Studies

Before embarking into examining the literature addressing the topic, there must be a clarification on the placement of this research in the realm of regional studies. The use of the term “regional game studies” to label works is often criticized for being influenced by the perspective of the global north on the localities of the global south as well as being “dismissive”. In *Postcolonial Perspectives in Game Studies*, Mukherjee & Hammar note that game studies and gaming culture debates are Eurocentric or North American (with infrequent engagements with Japan and South Korea). Seminars, schools, agencies, and experts are mostly from North America, Australia, Europe, and China (Mukherjee & Hammar, 2018). On the other hand, there are arguments that support approaching game studies through the lens of global north due to the influence of production and consumption. Apperley states that despite the global reach and transnational perspective of the digital games industry, regional and national characteristics continue to have a significant impact on the digital game ecology. However, culturally explicable local variations

in the distribution and consumption of digital games cannot account for the industry's regional concentration. The 'North' of the world, particularly the United States and Japan, produces the overwhelming majority of video games. This is also where the preponderance of their consumption occurs. (16 Apperley 2010, p. 16). Apperley suggests that "In order to examine the embedded aspect of digital game play, the role of digital games in the everyday lives of their players' is significant; as each specific instantiation of digital game play takes place in relation to the global digital game ecology but is enacted through a specific culture of use that is also situated in the everyday lives of the players'." (Apperley, 2010, p.18). Although not the same as "cultural gatekeeping", designating research as "regional" dismisses their global impact. Liboriussen & Martin states that to refer to some studies as "regional" could be considered "dismissive" or, worse, validates a center-periphery model that views research from Europe and North America as essential, with regional research adding some insightful variations and issues. Regional game studies are not merely decorative additions to "real" game studies conducted in Western Europe and North America. Eventually, regional game studies can contribute to theory. However, the term regional enables us to recognise that game studies have a centre, which is a concentration of academic resources in Western Europe and North America. In the global South, game research confronts unique obstacles. By recognising this, scholars can discover methods to foster game research in various areas that resolve these concerns. Translation and open access publishing can aid the expansion of game studies in non-English-speaking nations with limited access to academic journals and libraries (Liboriussen & Martin, 2016). Thus, instead of using the terms such as Regional Game Studies, the research opted in focusing the scholarship without this classification.

In this brief summary of the work, three distinctive approaches could be identified. The categorisation of these three paradigms is based on how they present the reasoning behind Arab representation in video games. The three paradigms are (1) the counter-construction model by Šisler and others, (2) the cultural heritage model by Balela and Mundy and (3) the global south comparison model by Clément (Al-Khamees et al., 2022). The naming of these paradigms is a matter of convention, as some of these works intersect or build on the Šisler's model, which in turn incorporates Said (2003), Shaheen (2000) and Poole et al.'s (2005) frameworks into his work. The current chapter will reflect and incorporate the main points in these paradigms in order to support the argument throughout the dissertation. Highlighting these three paradigms will serve two purposes: (1) introducing the main schools of thought regarding the topic and (2) highlighting the importance of establishing a timeline. Both purposes help to establish and detail the research gap. In each paradigm there will be an emphasis on the main issues of under-sampling of game content, generalisation of Arab populations and cultures and disregarding the impact of the global consumer hybridisation process.

The Counter-Construction Model (2008)

Many works argue the counter-construction of Arab game design. Šisler's "Digital Arabs and Palestine in Pixels" could be the most cited work on the topic of Arab representation in video game, and Šisler's work continues to influence many recent works. There are three distinctive features of this paradigm: (1) Orientalism in Western games is an extension of that in media and journalism, (2)

Arab/Muslim games are a “reaction” to Western representation, and less of an autonomous form of expression, and (3) the findings are based on a ludological approach (as will be clarified), finding the procedural rhetoric of FPS (First-Person Shooter) games as a contributor for the polarisation in Arab games. The majority of scholarship addressing this approach engages with the topic using similar approaches. The research paradigm is mostly a comparison between Arab/Muslim representation in Western games and their Arab made counterparts. This approach is generally concerned with schematisation, othering, orientalism and most importantly counter representation. These concepts will be detailed shortly. Among the works that fall under this category are the following: “Simulated Stereotypes Turning the Unreal Real: An Analysis of Representations of the ‘Other’ in Traditional Media Forms and Digital Games” (Naji & Iwar, 2013b), “Preaching Islam to the Video Game Generation: New Media Literacies and Religious Edutainment in the Arab World” (Šisler, 2014), “Palestine in Pixels: The Holy Land, Arab-Israeli Conflict, and Reality Construction in Video Games” (Šisler, 2009b), “Arab and American Computer War Games: The Influence of a Global Technology on Discourse” (Machin & Suleiman, 2006), “War By Other Means: Mobile Gaming and the 2014 Israel-Gaza Conflict” (Schulzke, 2015), “Being a Terrorist: Video Game Simulations of the Other Side of the War On Terror” (Schulzke, 2013a), “When Geopolitics Meets The Game Industry: A Study of Arabic Video Games and What They Teach Us” (Courmont & Clément, 2014b), “Digital Arabs: Representation in Video Games” (Šisler, 2008), “Revolution Reloaded: Spaces of Encounter and Resistance in Iranian Video Games” (Šisler & Mohseni, 2017b), “Video Games and the Asymmetry of Global Cultural Flows: The Game Industry and Game Culture in Iran and the Czech Republic” (Šisler et al., 2017), “Arab Gamers: An Identity Inclusivity Study (the chapter on ‘Gender Identity in Arab Gamers’ by Bushra Al-Faraj)” (Alfaraj 2019) and “Not Waiting for Other Players Anymore” (the chapter by Pierre-Alain Clément) (Clément, 2019), These works will be discussed in the following sections.

Orientalism in Western Games and the *Other*

The first feature of the counter-construction approach addresses Orientalism (Said, 2003) in Western video games as an extension of Orientalism in media and journalism (Poole et al., 2005). I remind the reader that orientalism essentially looks at the “orient” with occident as a frame of reference to civilisation. While research using the counter-construction approach refers to Said’s work on Orientalism, there is an element in Karim’s work that is more specific and is connected to Orientalism through previously mentioned works. The link is made through highlighting news headlines that correspond to the perceptions of the audience of a foreign culture. This will also be detailed under *cultural peg* and Orientalism. Karim (2005a) summarises Said’s observation on media coverage of the Middle East into the following thematic clusters:

1. A prevalent Arab or Islamic organised terrorist movements or terrorist state with inherited conflict or prior violence.
2. A rise of Islamic fundamentalism.
3. The association of the Middle East with an ancient past full of “tribal, religious or ethnic hatreds.”
4. “The Middle East is a contested site” between a civilised West and the other side.

5. There is an emergence of Middle Eastern quasi-European anti-Semitism.
6. Palestine liberation movements.

Karim adds other stereotypes in other media forms citing Jack Shaheen. The misregistration of Arabs in television seems to magnify four stereotypes of Arabs:

1. They are all wealthy; sometimes, expressed as an “undeserved” wealth adds Karim.
2. They are barbaric.
3. They have an obsession with sex and the slavery of white women.
4. They like acts of terrorism.

According to Karim (2005a), these images have been reproduced in “popular culture, art, music, literature, school textbooks, public discourse and compound formats.” (p. 120) And while Arab and Turk imagery could change in accordance with the political situation, the violent Muslim image stays the same (Poole et al., 2005). Most important to the research is the symbolism that Karim emphasised. According to Karim, the imagery and symbols are associated with Islamic fundamentalism in Western media. These include Women’s Hijabs’, imams’ and Islamic scholars’ wardrobe (cloak and turban) (p. 118), the “Arab head dress and cloak” (also known as shmagh/ghutra and bisht), the imagery of Muslims performing group prayer, the masses of people performing the Islamic pilgrimage or Hajj to Makkah (Mecca), children participating in Quran school and recitation, domes and minarets of mosques, a crescent with five-pointed star/s, Arabic and “Arabic-looking” writing (p. 118), Arabesque designs, scimitars, dunes, desert and camels (Poole et al., 2005). Karim’s observations have a great influence on the counter-construction school of Arab game analysis. However, the narrow scope that it is presented is a challenge in applying these observations to video games. This could be related to the nature of the observations because they are journalistically related and do not address a wider cultural perspective. An alternative framework is Tanikawa’s cultural peg, which has a wider scope and could be applied to video game studies.

Cultural Peg and Orientalism

An alternative to Šisler’s Counter construction approach, where he finds genre as a culprit in schematisation, is the consideration of Culture peg and culture link in photographs. A reoccurring theme that the reader will come across in this research is the interaction of cultures. In this juncture, I would like to introduce Tanikawa’s framework, which will be a vital piece in explaining much of the findings of this research especially in Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9. In “Seeking Cultural Relevance”, Tanikawa (2017) confirmed that the strategy of cultural peg was used specifically in the depiction of Arabs and Muslims. Culture peg and culture link in photographs. “Each instance of a culture peg identified in the photograph(s) accompanying an article under study was identified and counted as a visual peg. A visual peg could be an image of a mosque in the context of a story from an Islamic country....” A cultural peg is defined as “a topical or content choice in a foreign story that provides readers with elements they can easily identify as something arising from that culture and is an approach to engage the reader who may otherwise not be interested or knowledgeable about that culture.” (p. 123) Although the works on the

counter-construction approach affirm the influence of the bias in representation of Arabs in mainstream media and writing, there is no reference to aspects of convergence. Instead, the literature found similarities in the video game representations to the journalistic misrepresentation of Arabs as mentioned by Karim. Both Šisler (2008) and Poole et al. (2005) referred to a concept very close to cultural peg, yet there was no direct reference to it as presented by Tanikawa, (2017). As for Orientalism, the general consensus in this regard is Said's contrasting image between Orient and Occident, in which the Orient is an imaginary European construct that addresses the *other* (Said, 2003). The topic of the other is one of shared elements investigated in video game studies associated with representation. There is a common consensus in the field that Arabs and Arabic culture is displayed in either of two forms: (1) the classical representation of the topi Oriental Middle East and (2) the Middle East is torn by conflict and aggression. The former being applied to visual motifs extracted from familiar works of popular literature, film and even artworks can be noticed in the representation of places, such as deserts and marketplaces, as well as character archetypes and uniforms, such as guards with scimitars and turbans (Reichmuth & Werning, 2006). Šisler added that the latter depiction of the conflict framework was usually associated with schematisation and polarization, presenting Arabs and Muslims as the enemy (Šisler, 2008). This, however, is a matter of understanding how the topic of "the other" is addressed in video games in general. In various cases, the representation of Arabs or Muslims in video games is very similar to that of the mainstream media. The cause and effect of this is a matter of debate. Naji and Iwar asserted that this was due solely to the reason of commercial gain, as most audiences were that of American and European markets. According to Adrienne Shaw, "In the years since the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and the beginning of simultaneous wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the representation (both in and out group) of Muslims in video games and elsewhere have been written with a palpable urgency" (Naji & Iwar, 2013b, p. 119).

Schematisation and Genre

One of the biggest aspects of the counter-construction paradigm work is how it addresses schematization. A great amount of research built on Šisler's work expands on this observation. The aspect of schematization, in terms of Arab representation in video games, is mostly attributed to Western game developers and some Arab video game developers. This resulted in a recurring image of Arab characters in Western games. "Often game characters are depicted only by several distinctive symbols." (p. 206) Šisler also explained that the depiction extended from characters with "headcover, loose clothes, dark skin colour" (p. 208) to the depiction of the Middle East environment as being "quasi-historical or [of a] fantasy manner." Šisler also criticized Arab video games, mainly those of Radwan Kasmiya, for employing schematisation in his video games (Šisler, 2008). Other studies have also connected particular game genres to polarisation. Schulzke highlighted the mental attitude of FPSs. The dehumanisation of enemies is constant as, "FPS enemies are invariably simplistic figures that seem to be caricatures of evil" (Schulzke, 2013b). *Digital Arabs*, a study that analysed the content of 90 European/American games and 15 games of Arab origin, classified Arab representation into two major categories. A large proportion of these games portray the Middle East in a "quasi-historical" manner by employing Orientalist imagery. Such depictions are common in adventure games and role-playing games. In the second category are the

video games that depict the Middle East as a land of conflict. This is common within the FPS genre. Furthermore, the research finds that in strategy games, such as *Civilization*, Muslims and Arabs are not depicted as foes, nor depicted in an Orientalist manner. The representation is simply a reflection of the player himself. Šisler asserts that bias exhibited in the FPS genre correlates with suggestions by Reichmuth and Werning on *neglected media* (Šisler, 2008). Reichmuth and Werning observed in "Pixel Pashas and Digital Djinn" that the representation of Arabs exhibited schematisation and polarisation. It was proposed that this observation be examined in the context of neglected media. The term neglected media is used here in a loose sense to refer to media forms that have not received criticism from either the academic community or the mainstream culture. This category includes board games, comic books, music videos, tabletop role-playing games, trading cards, and certain performance-based media, such as concerts. With considerable popularity and economic growth associated with a lack of academic acknowledgment and cultural prestige, neglected media usually follows a supply and demand model (Reichmuth & Werning, 2006). Reichmuth and Werning indicated that the use of Orientalism in video games in general was due to a lack of media criticism and without reference to a genre effect. This indicates that the economics of the video game industry have a substantial impact on the subject of representation in video games. This theory corresponds with Shaw's observation regarding video games written after September 11 to satisfy the demand of the American and European markets. In "Palestine in Pixels," Šisler elaborated on his remarks regarding the effects of the game genre on Arab representation. Šisler analysed the content of 50 video games using Bogost's procedural forms in this study (Bogost, 2008). Procedural forms are "the common models of user interaction as utilized by particular video game genre." (p.275) Šisler concluded that strategy games are mostly used for modelling the past, and FPS games mediate the present. In such contexts, the procedural forms of the strategy games enable diplomacy and negotiations, while FPS games prohibit negotiations by default of its genre (Šisler, 2009a). However, Schwartz (2006) noted, that conflict was the general centre point of most games regardless of their genre. Schwartz's study includes strategy and action and adventure games, and she reported that the conflict and aggression in games were strongly related to justification through the dehumanization of others (Schwartz, 2006). In support of the theory of genre effect on schematisation, Šisler gathered evidence from both FPS and strategy games depicting Arabs (Šisler, 2009a). All games analysed were based on developer's prospective, with the developer and game rules as the centre of analysis. It is important to note that research that followed this line of deduction in Arab video game representation mostly used the same video game selection, with Afkar Media on one side and Western games of the early 2000s on the other. In an analysis of *Quraish*, an Afkar Media strategy game, Courmont and Lément (2014b, p. 41) found, "Dealing with the Israeli occupation, for example, leads almost inevitably to a need to reverse the polarities of the narrative and substitute the Arab Muslim hero for the American soldier and schematize Israelis as enemies. The RTS genre⁶ allowed Afkar to produce a statement by Arabs about Arabs devoid of any reference to the West."

⁶ RTS stands for real-time strategy games.

Other Works Based on Counter-Construction Paradigm

While Šisler (2008) was one of the first works to establish the counter-construction paradigm, he also continued in other works to look at Iranian games (Šisler & Mohseni, 2017; Šisler et al., 2017), and most importantly, work that followed comparative research between Arab and Western game production. In a study involving Western games that allowed the player to assume the role of a terrorist, (Schulzke, 2013b) examined three games: *America's Army*, *Modern Warfare 2* and *Medal of Honor: Warfighter*. Schulzke concluded that entertainment media addressing the topic of terrorism and war on terror usually offered a simplistic narrative, with enemies who could not be understood and who were driven by an unsolicited desire to commit violence. The three games studied seem to attempt to offer a glimpse of the other side of this war. However, the author argued that the games failed to deliver the goal that they sought, by offering “little substance beneath the appearance of more realistic simulations of violence.” (p. 208) On the contrary, by claiming to reflect the terrorist perspective, the games gave the illusion of an accurate depiction while they were actually hiding this perspective (Schulzke, 2013b). In an extended work in 2014, Schulzke studied several games developed by Hizbullah and Afkar Media. These games were specifically directed to address the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The study investigated software developers' efforts to persuade an audience. The focus of this study was to discover narrative styling and the occurrence of bias in these narratives. Schulzke stated that their research uncovered how Islamic “violent organisations” were trying to promote their biased ideologies in video games. According to Schulzke, these video game developers utilised the same strategy and characteristics of some Western video games, which included simulating a cycle of violence and using material directed at “intimidating enemies and winning support from the neutral audience.” (p. 329) This included some scenes of great destruction committed by Israel's security forces and the retaliation of militants. In addition, the games of Hizbullah and that of Afkar Media attempted to mirror real events, which resulted in a general appearance of historical accuracy despite the motivation behind the retelling of such narratives (Schulzke, 2014).

In “Preaching Islam to the Video Game Generation: New Media Literacies and Religious Edutainment in the Arab World,” Šisler investigated the use of video games as a medium to educate young Arabs about Islam and Islamic history. The study was based on the content analysis of 80 video games. Among these games were Afkar Media's *Quraish* and Future Soft's *The Prophets Wars* as well as Western games with Islamic re-enactments. The full list of Arab games was not listed. There were also interviews with producers in Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria. The focus of the study was the use of video games by private companies as a platform for the Islamic revival movement. This study examines the use of video games as an educational and communication tool for “religious, cultural, or moral values.” (Šisler, 2014, p. 104). Šisler categorised the appropriation into three subcategories: (1) Religious Edutainment (2) Full Fledged Video Games and (3) Multiuser Video Games. Šisler argued that the aim of these games was the translation of Islamic values to a generation through a “new semiotic domain,” a language they understood. He expanded on the pre-established norms of the industry through the formulation of “patterns.” Šisler reaffirmed his theory on the influence of genre and the contrast between the FPS genre and the strategy genre, comparing the pattern of *Quraish* (AfkarMedia, 2005) to the already established *Age of Empires* (Studios, 1997). Most importantly, Šisler stated, “although in recent

years a significant shift in technological and conceptual quality has been achieved, most of the Islamic games available on the market still fall into the category of religious edutainment,” which resulted in the lack of utilization of “interactivity, immersion, and exploration” (Šisler, 2014). Finally, Šisler found Arab video games were a reaction to the expansion of “Global or Western Culture.” (p. 121) Most importantly, Šisler emphasised the importance of using the rapid production and consumption of video games in the Islamic world as a lens to explore aspects of the transformation occurring in the Arab world.

The next major study published on this topic was “Simulated Stereotypes Turning the Unreal Real: An Analysis of Representations of the ‘Other’ in Traditional Media Forms and Digital Games,” in which Naji and Iwar (2013) agreed with Šisler’s observational points on the relationship between video games and the Western military, especially after the 9/11 events. There are three defining characteristics of the militarization of digital entertainment: (1) an increasing cooperation between the game developers and the military of the U.S., (2) the use of video games as a recruitment tool for the U.S. military and (3) the use of video games to validate action taken in “the war against terror.” Like other works that hold the same approach, Naji and Iwar (2013) reaffirmed the idea that Arab video game production was a type of counterstatement. And similar to most studies of the same approach, Radwan Kasmiya as CEO of Afkar Media was used as support for this statement. Also, the term *counter-construction* is often used in association with counter-gaming (Naji & Iwar, 2013b).

Militarising Video Games

In contrast to previous studies that criticize the Western approach to militarising Western video games, some works exclusively address violence and conflict in Middle Eastern produced games. The themes are mostly divided into two camps: (1) research that addresses the violence in video games and compares violence in Western video games to that of Arab counter representation and (2) research on “the danger” and connotations of “Islamic radicalism,” which ISIS are posing through game production. The majority of the first group use comparative approaches to establish a pattern, as discussed previously in the counter-construction model, while the second is more concerned with gathering supporting material and connecting this material with Islamic terminology. However, the findings of Šisler were used in some studies on the topic of security-focused research. Though it is a small portion of studies that could not constitute a paradigm by itself, it is worthy of mentioning as some hold what could be construed as an *alarmist* approach to Arab media production, while others, such as Šisler et al. (2017), have a more balanced approach to the topic, in terms of objectivity and avoiding the underlying tone of security concerns. The second group includes works addressing Arab games as a tool of Muslim radicalisation used by military groups or associated with Iran. These include: “Video games, terrorism, and ISIS’s Jihad 3.0” (Al-Rawi, 2018), *Weapons of mass recruitment: The socializing function of video games in the context of radicalization* (Plachkova, 2017), *Impunity: Countering Illicit Power in War and Transition* (Hughes & Miklaucic, 2016), “Let’s play a video game: Jihadi propaganda in the world of electronic entertainment” (Lakomy, 2019), and “Video Games and the Asymmetry of Global Cultural Flows: The Game Industry and Game Culture in Iran and the Czech Republic” (Šisler et al., 2017).

The alarmist group of research is concerned with gathering evidence and analysing game strategy from a military standpoint. In “Video games, Terrorism, and ISIS’s Jihad 3.0,” Al-Rawi examined the strategies that ISIS was using to recruit Western youth. Al-Rawi examined game media material, which, according to the author, were made by ISIS. It should be noted that the author seemed to refer to media created by capturing gameplay (a YouTube Video) without directly interacting with actual game, which leaves little to work with from a game point of view. However, the author referred heavily to imagery in these video games. The material referred to by Al-Rawi is *Salil Al-Sawarim* (a *GTA* mod), *The Quest of Bush* (a *Quest of Saddam* mod), a mod of *RMA III*, and a version of *Call of Duty*. The research emphasised that the created media with its model of distribution and the games itself were not likely to have been produced by ISIS centralised media centres, but rather were more likely made by “sympathisers.” “Certainly, the video game’s trailer was not produced by the centralized media centres of ISIS-like Al-Hayat, Al-Furqan, and Al-Ethar, especially in that the group stand against entertainment activities like listening to music or playing games that can divert attention from prayer and faith.” (p. 746) Nevertheless, the author argued that the general goal in developing this online material, whether it was an actual game or a YouTube video, was to produce a publicity stunt. According to Al-Rawi, the main target audience of ISIS were young individuals who might be convinced by the technological advancements of ISIS. These advancements included apps, high-definition edited videos, “drones,” as well as video games. Al-Rawi added that the comment section in the YouTube video showed a majority of disapproval. There was also a considerable number of “ISIS Sympathisers,” commentators who used polarising tactics by trolling and flaming within these engagements (Al-Rawi, 2018). In regard to this observation, a finding previously highlighted by Naji and Iwar (2013) is noteworthy, where they conclude that there was no single factor in the misrepresentation of Muslims in video games. However, these images can have an effect on society unless positively challenged. The authors recommended the continuance of “a systematic and well researched academic reflection” (p. 126) on video games in this domain. They stressed that even with advances in internet searches and digital space offering non-Muslims a strong resource for understanding Islam, “the opposite is taking place.” Considering games as a cultural product, a reinforcement of stereotypes could be observed to be occurring in the same manner. Moreover, digital games have a greater impact on shaping stereotypical representation because they simulate reality. Naji and Iwar deduced that this effect would not reach or resolve until the minorities developed the needed skills to be producers as much as they are consumers of that content. The authors predicted that this will not happen in the near future due to “the poor nature of infrastructure” in these locations. The authors stated that the solution to this was in the hands of Muslims in the West. The emphasis here is on Naji and Iwar’s idea that Muslims in the East could not create their “own” content and could only be helped by Western Muslims (Naji & Iwar, 2013b). The disregard of earlier Middle Eastern video game production is a gap which will be addressed by the end of this chapter and throughout the dissertation.

In “Let’s Play a Video Game: Jihadi Propaganda in the World of Electronic Entertainment,” Miron Lakomy argued that video games had become a valid and very significant means of extremist propaganda. According to Lakomy, since the early 2000s, the Islamic extremist and Jihadists turned to digital means of recruitment, “radicalizing sympathizers, as well as intimidating the societies of

developed states.” (p. 383) The author criticised the lack of attention to the “Islamist Terrorist” utilisation of modern mediums in academic work published since the 9/11 attacks. Lakomy discussed the extent of influence that video games contribute to cyber jihad. He also investigated cases where entertainment software was used by Islamist terrorists and sympathisers. Finally, locally, he attempted to identify major patterns as well as trends in material used in the process of inspiring radicalising recruiting and in intimidating the jihadi’s audience. While examining the Afkar Media games *Under Ash*, *Under Siege: Path to Freedom* and *Under Siege: Remnant of Human*, Lackomy criticised Afkar Media for inciting hostility against the Israeli Defence Forces. He also examined *Special Forces* (Hezbollah, 2003); a game developed by the Hezbollah Central Internet Bureau. There was localised with Arabic, English, French and Farsi and distributed in various countries. According to Lackomy, the game was “steeped in anti-Israeli and pro-Islamist propaganda.” (p. 288) The author examined *Quest of Bush* and *Lion of Fallujah* as well. Furthermore, the author referred to what he defined as “relatively undocumented” and “uncertain cases” of the use of MMO games in rehearsing of Al-Qaeda operation in MMO games: one in *Second Life* and one in *World of Warcraft*. Lakomy concluded that none of the Al-Qaeda games reached global recognition because they “were unsuitable for players from developed states. He added that these games were usually developed with stolen assets from Western applications. As for ISIS-linked games, Lackomy notes that the quality is better, and they merit more observational research. Lackomy warned of the dangers that the Islamists pose in this domain, considering it “an opportunity” for fundamentalists to take advantage in terms of training. Lakomy stated, “VEOs will more likely use simple, even fan-made modifications of AAA products. It is also possible that terrorists may utilize even unmodified simulation games to imitate suicide or vehicle-ramming attacks.” (p. 401) Lakomy recommended that game makers “hinder” the use of video games by Jihadis, “Otherwise, video games in the future may develop into a fully-fledged tool of radicalizing, inspiring and training homegrown terrorists” (Lakomy, 2019, p. 401). It should be noted that Lakomy’s work could be categorised as belonging to the groups of works that present a one-sided argument in terms of violence in Middle Eastern games. As this research moves forward, it will elaborate how this group of research focused on a limited number of games as supporting evidence, while overlooking a greater body of game production and gaming culture. Chapter 9 will revisit this topic, explaining in detail how and where this group of games fits, and asking how reliable are the source materials that these studies are based on.

Reproach to the Counter-Construction Framework

The semi-ludic logic, which counter-construction paradigm works operate under (including Šisler’s), was the source of a great amount of comparative research in addition to its substantial use in works that study digital Orientalism. However, this approach was described by Shaw (2010) as presenting a dichotomy in both (1) game analysis and (2) game developer interviews. This manifests as Arab games being brought to light only if they are set “as reactions to the images of Arabs in Anglo-produced video games” (Shaw, 2010, p. 1). In the description of the status of academic work regarding games produced in the Middle East, Shaw criticised the dichotomy demonstrated in work produced on the topic. According to Shaw, most research was concerned with games that cannot be compared with games produced in the U.S. The limitation of interest in other games springs from the focus of media coverage.

Shaw stated that the interest came as a result of considering these specific games a reaction to Western produced video games. By analysing how this dichotomy was constructed in both popular and academic representations, Shaw investigated the possibility of reconsidering the focus of representation and localisation in video games in the region. The analysis included articles and academic research as well as interviews. Shaw criticised articles that tried to “instil a fear of terrorist training simulation.” He noted that a great deal of these works emphasised the susceptibility of viewers to these games, especially by young Arabs, “particularly special forces.” (p. 4) Shaw underlined how these works had an underlying “tension,” where the author tries to raise the concern while trying to mediate it at the same time. In academic works, Shaw examined Machin and Suleiman (2006) and Šisler (2006), where the works compare Western games to Arab games. These two works share a certain look to “the other” in both productions. He indicated that while these works offered a strong analysis, they were trapped in the same comparative framework exhibited in news discourse. Shaw argued that the occupation of designating Arabs as “the other” was a result of looking at the gaming industry from a dominant Western/Japanese point of view. Shaw raised a question that strongly links to the gap that generated this work, “What if we saw these games, not as reactions to outside representation but rather as individual expressions of Arab identity, politics, and culture?” (Shaw, 2010, para. 16). Clément asserted that the greater body of work used in studying Arab representation was specifically Western games and the negative attitudes towards Arabs and Muslims (Clément, 2019).

Naji and Iwar (2013) compared the image of Muslims as portrayed in video games to that in other forms of traditional media. The author connected the representation of Muslims in media and games to the concept of Orientalism. Specifically, Muslim representation in Western media was shrouded by a sense of constructed “otherness.” The author examined various accounts and instances from Western media as well as academic work that analyses these instances. For example, Inez Mahony (2010) analysis of Australian and Indonesian news coverage in regard to the Bali bombing in 2002, where Mahony found the Australian coverage of the issue was connected to terrorism and Islamic groups, while Indonesian coverage was more moderate. Other works were attacked, such as Janet Reitman (2013), Deprez and Raeymackers (2010) and others. Naji and Iwar (2013) argued that digital games can be considered as “simulations of representations” or “a copy of a copy.” (p. 120) However, this does not mean that the copy would not claim to be “the ontological possibility of being the original.” Naji and Iwar, also affirmed the commercial aspect of this misrepresentation. The authors indicated that many post 9/11 video games were written to cater to American European audiences where Muslims are vilified. Another observation on the representation of video games was that of the Western hero. Only the hero was given a background story and a detailed personality while the rest of the characters are not, and this affirmed Šisler’s findings. The authors also connected to Said’s observations on Orientalism, where the Islamic Society is seen as “a timeless and exotic entity.” The authors also affirmed Šisler’s observation on the use of cultural artefacts and symbols. They were pointed out as visual indicators, artefacts, such as scimitars turbans headscarves tiles camels, deserts, minarets bazaars, as well as conceptual symbols, like caliphs, djinn, belly dancing and Bedouin culture. Naji and Iwar asserted Shaw’s (2010) observation and critique of academic work on the topic, where research has limited itself to investigating Arab video games in a

comparative capacity, and they disregarded most studies comparing the concept of “other” as represented in “Anglo-produced” video games and their Arab counterparts (Naji & Iwar, 2013b). This observation has had a great influence on the methodology of this research. This will be demonstrated throughout the dissertation as games and game culture are taken from an autonomous perspective.

The list of works addressing bias against minorities and the “other” would grow exponentially if the premise that these works operate under was to be included. The premise is generally an interaction with principles of Orientalism, othering, and bias against minorities. The works addressing the issues include the following: “The Governmentality of Battlefield Space: Efficiency, Proficiency, and Masculine Performativity” (Kontour, 2012), “Just Keepin’ It Real: Gender-Based Game Studies” (Leonard, 2006), “The Power of Play: The Portrayal and Performance of Race in Video Games” (Everett & Watkins, 2008), “Playing with Religion in Digital Games” (CAMPBELL & GRIEVE, 2014), “Social Realism in Gaming” (Galloway, 2004), “Writing “Gamers”: The Gendered Construction of Gamer Identity in Nintendo Power (1994–1999)” (Cote, 2018), and “Depictions of Female Protagonists in Digital Games: A Narrative Analysis of 2013 DICE Award-Winning Digital Games” (Perreault et al., 2018).

In later years, this framework (paradigm), is mostly found to carry an association with works that address bias against Muslims as well as Orientalism in video games. However, the principles of “othering” in Šisler’s research are also extended to other groups. Maheswara and Fatwa found similarities between the misrepresentation of Muslims in video games mentioned by Šisler and the portrayal of Eastern European countries (Maheswara & Fatwa, 2021). This is often associated with the link between the representation in video games and other forms of media. Mirrlees and Ibaid affirmed Šisler’s findings, regarding the link between shooter games and the depiction of Arabs in TV and Hollywood production. This was used to further the investigation of the influence of Islamophobia and the association with the war on terror (Mirrlees & Ibaid, 2021). Šisler’s work is often grouped with other works that have an intercultural perspective of the impact of video games. In a systematic review on this topic, Shliakhovchuk and García found some works arguing that counter-construction shared common ground with other works that address the depiction of minorities in video games. Shliakhovchuk and García found that these works underlined the marginalized role of minorities characters to a stereotypical or limited role. An example of this is “black as criminals or sports stars, Asian as ninjas or martial-arts experts, Mexicans as illegal immigrants, Arabs and Muslims as enemies and terrorists” (Shliakhovchuk & García, 2020, p. 48). Šisler’s work is also mentioned in the context of using religious tropes in video games (de Wildt & Aupers, 2021). Another area where Šisler is often cited is on the matter of counter-construction of Arab representation by Arab game developers of the 2000s. Contextualizing current digital religion research on emerging technologies, Campbell and Evolvi asserted Šisler’s findings on the 2000s Arab game developers. Attempts of constructing positive images of the Middle East through the “creation of Muslim heroes and positive Islamic narratives” is a focal point of investigation in works adopting this approach (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020, p. 9). This makes Šisler’s work relevant to this dissertation in a general sense. However, there are points of difference that create much space for expansion, especially from the perspective of a non-comparative lens. Chapters 7, 8 and 9, will

undertake the task of examining the topic of attempts by Saudi gaming community in constructing a positive image in the context of global consumer acculturation.

The Cultural Heritage Model of Balela and Mundy (2016)

One of the major works which influences the methodology of this research is Balela and Mundy's work on cultural heritage: the influence of historical records and the importance of looking at historical evidence of a culture. In "Analysing Cultural Heritage and its Representation in Video Games," Balela and Mundy proposed the representation of cultural artefacts in video games. The research used dimensions of cultural heritage as a tool for game analysis. The research examined two games: *Assassin's Creed I* and *Unearthed: Trail of Ibn Battuta*. The authors addressed concerns in these games under five groups: (1) cultural appropriation, (2) Hollywoodization and beautification, (3) selectivity, (4) game dynamic rule design decision and (5) ideological constraints. The research included content analysis and interviews with game designers. The authors foregrounded the changing nature of culture and considered the difference between culture and culture products. The products of culture were categorised into two groups: (1) material, which is touchable and physically evaluated and (2) non-material, which include customs, beliefs, tradition, festivals and celebration. The two groups taken together, then, can define culture. This leads to discussing cultural heritage and the relationship with time and history, as culture was "defined as the full range of symbolic and artistic materials, delivered to each culture from the past to the present." The aspects examined are divided into tangible, which included "music, dance, and works of art, artefacts, language, festivities, poetry, ceremonies, knowledge and skills," (p. 3) and intangible, which included "social customs, ethical values, beliefs, traditions, myths and folklore." (p. 3) The research looked at the products of culture as manmade entities. These entities were viewed with consideration to cultural development and social inheritance. Time was key in this research, which distinguishes it from other research that takes a comparative approach, as the relationship between culture and heritage was based on the passing of culture through time. Balela and Mundy stated, "the cultural heritage of a nation plays a key part in creating its identity" (Balela & Mundy, 2015, p.3). Balela and Mundy's research looked at the evidence passed through cultural heritage and examined the value of culture through the development of new cultural artifacts. The dimensions examined in the research are shown in Table 1.1.

The authors considered various definitions of cultural representation. These included Hall (1997), Chandler in Signs (2007) and even the one used in Šisler's work (2008). They also took into consideration Galloway's (2004) account on the presentation simulation and its existence in reality. The research also highlighted how the misrepresentation of culture was common due to the difficulty of representing intangible aspects of cultural heritage. This included beliefs, values, superstition, movement of thought and myths. Balela and Mundy stated, "In fact, these kinds of elements may be difficult to represent in media in general and in video games specifically." (p. 5) Additionally, the work compared two approaches to addressing cultural representation in video games, specifically Muslim representation: Šisler's (2008) "Digital Arabs: Representation in Video Games" and Seif El-Nasr et al.'s (2008) "Assassin's Creed - A Multi-cultural Read." Both papers imply a need to better understand the cultural dimensions of the games we play in order to assist game designers in future productions create more

accurate interpretations of Islamic culture.

Tangible Dimensions	
Arts and Artifacts	Architecture; Sculpture; Visual Image; Documents and Writing; Performance Arts; Clothes; Design Ethos; Other Arts
Environment	Places of Scenic Interest; Landscape
People	People
History	Historic Sites; Historic Artifacts; Historic People
Intangible Dimensions	
Arts and Artifacts	Language; Music; Folklore
Environment	Climate
People	Behaviour
History	Religion; Customs; Time; Ages

Table 1.1 Dimensions of cultural heritage (Balela & Mundy, 2015, p. 4)

The most important part of the study was the methodology, which is quite unique in addressing cultural issues in video games. The authors proposed, what they call, *dimensions of cultural representation*: “The framework evaluates approaches taken by designers when including heritage artefacts.” (p. 6) The aspects examined were the narrative, the architectural design, the character design and people’s clothing. The research also examined intangible artefacts. Examining the two games, *Assassin’s Creed I* and *Unearthed: Trail of Ibn Battuta*, raised numerous concerns in terms of cultural representation. The major concerns could be categorised into five major groups. The first concern was *cultural appropriation*. It was the designers’ choice to include cultural artefacts that were culturally relevant yet not physically accurate in the location they were placed. The second point of concern was *Hollywoodization and beautification*. This included creative liberties that designers took to persuade the gamer into a deeper stage of immersion, into a stage between the “real” and the “imagined real.” This would usually include choices of spatial design which have an emphasis on aesthetics in both character and environment. The third point of concern was *selectivity*. Limitation of space in games meant that game designers had to make choices in selecting items to include in the game. This included cultural items and locations. The fourth point of concern was *game dynamics rule design decisions*. This included how the dynamics of “play” influenced the design choices. For example, games that had a character designed to jump and climb, would most likely have an environment that provided points of interaction that enabled the character to climb and jump from one place to another. The fifth area of concern was *ideological constraints*. This point was mainly concerned with adjusting game content to suit a certain audience. The authors specified the Westernisation of content in Arab games.

The dimensions mentioned in this proposed framework were unique to game analysis. It might be one of the very few cross-cultural-centric frameworks used in game research. Balela and Mundy’s work on the missuses of cultural artifacts and symbols in video games, by both Western and Arab game developers, may be the most relevant to this study. They added, “Design perspectives which view games

as places where there is limited space for reality, provide challenges to supporting designers with understanding the value of closer representation of cultural items” (Balela & Mundy, 2016, p. 110). This framework will be utilised in analysing cultural game content, especially in Chapters 7, 8 and 9, where the use of cultural artifacts is evaluated in terms of cultural value.

The Global South Comparison Model of Clément

In its early formation, the contrast between Western and Eastern games was expanded in “When Geopolitics Meets the Game Industry A Study of Arabic Video Games and What They Teach Us” (Courmont & Clément, 2014b). The study followed Šisler’s methodology in the approach to contrasting Western games and very specific Arabic games, choosing Afkar Media’s production as the main example. The research used qualitative analysis to examine cultural artefacts in the games as an example of an autonomous statement by Arab game producers. It moved on to give a general comparison between Afkar’s Media’s *Quraish* and Microsoft’s *Civilization*. It also examined FPSs, like *America’s Army*, and compared it to the Hezbollah game *Special Forces*. Through the examination of a distribution strategy of dar al-fikr, the authors suggested that Afkar Media could not afford a big network of distribution or was evading censorship for political reasons. The authors concluded that *Quraish* (Afkar Media, 2005) is the “first” Middle Eastern game which had managed to imitate current RTS Western games. The research will address this assumption later in the dissertation in Chapter 4 and in Chapter 6. The game also assumes responsibility for the embedded “political message” that it delivers. Because the messages embedded are at risk of manipulation through propaganda, the authors of the game chose to talk about the past, not present events. Finally, the authors indicated that the game shares the same premise of Islamism, including “a feeling of humiliation, a deprivation of speech on the self, an intellectual immobility.” Yet the game was different than Islamism through avoiding exclusivism (Courmont & Clément, 2014a, p. 46).

In terms of similarities, in both “When Geopolitics Meets the Game Industry A Study of Arabic Video Games and What They Teach Us” (Courmont & Clément, 2014b) and “Not Waiting for Other Players Anymore” (Clément, 2019), Clément extended Šisler’s (2008, 2009) notes on Arab developers in post-2000 game production. Clément agrees with Šisler that the endogenous games follow two strategies, which were developed to mitigate Western games’ negative stereotypes: (1) to offer a narrative with reversed roles and (2) to depict Islam in a very positive image as a culture and religion. Like Šisler, both methodologies were built on the postulation that the gaming production was either non-existent or did not matter. In addition, both works looked at the games from a developer standpoint, not from a user/gamer point of view. Another point of association was the generalisation of the context of the economy in Muslim countries. Clément reiterated the common generalisation that the game market in the Middle East exists in the realm of popular culture in an “impoverished or relatively impoverished context.” (p. 118) This could be a reason to conclude that there was a gap in first-hand data with weak reliability in numbers. This is most likely due to what Clément underlined as access obstacles to market data. According to his study, two obstacles regarding access in the study of games in the Middle East were (1) the authoritarian context common in the region and (2) a lack of interest in the topic. Clément added that there was no “prolific game industry” in the region, citing Šisler (2007), whose recoded games were only

26 games. Which leads to the other associated point between Šisler and Clément's studies. Both paradigms of research rely mainly on Afkar Media/Radwan Kasmiya's feedback on the market. The heavy reliance and attributed findings on the topic effectively assign Radwan Kasmiya CEO of Afkar Media as a spokesperson for video game developers in the Arab worlds. The source of the interview was a contribution by Halter (2006) in "Islamogaming: Looking for Video Games in the Muslim World." However, in the latter work, Clément expanded on the later works by mobile games and games developers in the region. Clément pointed out that the piracy rates in 2010 in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Israel and UAE were under 50% in comparison to other countries in the region, which were close to 60%. Clément quoted the CEO of Afkar, who stated that any game that cost USD10⁷ cannot be sold in the Middle East. Clément also quoted Kasmiya's statement that Afkar Media was the largest game development company in the entire region to date, with no mention of Sakhr, Bawareth and Barq. However, Clément referred to Šisler and Mohseni's works, regarding the matter of presenting a positive image of Islam in Saudi Arabia, UAE and Iran and national unity through Islam (Clément, 2019). Yet, Šisler and Mohseni did not specify Saudi Arabia in these efforts (Šisler & Mohseni, 2017b), which leaves space for clarification and elaboration.

On the other hand, Clément agreed with Shaw's (2010) appraisal of the status of the academic work on the topic of Arab representation in video games, that of it being a comparative work. Clément also added that by studying the older generation of video games, scholars tended to yield to the idea that video games were inherently reductive in nature. On the Arab developer side, Clément's work added more recent development in the region. Clément added that Kasmiya left Syria in 2011 to establish Falafel Games in Lebanon, an MMOG model using funds from regional venture capital investors, indicating it will be successful. Another success story, noted by Clément was Tamatem, a mobile gaming developer in the region. He noted some game modifications were present in the region, as mentioned in previous studies. Clément listed *Quest of Bush* (Al Qaeda 2006), a *Quest of Saddam* (Petrilla Entertainment) mod and *Special Forces* (Hezbollah 2006) "believed" to be a *Far Cry* mod. He also mentioned *The Clanging of Swords* (Salil al swarim, unknown developer 2014) Islamic state sympathiser, which is believed by many scholars to be a *GTA (V)* mod. More detail on this mod is given in Chapter 8. In analysing the current status of the development in the Middle East, he noted that some technologies helped supported these success stories, one of which was the impact of internet access, which helped in bypassing censorship as well as decreasing production costs; he also emphasized that mobile gaming increased revenue since 2016. Furthermore, Clément indicated there was difficulty in establishing "autonomous discourse" (p. 122) among Middle Eastern developers as the depiction of the Middle East was left to others. The analysis limited the approaches to the stereotypical depiction to three categories: avoidance, transgression and subversion. It should be noted that in terms of addressing issues of othering this paradigm is similar to earlier works that set Arab video games as a reaction to Western video games representation (Shaw, 2010). This means that it could also be included in the first paradigm, counter-

⁷ The interview with Sakhr's head of Educational Software contradicts this statement, as Arab games were sold around 50 USD in big numbers through the late 80's and 90's (see index for full interview).

construction. Most importantly, Clément found that mimetic adoption of popular Western games was due to the good marketing strategies of Western game makers. This resulted in a tension for Arab gamers in regard to the struggle between emotional entertainment and intellectual discomfort. Finally, the findings asserted that the Middle East (in its entirety) shared the following findings of the global south model established by Penix-Tadsen: “An absence of a long-standing culture, a historical obstacles and affordances and a legacy of cultural representation which was shaped in the global North.” (p. 124) However, the Middle East lacks an autonomous existence as it constantly looks to the west for inspiration (Clément, 2019).

Chapter Conclusion

In sum, as this chapter clearly demonstrates, there has been substantial work on the topic of the representation of Arabs and Muslims in video games. However, as this chapter also shows, there are areas that have received less academic attention than others. Most notably of which are areas of audience reception, audience practices, including media created for paratextual purposes, and an expanded study of a larger game sample. Clément stated, “In terms of audience reception, modding and recoding practices in the Middle East, there are even fewer studies still” (Clément, 2019, p. 118). Access and linguistic barriers are the most common reasons behind this gap in research. In a similar study on video games in Iran, Šisler commented, “What I have done is content analysis of the games and took interviews from the producers. There is an important piece which is missing, the audience study and reception study, which is by far not an easy thing to do. It is really hard to get reliable data. And it is best done by Iranian scholars who are interested in the same topic” (Šisler & Annenberg School for Communication, 2013, min. 62-66). The sampling of games is another issue present in the majority of games’ studies. Clément highlighted the issue that the early research on Arab representation was conducted on only 26 games (Clément, 2019). Furthermore, these works are presented, often with an insinuation or a statement, of Arab game production having been only a recent phenomenon (Šisler, 2008, 2009b; Shaw, 2010; Naji & Iwar, 2013b; Courmont & Lément, 2014; Clément, 2019). The collection of games in the majority of these works are post-2000 Arab games. The most common developer interviews are Afkar Media’s and Hezbollah. There is no mention of an Arab game from the 80s and early 90s period and from game developers of that period (i.e., Sakhr, Bawareth and Barq). Most importantly, the Arab games collected for review in these studies are attached to a form of nationalism or political purpose. Furthermore, Arab game mods selected in some of these studies are not only few, as Clément (2019) stated, but they are also vaguely documented. The documentation is usually done either by comparing them to the original game or by describing them through circulating media.⁸ Finally, one of the understudied areas on the topic is the effect of paratext on video games in Saudi Arabia. The paratext of games has been examined in a general sense (Egliston, 2016; Švelch, 2016; Duret & Pons, 2016b); however, there has been very little done on the topic and the inner workings of this key issue in the region, save brief interaction with works on localisation (Bernal-Merino, 2014).

⁸ This topic will be expanded further in the thesis Chapters 6 and 9.

All three paradigms, (1) the counter-construction model, (2) the cultural heritage model, and (3) the global south comparison model are viable ways to examine the topic of Arab misrepresentation in video games. Consequently, investigation using these paradigms will be a common occurrence throughout this research. However, these works do not have an all-encompassing approach, rather they focus on specific, yet existing issues. Apart from answering the research questions, this thesis seeks to overcome these major shortcomings in the field. There are issues in each model which merit reconsideration. One of these issues is the over-generalisation of Arab identity. During the revision of the plentiful works on the topic of Arab representation, this shared issue became noticeable, especially in works examining the Arab identity by people outside the Arab world. For example, although Clément acknowledged the diversity of the region holding more than 22 countries, practising different religions, he seemed to assert that all Muslim societies in the region were considered to have “similar traits” (Clément, 2019, p. 122). A previous reference was also made to Bushra Al-Faraj’s minimising of the effect of cultural diversity (Alfaraj, 2019). There seems no consideration of the aggressive sectarian divide in the region (Cheterian, 2021), let alone the religious and cultural diversity. In addition, governmental policies and the efficacy of these laws are additional factors that set each Arab country apart from the other. Content regulation, copyrights laws and the prioritisation of specific issues in policy are all issues which collectively and individually affect the identity of a specific state. Another factor that suggests a separate approach to addressing video games in Arab countries, is the effect of national educational standards and educational policies relating to video games in a specific country (Sørensen, 2018). Furthermore, the level of education is generally associated with the consumption of video games and eSport content (Macey et al., 2021), which brings about the issue of differences in educational systems in Arab countries and the level of uniformity in terms of standards in Arab countries. And, finally, the effect of the economic factors should not be undervalued, as there is a vast difference in income amongst Arab countries (Alvaredo et al., 2019). Income and the economic status of video game users are associated with practices amongst and game content selection, such as bullying and the selection of violent video games (Sağkal et al., 2020). This would also resituate the understanding of video game piracy levels noted by (Courmont & Clément, 2014b; Clément, 2019), and others, as Afkar Media’s CEO stated, “Arab countries have no laws protecting intellectual property or trademarks.” (p. 34) Poverty has been found to be strongly connected with cybercrime, which includes intellectual theft and software piracy (Akinyetun, 2021). For example, poverty in sub-Saharan countries is “one of the first and most frequently used factors to explain variation in software piracy” as MBOUNGOU stated. Furthermore, the act of software piracy is ethically justified through a counter argument that companies should not charge the same prices for low-income countries (MBOUNGOU, 2018). For this reason, this thesis priorities narrowing the scope with selecting a specific region (Saudi Arabia) with a preconceived notion of multiculturalism. The lack of a cohesive national identity in Saudi Arabia, as described by Al-Rojaie, sets it apart from most Arab nations, including other GCC countries, such as Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman. People in Saudi Arabia are more likely to affiliate themselves with region, tribes, clans, or political groups. Al-Rojaie discussed the use of Smith’s national identity definers: (1) a history of belonging to a homeland or territorial ground, (2) shared memories and myths, (3) a commonality in mass culture, (4) legal rights that are shared equally by all members, and (5) an economy and that is common between members with territorial mobility (Al-Rojaie, 2016, p. 27). By

choosing one Arab country (Saudi Arabia) for a sample, the current research overcomes past limitations caused by the effects of the economic, educational and policy variables, as it is theoretically impossible to remove these factors all together. Henceforth, as a result of my original research in the thesis, the methods followed within the carefully planned sample selection aim to mitigate some of the issues noted in the past research reviewed above. The next chapter discusses these specific methods in detail.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This thesis is divided into three sections. The approaches of works addressing the topic of Arab representation in video games (Chapter 2), defining the areas of research and key elements of investigation (Chapters 4, 5, 6), and examining the processes and practices involved in the Saudi representation by a cohort of game developers and gaming enthusiasts (Chapters 7, 8 and 9). Although labyrinthian in nature, the topic is approached in a coherent remapping of investigation of the topic. The methodology is an observation of the acculturation process⁹ of a local emerging culture with a dominant global culture. In particular, this research examines how cultural elements (artefacts, symbols, values, etc.) are transitioned from and to the medium to other mediums as this process progresses. The main difference of approach between this work to the three paradigms, examined in Chapter 2, is avoiding the comparison approach, which has been criticised by Shaw (2010) and others. While previous research holds a limited number of video games in juxtaposition to Western/Japanese production (see counter-construction paradigm in Chapter 2), this research examines Saudi Arabian video games as a medium of expression. By looking at two cultural circles (a global and local one) moving towards each other, the thesis highlights the processes involved in collision. In addition, unlike the paradigms examined in Chapter 2, this research will not limit itself to post-2000 games. In Saudi Arabia, the process began, long before this, in the early 1980s with Arab game producers expressing and demonstrating their own understanding of their culture. The research will move forward to the current day, in which the process of acculturation has moved the gaming community of Saudi Arabia to a more equal place on the global platform (see Figure 2.1). In other words, this research will examine how the autonomous expression of culture and the media content involved in that expression has changed overtime – in ways that have yet to be fully examined in previous literature. As state policy is an integral part of this research, the thesis will examine how the implementation of laws by various governmental bodies affects the acculturation process. Finally, the significance of the effects of an absent centralised policy will emerge, adding a relatively new perspective to the academic work on the topic.

As previously noted in the research's literature review, I remind the reader that the comparison method has its own drawbacks. Amongst these is the overgeneralisation, limitation of scope and the most importantly is the absence of keen examination of other cultures. The study will present a subject that may be unfamiliar to many western readers: the complicated situation of multiculturalism in Saudi Arabia. The research highlights the lack of a "coherent" national

⁹ Chapter 7 is dedicated to defining the acculturation process and distinguishing it from hybridisation.

identity. Although covered in chapters 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9, I would want to emphasize at the outset that reducing Saudi Arabian culture to a single local culture is a risky proposition.

The steps followed in this research are chronologically as follows: first, a review of available literature on the topic of the representation of Arabs, Muslims and other groups (Chapter 2). This is complemented by a review of journalistic work and articles written in Saudi newspapers or international publication (Chapter 4). After reviewing the methodology and themes involved in previous work, an observation trip was planned. This trip was to verify if the methodology and findings of previous work pertains to the specifics of the Saudi region. The trip served as a scouting trip for the snowball sampling. Therefore, the methodology chapter will address the process in the three stages that they occurred, that is, after the consulting methodologies of previous works (cited in Chapter 2):

- (1) observation and scouting for sampling locations for gamer interviews.
- (2) selection of game titles and other media materials; and
- (3) constructing the semi-structured interview.

By doing so, the research engages the cultural impact of video games. This means consideration of various cultural signifiers: cultural symbols, cultural artifacts, cultural values, etc., similar to the approach proposed by Balela & Mundy (2015, 2016). These will be identified in both the host dominant global culture and the emerging local culture as the two cultures move towards each other. As this research unfolds, it will highlight aspects of convergence, especially that of participatory culture and transmedia storytelling. The aspects of convergence culture involved with video games have been addressed in various works (Jenkins, 2006; Keogh, 2015; Backe & Aarseth, 2013; Galloway, 2013; Roig et al., 2009; Swalwell & Wilson, 2008) and others. One of the things that sets this work apart from other studies is including these aspects in the evaluation process in both game content and paratextual context.

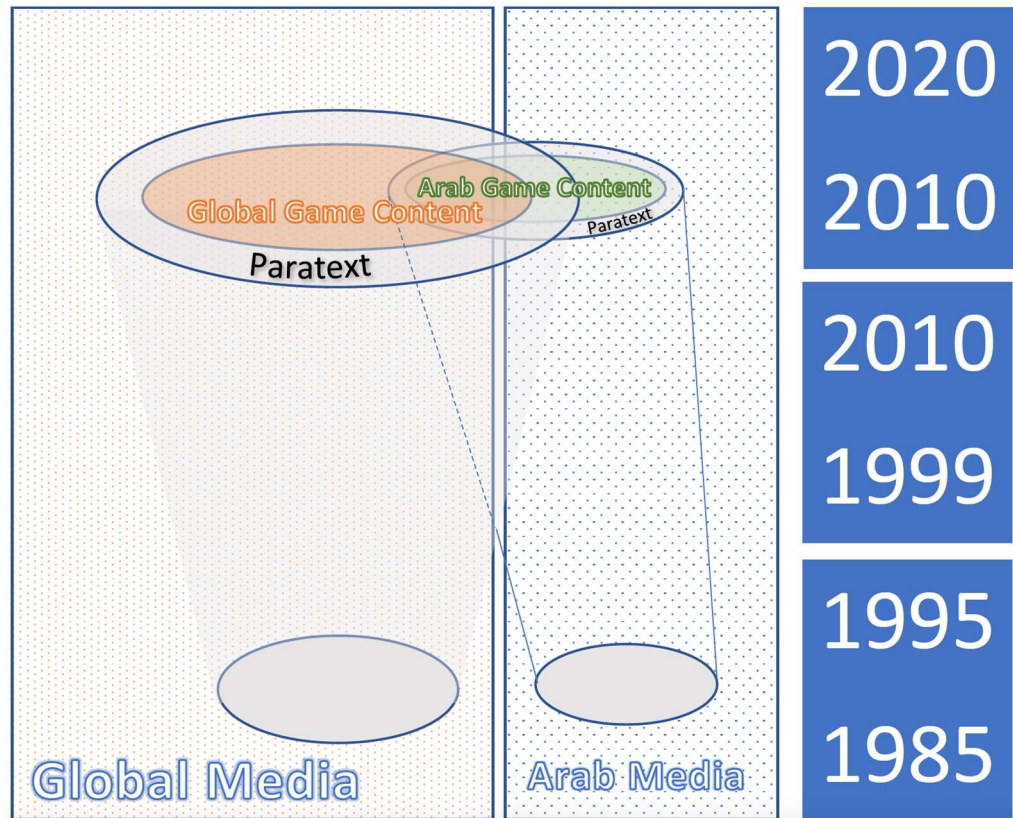


Figure 2.1 A simplified diagram demonstrating the paradigm used in this research taking into perspective the beginning of game development in GCC countries in 1985 to 2020. (It differs from the paradigms mentioned in Chapter 2 because it observes the topic from a wider and more prolonged scope.)

Content and Content Analysis Approach

While this work's research methodology shies away from attempting to raise the conventional Western vs. Arab game production comparison, cited by Šisler (2008), Naji & Iwar, (2013a), Courmont & Clément (2014b) and others, it does attempt to study how Arab development draws inspiration from Western media. In an attempt to examine transmedia storytelling in Saudi games, the research will probe association of universes in these games. The focus will be to compare the media sources (e.g., literary and historical narratives, film, television programming) that established these universes, and whether it is a direct expansion of a global source, an expansion of a localised version of these sources or a purely local source. This will explain the polarisation variations in the 2000s video games observed by (Šisler, 2008, 2009b, 2014; Schulzke, 2014; Courmont & Clément, 2014a) and others, where some games, such as *Under Ash* and *Quraish* (Afkar Media, 2005) exhibit different approaches to constructing an Arab representation. As Jenkins suggests in addressing the narrative design of video games, "Increasingly, we inhabit a world of transmedia storytelling, one that depends less on each individual work being self-sufficient than on each work contributing to a larger narrative economy" (Jenkins et al., 2004, p. 124). The methodology that this research aims to achieve is to examine the practices linked to storytelling in Arab video games. This examination will see if

these stories, spaces, and worlds created in these video games link to other worlds through the practice of storytelling or if they have more of a limited intertextual connection with an individual theme. Depending on the game and on how it is individually evaluated, as Keogh (2014) suggests, this will lead to exploring more venues. The venues, depending on the game, will include what type of cultural symbols are dealt within these expanded worlds, how does this affect the participatory culture of the game fans, and most important are these established story universes (worlds) established with a historical narrative attached to them or current event. The second instant that might seem like a comparison of global games to Saudi games is the borrowed interaction elements. However, this is only done if the interview participants criticise the game as lacking originality. Clément stated that “Today, the Middle Eastern gaming scene can be described as a scene struggling to exist autonomously. Looking West to the roots of the medium, Middle Eastern producers are the most active in their responses, since they are consciously rejecting the assignation to be the ‘usual suspects’ of stereotyped antagonists” (Clément, 2019, p. 125). As this statement was applicable to some Arab games of a specific period,¹⁰ specifically mobile game developers, it does not detail the bigger picture of gaming culture. For this reason, the approaches used in previous academic examination¹¹ face a challenge in reflecting this picture as seen and recorded in the observation trip. The reasons behind this could be attributed to three shared traits: (1) they are mostly concerned with a centralised approach from a developer point, (2) they are built on a small sample of games bracketed in a specific period, and, most importantly, (3) they try to find a standard “reaction”-based formula that would fit all Arab game production from all Arab regions. On this note, with the variation of game periods addressed and variety of games examined, this research agrees to a great extent with Keogh’s critiques of some conventional methodologies of criticism as these methodologies “prevented critical analysis through their uncritical uptake.” Keogh suggests veering away from the notion of a unified “perceived formula” for game evaluation. Rather, Keogh suggest evaluating each individual game “on its own terms.” (Keogh, 2014. P. 19). This study widens the scope with the reaction of the participants and the inclusion of decentralised material as well as involving various methodologies as they serve to fill in the gaps and give a more detailed picture of the gamer culture in Saudi Arabia. These include state policy documentation, a shortened list of games developed in Saudi Arabia or ones described by participants as having Saudi representation and (national/international) journalistic pieces addressing video games.

Policy Documentation and Governmental Reports

Policy Documentation in Saudi Arabia is public record. The categorisation of policy documentation is addressed in Chapter 5. The policy and governmental documentation included in this research are obtained through the following governmental bodies and their website:

¹⁰ The conventional division of gaming generation will be discussed in Chapter 4. Amongst many things, it will include characteristics of each period and the state of copyright.

¹¹ See counter construction and global South paradigms in Chapter 2.

1. The Bureau of Experts at the Council of Ministers (www.boe.gov.sa)

A legislative governmental body responsible for drawing policy bills are generating policy regulations. It is a branch of the Saudi Council of Ministers. Policy is forwarded from the Bureau to the Council of Ministers. After the Council of Ministers approves the policy, the policy is forwarded to the Royal Council for approval. The Bureau website has a public record of these pieces of documentation and can be accessed online. (*Law of the Council of Ministers*, 1993).

2. National Centre for Archives & Records (www.ncar.gov.sa)

The centre is connected directly to the Royal Council. It holds all announcements and documentation issued by the government. The purpose of the centre is to offer a centralised record of governmental policy documentation. The archive offers an organised and indexed access to governmental documentation, as well as a reference to announcements of official media outlets of said policies.

3. The General Commission of Audio-Visual Media (www.gcam.gov.sa)

The website offers the policy documentation, implementation documentation, annual reports as well as details that were not included in these documents.

4. The Saudi Ministry of Media (www.media.gov.sa)

Valuable resource for documentation regarding media content policy prior to 2016.

5. Communication and Information Technology Commission (www.citc.gov.sa)

In addition to policy documentation, CITC offers detailed reports on online activities and telecommunication market financial report.

6. Saudi General Customs Authority (www.customs.gov.sa)

In addition to regulation documentation, Saudi customs publishes reports on confiscated imported material.

7. The Saudi Arabian Federation for Electronic Sports (www.saudiesports.sa)

Explored in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, the federation offers news on gaming events.

8. The Saudi Ministry of Commerce (www.mc.gov.sa)

9. The Council for Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry (www.fsc.org.sa)

10. Ministry of Culture (www.moc.gov.sa)

The official language of Saudi Arabia is Arabic, as stated in the *Basic Law of Governance* (1992). Thus, all governmental documentation is written and published in Arabic. While translating elements of governmental documentation in this study, the translation attempts to be as true to the original document as possible. One of the challenges noted in the translation process was unclear pronoun references and some terminology that is not explained in the header, such as “Guideline: content creator of the content itself.”

Obtaining Older Saudi Arab Games and MSX Console Emulation (1985-1995)

In order to understand the context of Saudi Arabian self-representation, this research sets a precedent in examining Saudi developed games by local companies since 1984. However, it is noteworthy that a detailed historical context is not the focus of this research, and it will only be selectively examined to add to the argument of acculturation. As will be examined in chapters 7, 8 and 9, the examination of older games will serve the following purposes. First, it re-evaluates the conclusions of previous works addressing Arab self-representation in video games, especially that of (Šisler, 2008, 2009b; Naji & Iwar, 2013b; Courmont & Clément, 2014; Clément, 2019) and it revisits Shaw (2010) as she presents a critique of the comparative approach. Second, it examines the possibility of acculturation as an alternative theory. Exploring some of the historical context to the game culture in Arabia adds to a better understanding of the stages of this emerging culture in Saudi Arabia. Third, it adds to other major research interest of the field, such as the *Archaeogaming* approach by Reinhard (2018) and others.

In the current research, the games had to be obtained and played. Since the consoles have been discontinued since late 1995, according to the interview with [Bawareth], the game format of MSX cartridge posed another obstacle. This led the research to substituting the games from their original forms and console with game ROMs and a suitable emulator. It is useful to note this, as this might be taken into consideration if the research were to consider applying Dunne's suggested framework on game paratext (Duret & Pons, 2016b). However, as is discussed in Chapter 7 dealing with video game paratext in Saudi Arabia, the research was based on Švelch's suggested framework (Švelch, 2020). Arnaud de Klerk, a collector who generously provided ROMs of 128 Arabic video games¹² to play on our local emulators, as well as PDFs of printed materials published by Sakhr in the late 80s and early 90s. The collection of Mr. de Klerk's made a great and important contribution to a missing piece in previous research. Mr. Arnaud de Klerk is a game archaeologist who provides a valuable contribution of game collections of the era on his website (www.file-hunter.com). In addition to securing the ROMs, there was a challenge finding an emulator that could run Sakhr's Arabic encoding¹³. Only one emulator was able to play Sakhrs games in Arabic at the time of this research. BlueMSX was able to identify the game language encoding and display Sakhr's and Al-Methalis games with Arabic language characters.

¹² See index for full list of video games and screenshots with abstract of game.

¹³ The issue of preparatory localisation of Sakhrs of the MSX system is a matter of legal dispute in the early 90's. Some of the details were revealed to the researchers by both representatives of Sakhr and Bawareth. Although the issue is relevant, the research could not follow this line of investigation as it would not be relevant to what this research is attempting to achieve. See index for the interviews with Sakhr's and Bawareth surviving members.

Although carrying a great deal of local cultural elements, some games were excluded due to their divergence from the game format of the time, making them seem like educational software, rather than games. Thus, the research improvised a system for the consideration of games in the research. Firstly, the game is to refer to the user as “player.” As seen in many games of the era, Player One and Player Two selections were common menu list items at the beginning of the game. Secondly, there had to be a score system or end achievement that governs the progression of the game. This could be complimented with a high score screen on the termination of the gaming session. Thirdly, exposition and explanation of a cultural or educational element is acceptable as long as it is connected through *procedural rhetoric* Bogost (2007). This means, if the game explains a scientific fact, for example, it could only be a game if it is followed by a step that requires the user to apply the set of rules. There are additional paratextual indicators that could be taken into consideration. This is addressed in the Chapter 7.

Obtaining Newer games (2000-2020)

All games used in this research were obtained by the researcher’s own funding or were part of his collection prior to the research. Game titles that were selected for this research meet one of the following criteria:

- a) interview participants mentioned them by game title or by description;
- b) interview participants mentioned the developer’s name; and/or
- c) interview participants mentioned the participator event they were associated with (convention held in Saudi).

Game Mods

The examination of game modification is addressed in as a form of cultural preservation strategy in Chapter 9. Arab game mods have been discussed in many papers, such as Al-Rawi (2018) and Lakomy (2019). However, as noted in the literature review, these studies examine Arab mods within a very specific scope. Furthermore, it should be noted that a great of deal of references in these works was done in a way that might lead the reader to assume that the review was done from a recorded online video. There is little in this research to indicate how these games are obtained and how they compare to non-ISIS mods of the same era. This research addresses Arab game mods with an understanding of the decentralised manner of distribution, comparing them to other practices common with *participatory culture*. The mods mentioned in this research were used and played, yet their online presence and that of the teams responsible for them stopped after some period. Some mods are partial, and some are fully deployed, which means that some servers, or mod teams, would use mods from someone else. In addition, access to these servers is granted through an application process. Some of the applications were refused. However, large amounts of material created from these games is available on YouTube. In this research, a reference is accepted only if the game was (1) played, or (2) information was obtained from an online video release. This will be explored in detail in Chapter 9.

Printed Press and Magazines Selection

As detailed in Chapter 4, the printed press was selected through search functions in FACTIVE for international sources and individual press search engines for local newspapers. Access to older printed materials was made possible through either individual archives provided by Saudi newspapers (see Chapter 4, Section: Research challenges and Chapter 7) or by private collectors of vintage magazines.

Exploration Trip and Sample Scouting

Period: 60 days (16/10/2018 to 16/12/2018).

Population: Saudi Gamers between 18-40 years old.

Investigation Places: University gaming extracurricular clubs, Game Day Expo, gaming clubs and cafes, various gaming sections at department stores: XCite (one Branch), Extra (two Branches), Jarir (two branches) and various gaming stores (three In Qassim, four in Riyadh).

Objectives:

- Identify major themes relevant to the topic and examine the viability of existing scholarship frameworks (Chapters 4, Chapter 7, Chapter 9).
- Identify location for sampling interview participants with attention to sub-cultural diversity. This is due to the lack of a coherent national identity of Saudi Arabia (Durrer et al., 2017; Thompson, 2019).
- Through observation, investigate how gamers use social media. This is explored in Chapter 7, as a form of paratext.
- Check what consoles gamers are using (PC, PlayStation, Xbox, Nintendo, Mobile), in order to understand the connection between users and content regulation policy (Chapter 5).

The study seeks to obtain as much diversity as possible in the study sample. This includes both geographical and historical influence. The major historical demographics targeted are Saudi gamers with tribal and Bedouin tribal backgrounds, non-tribal Saudi gamers, as discussed by Thompson (2019), female Saudi gamers, with attention to Mustafa and Troudi's (2019) critique of sampling female interview participants in Saudi Arabia, as well as subcultural regional diversity. As for geographic diversity, it would be obtainable within Riyadh. Studies show that the population growth in Riyadh is predominantly due to immigration (Shakir Khan et al., 2018), and Riyadh exhibits the multiculturalism needed for our study. Carefully including inquiry about historical and regional factors into the initial survey, significantly helped to determine potential candidates.

There are reasons for seeking a sample of adults over 18, those who fulfill GCAM's 18+ years game rating (equal to M rating in other countries). First, the sample should have access to a wide spectrum of games, especially when games that feature Arab misrepresentation are usually M

rated for violence and profanity. Second, younger participants would require an adult present, which might have complications in vetting the answers. Third, in terms of the last section of the interview, regarding accessing blacklisted games and not observing age restrictions on games, underaged participants may not admit to that with a guardian present.

Observations of Gaming Cafes

Although it is difficult to determine their exact number because they are registered under different names, it is safe to say that there is a declining number of commercial gaming clubs and gaming cafes as network gaming has become more available. Two clubs/cafes came recommended by students and a third was recommended by a professional gamer who I met in a gaming equipment store (he also volunteered his name and contact information). *GameDver*, *GxGamingDafe* and *XhallengeArena* (names altered to protect the owners' identities) are three gaming cafes located in different parts of Riyadh, which offers some social diversity. Although home broadband availability has affected gaming establishments like these, there might be other reasons for the continuance of such business models. As PC gaming hardware is as an additional cost to broadband and gaming network subscriptions, gaming cafes offer a reasonable alternative to most gamers who might have limited income or other financial obligations. Another important reason why these venues still exist is the social structure. At the time of observation, the general atmosphere of these gaming establishments seems to offer informality and a sense of community. For example, *GameDver* is a gaming café, located in a very populated neighbourhood, which seemingly has a lower per capita income than the other two.¹⁴ Through general observation, this gaming café seems to be running with the least regard to regulations. Some legal issues were identified, such as indoor smoking. The poorly lit gaming room and smoke also prevented observation of the condition of the gaming equipment. The gentlemen running this establishment were of south Asian origin, and they referred to their Kafeel,¹⁵ which meant they are not local. The owner of the establishment was not a local of Riyadh; he resided in a city 900 kilometres away. This could be perceived as indication of an arrangement of “don’t ask, don’t tell.” At a glance, the games being played there were mostly *DOTA* and *Battlefield*. On the other hand, *Challenge Arena* could be perceived as having a different demography. It seems to attract wealthier patrons, as indicated by the cars parked outside the café as well as the aesthetics of the café itself. There is no strong indication that escapism is behind this business model, as criticized early by Riyadh newspaper (Al-Khalid, 2010). Although these venues are interesting, the factors of a limited demography, legal issues and a seeming reluctance to participate led to discounting Internet cafes

¹⁴ Including consideration to subsidised residential programs, property values and average shop rent of surrounding areas, income was assessed through many factors. Websites such as (www.aqar.fm) were instrumental in identifying the general economic status of the area.

¹⁵ Kafeel is a term used the visa sponsorship program in Saudi Arabia. In Saudi Arabia, every foreign worker legal status is dependent on them being under an employer Saudi sponsorship who is called his Kafeel.

and clubs from this research.

University Gamer Extracurricular Clubs

Public universities in Riyadh are relatively diverse in terms of sub-cultural diversity. The governmentally funded institutions offered a diverse seed sample for the research's snowball sampling method. Extracurricular clubs are an integral part of Saudi universities. Dating back to 1973 in King Saud University (KSU, 2022) and 1975 in Imam Muhammad bin Saud University (IMBSIU, n.d.), the deanships of student affairs at universities oversaw the extracurricular activities of students, which included sports, theatre and intellectual clubs. The extracurricular clubs at Imam University colleges and faculties were a point of focus. Video game tournaments were occasionally advertised by flyers, and attending these events is generally open to students, staff and the public. The club had a very casual atmosphere, and as this was an exploration trip, there was a self-imposed commitment not to ask any questions or to limit the questions to the scheduling, meeting, number of attendees, and the frequency of events.

Extracurricular clubs are hobby clubs sponsored by Saudi universities. The organization of extracurricular student clubs is a matter of convention. By regulation, there is a single extracurricular club per college (faculty). The hobbies and activities within the clubs are organized through a student board in each faculty. There are three faculties that have gaming activities and enthusiasts. The Faculty of Computer Science, Faculty of Languages and Translation and Med-school all engage in gaming activities. The attendance fluctuated between 15 and 30 students. I was informed by the extracurricular supervisor that there were usually more than 45 students registered at one time for each club activity. However, transfers between activities are common. Gaming championships (FIFA and others) are held; however, prominent members do not seem to engage in them. Heated debates and discussions about games seem to occur, as gaming topics are brought up. Limited to observation, the engagement with participants was at minimum, as the research was in its observational stage. Among much recorded observation, the following notes were taken:

PC gamers, or the self-proclaimed superior gamers, seem to express a more serious attitude towards gaming. Following up on current gaming trends, they seem to have more to say about upcoming gaming events and releases. For example, one advantage they have over other gamers is their technical knowledge. The research advantage they hold is that they can record their own gaming sessions, which was considered at one point in the research, yet was set aside in favour of a more inclusive approach. Another advantage they have is that they disclosed their constant participation in social media regarding game topics. Console gamers, on the other hand, share more diverse interest that include sports, music, TV and movies. They also range from frequent to casual gamers. One thing noted in the observation is, they seemed more enthusiastic to engage in social events in the club and are more likely to engage in other activities. The choice of console over PC is not necessarily a matter of personal preference. On three occasions, the financial issues regarding PC gaming were raised, and it seems to be an issue that needs to be considered. In order

for the author to obtain access to extracurricular clubs, the heads of college were addressed formally through the electronic system. The dean referred the request to the head of extracurricular activities committees. The committee requested an agenda schedule, type of interview question and topics, and a support letter from the supervisor. All were provided. The approval was issued on August 19, 2019. The data collection trip was arranged accordingly.

Themes Uncovered from Observation of Gaming Cafes and Extracurricular Clubs

During the observation trip, many notes and participants' inputs were taken from gaming cafes, extracurricular clubs, electronics department stores and a gaming convention. Although the number of notes recorded was relatively large and covered some aspects that are sometimes not directly connected to the research topic, the following is a summary of notes directly connected to the research.

The Importance of Paratext

An unexpected outcome, of the observing gaming location in Saudi Arabia, is the highlighting the importance of paratext in merging cultures. The research addresses these areas in detail, providing definitions and methodology applicable if examining video games' paratextual content. These include discussion of social media networks, and competitive gaming in Chapter 7 and advertisement in Chapters 4 and 6. The major social media used in the visited gaming community are Twitch, YouTube, Twitter, Discord, Instagram, Tumblr. The mention of Facebook is almost non-existent. Although being a topic of its own, in this research, streaming gameplay is addressed as a paratextual element in Chapter 7. The selection involved in the examination in Chapter 7 is made possible through third part sources (rating websites) of top Saudi Streamers. In, "Toward a Transcription and Analysis of Live Streaming on Twitch," Recktenwald (2017) suggests the methodology to record the data in a twitch stream. The three sets of information are as follows: "game event" windows, which is the video streamed from the game; "streamer," which is the video of the commentator/broadcaster; and the "chat," which is the viewer participant's section. However, as the length of video stream is extraordinarily longer in the chosen sample, as high as 8 hours per day, the recording was limited to two sets of information: streamer and game event sets. To give an example of how long the stream production is in the selected sample, RAKAONLIVE produced 49 streaming sessions between 12.01.2019 and 12.01.2019. The average of these sessions is 5 hours and 23 minutes. The streams were downloaded to maintain the same period of streams to all streams. This was roughly between 12.01.2019 to 12.01.2019. As demonstrated in the example above, the process is time-consuming to record minute events. The approach that was followed was passive watching, with observation of only two categories of elements, paratextual relation and cultural artifacts. The findings were built on the methodology followed in Sjöblom et al. (2017). This was used to link chat type to the paratextual nature of streams. Passive watching was practiced while attending to another task. It should be noted that longer streams had less commentary and more reaction. Thus, fast playback of these recorded

materials was common in longer streams. The selection of streams is expanded upon in Chapter 7.

Compliance with Content Law

The issue of parental compliance was raised through a topic that came to discussion in almost every club meeting, which was *Fortnite* by Epic Games. With great annoyance, many attendees expressed an annoyance with the younger demography of this game's audience. Something like, "It seems that the most of 10-15 years old with cell phones are engaged in this game on a social level." In addition, participants added that the popularization of *Floss Dance* had found its way to this age demography. Some participants expressed annoyance with the micro-transactions associated with this game. Some attendees explained that their parents are also annoyed by this, as they usually are the source of financial support for this "taxing" hobby. Chapter 5 expands on policy and the topic of compliance.

Saudi Foundation for Electronic and Intellectual Sports

In addition to the Saudi General Sports Authority, General Commission for Audio-visual Media (GCAM) is another governmentally supported organization related to gaming in Saudi Arabia. Also, SAFEIS is a foundation established to address the need to organize tournaments for nonphysical sports. The foundation was established in November 2017. From the website and the official Twitter account, it seems that the foundation role is concerned with tournaments of Balout (a card game), chess and video games. Chapter 7 expands on the topic of the governmental approach to use gaming events as paratext.

Collecting Experiences through Interviews

Interview Language: Arabic (translated in entirety to English before analysis).

Software: NVivo¹⁶.

Interview Stage: Over 90 days between 03/12/2019 to 02/03/2020.

Conventional methods of gaming experience, such as the Online Game Experience Questionnaire by Choi & Kim (2004), the Play Experience Scale (PES) by Pavlas, et al. (2012), the Player Immersion in Computer Game Narrative Questionnaire by Qin, et al. (2009), and the Game User Experience Satisfaction Scale (GUESS), were found to have fewer out-of-game cultural parameters. These scales did not give many research tools for the complex cultural challenges in Saudi Arabia. It was apparent that these tools use investigational techniques with predetermined cultural values. Thus, the research opted for qualitative analysis of the experiences collected through the interview of a cohort of Saudi gamers. Although restricted to a male

¹⁶ See indexes for codebook.

audience, the inquiry resulted in a wealth of expertise dispersed among the chapters. The experiences of Saudi gamers in relation to official cultural policies are investigated in Chapter 5. Chapter 7 explores the experiences of Saudi gamers with game paratext, gaming events, and internet streaming services. The experiences of Saudi gamers in relation to the greater global consumer culture are discussed in Chapter 7. The experiences and responses of Saudi gamers to Saudi developers' attempts to promote local culture on the international market are elaborated on in Chapter 8. In Chapter 9, Saudi gamers address their experiences with game modification, cloning, and the linguistic and cultural characteristics of localized games. In conclusion, the experiences offered via interviews in these chapters provide important data to address the lack of local Saudi gaming experience.

The semi-structured interview was designed with prioritisation of the discovery of cultural aspects: artefacts, symbols, and values as well as game titles and names of Arab game designers. There was special care taken not to lead the participants, as one of the research aims is to discover rather than impose. At no point in the interview did the researcher mention any game title or game designer. As an ethical requirement participants/gaming cafes were assigned pseudonyms. The de-identification log/information are stored separately in a secure encrypted folder at the University of Wollongong's secure servers. The access is only given to the research team. The re-identified information will be expressed between square brackets [pseudonyms] within the text.

Developers' Interviews of 1980s and 1990s (see index for full interviews)

The scholarship examining Arab representation in video games relies heavily on Afkar Media's CEO interview (Šisler, 2009a; Shaw, 2010; Naji & Iwar, 2013b; Schulzke, 2014; Courmont & Lément, 2014; Clément, 2019; Maheswara & Fatwa, 2021). This led to overgeneralisation, which is discussed over Chapters 2, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9. To offset this overgeneralisation, the current research adds the perspective of Saudi game production companies that preceded Afkar Media and had more game title contributions.¹⁷ Documenting the missing piece of game development in Saudi Arabia was one of the priorities of this research. Sakhr shifted its focus to productivity software and Bawareth left the computer business. It was fortunate for the research that one surviving member of Bawareth's founding members is still alive. As noted in the literature review, the overwhelming majority of academic articles involving Arab game developers are concerned with game developers between 2003-2010. The result of limiting the sample to the period led to an ongoing counter-representation theory discussed in the literature review. The current research included Arab game developers between 1985 and 1995. Sakhr was a Kuwaiti/Saudi game publisher and Bawareth was a company based in Saudi Arabia. The companies were game developers and hardware (game consoles/home computer) localisers. While Sakhr still exists in Kuwait and UAE, Bawareth stopped all production of their computer division and no longer is involved in selling computers nor video games. Through personal connections,

¹⁷ See Index: Video Game Titles Between 1985-1995

tracking Bawareth yielded one surviving member of the founders (Muhammad Bawareth), who gracefully agreed to the interview. Trust is a cultural issue that had to be observed as the introduction was made by a third party. On the other hand, Sakhr was easier to contact as the founder, Muhammad Al Sharekh, is a public figure. I was referred to Riyadh Al-Sharekh, the head of educational software in the 90's and the son of Muhamad Al Sharekh. The semi-structured interview included topics relevant to the time of production. The scope of the interview included localisation, sales, hardware production and software production.

Interview Participants Selection

The selection of interview participants was done in two stages. The first stage is Discovery/Exploratory Trip. The main concerns with selecting the sample were: (1) multiculturalism and (2) income variation. Considering existing research that finds connection between income, video games and specific behaviour (Sağkal et al., 2020), measures were taken to explore the income variations of the sample. Three gaming cafés in three different income neighbourhoods were visited. The income was determined through the rent average of the neighbourhood, type of gaming hardware and café setting. These aspects naturally reflected on the monthly subscription fees. The sample included 20 participants, between 21 and 39 years of age. They disclosed different affiliations with numerous regions of the Kingdom and demonstrated varied associations with Saudi's subcultural spectrum, as described by Thompson (2019), Al-Rojaie (2016) and others (more on this in Chapters 2 to 9).

As acknowledged in the introduction of this thesis, that the sample lacks female participants. The gender issue in Saudi Arabia is a lengthy issue in its own domain. The refusal of some female gamers to participate led me to conclude that this issue has its own cultural impact which should be addressed in an independent research by a Saudi female researcher. This issue was emphasised by many works, such as Le Renard's (2014) *The Politics of "Unveiling Saudi Women": Between Postcolonial Fantasies and the Surveillance State* and Mustafa & Troudi's (2019) *Saudi Arabia and Saudi Women in Research Literature: A Critical Look*, where they define the term "sampling and literature manipulation" in research such as this one. Mustafa and Troudi define it as "when researching Saudi Arabia and Saudi women. Sampling and literature manipulation denote the process of cherry picking a certain type of Saudi women or a certain portrait of Saudi Arabia that represent fractional truth about the whole setting and that best serve the researcher's purposes or that the literature abounds with references that support the researcher's claim" (Mustafa & Troudi, 2019, p138). I avoid giving titles such: religious, conservative, traditional etc. due to the subjectivity of these classifications as well as the attached prejudicial connotations that may result from these labels. I will also make note of this point in the conclusion of the research.

Participant Coded Name	Interview Duration	Word Count after Translation
Abu Abdullah	0:29:12	1782
Abu Bandar	1:10:12	5381
Abu Loolwah	0:27:20	2822
Abu Omar	0:48:15	4435
Ahmad	0:31:41	2621
Al Theeb	0:36:03	2650
C.J.	0:42:01	3199
Carbon	0:29:09	2735
Charming	0:40:41	2269
Ericcson	0:35:41	2216
Khaled	0:28:22	2438
Majeed79	0:32:52	3324
Moath	0:15:40	1671
Moon Guy	0:44:11	4362
Nerf	1:07:18	7468
OniThunder	0:55:58	4421
Ososo	0:41:23	4115
Toobah	0:37:26	3489
Wise Man	0:49:21	4498
Yaz	0:41:23	3198
Total	13:24:09	69094

Table: 2.1: Interview participants, the duration of each interview and the word amount.

The Interview Design

The semi-structured interview was designed to address issues arising from the academic scholarship regarding the topic. However, the order of the questions was set with the priority of not leading the participants. For example, the sections at the beginning mention Arab (not “Saudi” or “Saudi-Arab”). This was intentionally made to see if participants would choose cultural symbols, markers, artifacts, etc., which belong to a narrow definition (Saudi-Arabs) or a broader definition of Arabs. Another example, as governmental policy is region specific with a specific definition of what is generally appropriate and what is not, the governmental policy section was delayed until the end of the interview. In contrast, the general question about culture was put at the beginning to probe the personal thoughts on culture that participants associate with their identity.

The interview is divided into five sections: (1) reflection on general cultural issues, (2) examining findings of previous studies, (3) the depiction of Arabs in video games by Arab and non-Arab developers, (4) localisation and exporting Arab games to other locales (globalisation), and (5) state policy and content control. Each of these sections has a number of questions that are

carefully and methodologically selected to test and correspond to a body of work. As will be explained in detail, the questions connect to various bodies of work relating to the topic. It is imperative to emphasise that this research, although based on a different premise than works mentioned above, does not agree with the assumptions that some research on Arab self-representation is built on. However, the interview aims to test these findings as well as the overall content analysis mentioned.

Reflection on General Cultural Issues

The first selection of the interview is comprised of six questions. The aim of this section is to invoke a response to some social and cultural issues. It includes:

1.1. Age? Gaming period? Gaming platforms? Married? In a relationship? Children?

This will also be relevant in Section 5 of the interview where participants look at content suitability in from a guardian/parent point of view.

1.2. Are you connected to an extended family from another region outside of Riyadh?

This question reveals the regional subculture that the participant connects to.

1.3. Where do you see yourself and Saudi society in regard to the following issues: collectivism vs individuality?

“Collectivism” in the Middle East seemed to be a general impression taken by a great deal of Western researchers. In his review on Arab games and game production, Clément states “Thus, developers still have to take into account social norms and expectations and produce games highlighting “three common basic cultural values: collectivism, honor and hospitality.” (Clément, 2019, p. 121) This question was to investigate how “collective” are Saudi Arab Gamers.

1.4. Assigned gender roles?

This question is meant to invoke a reaction and understanding of how Saudi Arab gamers do gender. Bushra Al-Faraj’s work on gender bias in Arab gamers, finds that “religious” male Arab gamers, as a “privileged” group, practice gender bias against non-privileged gamers (Alfaraj, 2019, p. 174). In a broader sense, there are works that address this issue (Leonard, 2006; Newman & Vanderhoef, 2014; Myers, 2019; and others).

1.5. Social hierarchy and the power distance of social pyramids?

This question is designed to invoke responses towards the distribution of power in a given

cultural setting. The goal is to explore where games stand in terms of authoritarianism. With it being a relevant theme in the region (Clément, 2019), this topic is also relevant for exploring a specific Arab game development issue. In this research, the topic of ethnocentrism is a topic explored in regard to game marketing and in reference to exploring Arab game globalisation. The relationship between ethnocentrism and the “authoritarian personality” is explored in detail by Siamagka and Balabanis (2015).

Questions on Existing Paradigms of Subject Scholarship (see Chapter 2)

The second section of the interview addresses the findings of the scholarship dealing with Arab representation in video games at its early stages (2005-2013). The argument held by the majority of these studies is something within the following scope: “Arab game production could be as new the early 2000s. Arab game developers’ production is mostly limited to the counter-representation of Western video games’ depictions of Arabs. The ‘majority’ of the games produced by Arabs demonstrate polarisation and othering. This was mostly due to ‘procedural rhetoric,’ as defined by (Bogost, 2008), in the games. The studies deduce that the genre of FPS games demonstrate more polarisation than strategy games.” Amongst the works that hold this argument are those by (Šisler (2008, 2009a), Schulzke (2013a), Naji and Iwar (2013a), Courmont and Clément (2014a), Clément (2019) and others. It should be noted that the issue is well explored in a wider scope in other works. The mentioned works are adopting the previous statement fully or partially. There will be engagement with other broader works that address this issue as it arises in the discussions.

2.1. What’s your impression of Arabs’ representation in Western video games? Keep in mind the following aspects (narrative, aesthetics, and the gaming (play) aspects). Follow up: Does this extend to Saudi Arabs?

In this question, the omission of mention of Saudi was intentional at first. This was intentionally done to examine which cultural symbols, values, artifacts, etc., the participants associate their identity with, and whether it is a limited scope of Saudi cultural aspects or a broader sense of Arab identity. There was also an intentional omission of specifying if the games in question were Arab or Western games. This was done to examine which games carry relevance to the Saudi Arab gamer.

2.2. What’s your impression of Saudi developers’ representation of Arabs in video games?

This question brings to light the reaction to Arab games. As mentioned in the literature review, academic works have compared work between Western games and Arab developed games (Shaw, 2010). This observation could be noticed in early works such as Šisler (2008) and could also be identified in later works such as Clément (2019). This question aims to explore the themes, the cultural artifacts, the tropes, as well as names and titles of video game developers.

2.3. Between the two representations (foreign and local), which one do you identify more with? Or there is a third representation that you rather have? (Follow up: What about schematisation of Arab nations?)

The aim of this question is to test if Saudi Arab gamers could identify and express contrasting images between the two developments. However, the most important issue sought in this question is to measure if there are any views of ethnocentrism in Saudi Arab gamers (Chapter 6). Ethnocentrism will be discussed in the chapter on Saudi Arab global consumer acculturation, and this will link to works on AGCC (acculturation of global consumer culture), which inspired the search for cultural values of global consumers, such as cosmopolitanism and ethnocentricity. In the chapter, there will be engagement with Strizhakova and Coulter (2019), Siamagka and Balabanis (2015) and Carpenter et al. (2013). The issue of schematisation has been raised in many studies (Šisler, 2008, 2009b; Naji & Iwar, 2013b), and others have also discussed this in their works on Arab and Muslim representation in video games. The question aims to test if the Saudi Arab gamers identify with racial schematisation. Šisler (2008, p. 215) states, “The awareness of racial schematizations does not necessarily lead to attempts to destroy or subvert the schematizing framework itself. On the contrary, many Arab game producers have appropriated the FPS genre with its polarized cultural frame in order to present an Islamic and Arab point of view.” The question aims to examine if the gamers share the same direction that these Arab developers took.

2.4. In regard to “the other” (a person from another culture, nation, country), do you find that a game genre affects your views and thoughts about them? Is this the case for an NPC or an actual person in MMO game?

In his work, Šisler emphasised the effect of genre on the portrayal of the other. He attributes the procedural rhetoric used in FPS games in presenting “the Middle East in a contemporary and decidedly conflictual framework, schematizing Arabs and Muslims as enemies” (Šisler, 2008, p. 214). This also extends to Arab developers’ counter-balancing the representation in the same genre (Šisler, 2009a). While the concept of genre in video gaming is still a matter of critique with “issues and limitations” (Clarke et al., 2017, p. 460) as well as genre hybridity (Vargas-Iglesias, 2020), the point raised by Šisler, regarding the ludological contract or procedural rhetoric in shooter games depicting Arabs is relevant, especially in games developed in the early 2000s. However, the research conducted here narrows the investigation to “Saudi” Arabs in Arab developed games from 1985 to 2019. In addition to testing the counter-construction paradigm, as a “side task” the research examines what does genre means to participants and if that affects their views on “the other.”

2.5. Is there anything common between Arab representation in video games and Arab representation in traditional media (TV, movies, news)?

Research connects the representation of Arabs with traditional media. This question serves various purposes. The first is observing the participants' knowledge of global media. This will be discussed in Chapter 6. One of the dimensions of AGCC is global mass media exposure (Carpenter et al., 2013). The other purpose is to examine any presence of aspects of convergence culture.

Localisation and Globalisation (Questions on Saudi Developers)

This section attempts to identify cultural elements at play between local and global market. The section explores which cultural elements (symbols, artifacts, values) participants identify with in the transfer process. This also explores which elements participants find useful in the depiction process and otherwise. This section takes into consideration Balela and Mundy's observation on the use of cultural artifacts and symbols in both Western and Arab game production. As mentioned in the literature review, both Western and Arab developers demonstrated various issues, including issues with cultural appropriation, Hollywoodisation and beautification, selectivity, ideological constraints, game dynamics ruling design decisions as well as various degrees of issues (Balela & Mundy, 2015, 2016).

3.1. Do you know any Saudi games or Saudi developers? (Follow up: Do you know any games that depict Saudi Arabs directly?)

As mentioned earlier, there was a directive on not leading the participants to the identification of cultural issues. This included on how they identify games with cultural elements. In addition to identifying cultural elements, this question was expected to yield some detail on (1) how participants learn about game development in Saudi Arabia and (2) what type of contact Saudi game developers have with the Saudi gaming community. The active role of the Saudi gaming community in correcting and cooperating with global game developers was established and recorded in various instances (Bernal-Merino, 2014). Follow up justification: The omission of "Arab" before games here was intentional. The purpose was to test which games come to mind and have relevance first. This was also meant to enrich the game list that this research addresses.

3.2. When Saudi games depict Saudi culture and Saudi Arabia, which period is most suited for the local gamer, which one is for foreign gamers?

A great portion of Arab depiction in video games "recreates Islamic society as a timeless and exotic entity" (Šisler, 2008, p. 207) in a historical manner (Šisler, 2009b). Clément adds details to this notion in two major depictions in Western video games, "There are two types of Middle East: a fantasy Middle East, focused on the exoticism of timeless tribal societies and a contemporary Middle East, focused on the threat of anti-Western or anti-Semitic terrorists" (Clément, 2019, p. 118). Exploiting modern and historical settings could be observed in certain

genres more than others, especially in war games (Donald, 2019). Balela and Mundy point out that both Arab and Western games appropriate historical themes and cultural heritage as a means of beautifying and as design choices (Balela & Mundy, 2016).

3.3. Regarding geographical aspects of games and Saudi's multi-cultural society, in your opinion what is most suited for local and foreign gamers: a detailed multicultural representation or a generic mix of cultures represented in Riyadh urban life?

As mentioned earlier, schematisation of Arabs is common in Western video games (Šisler, 2008; Naji & Iwar, 2013b) and others. The question aims to see if this extends to participants who identify with various distinctive regional cultures in Saudi Arabia.

3.4. Regarding the historical context, which depiction would you suggest for Saudi historical depiction: Bedouin culture? Agricultural rural culture? Coastal culture? Other? Why?

This question attempts to identify the cultural heritage (Balela & Mundy, 2015, 2016) that participants identify with. The examples were given to clarify because the concept, while being familiar to the participants, is known under different terminology historically (heritage, morals, traditions, customs).

3.5. Do you know any foreign players that have demonstrated interest in Saudi games?

Although being speculative on the most part, this question is designed to evaluate participants' opinion of their representation in Saudi developed games. The issue of global relevance is not a new issue. It is often addressed under cultural relevance. This connects to two areas of interest in this research. Cultural pegs, where the attention of the audience is highlighted with a piece of information linked to a familiarity. Tanikawa defines cultural pegs as, "a topical or content choice in a foreign story that provides readers with elements they can easily identify as something arising from that culture and is an approach to engage the reader who may otherwise not be interested or knowledgeable about that culture" (Tanikawa, 2017, p. 116). The other issue is examining Šisler's findings: "The key topics pertaining to Arab production continue to be issues of identity and religious and cultural relevance" (Šisler, 2009a, p. 208) and to which extent participants see the "religious and cultural relevance."

Material Extended through Social Media

The questions in this section were not designed to raise the issue of paratextual audience participation and the condition of paratext ownership (Genette & Maclean, 1991a). However, as the importance of investigating this material surfaced through observing extracurricular clubs, it was an unanticipated benefit that contributed to adding additional evidence. The preliminary goal of this section was to investigate the participatory culture in Saudi Arabia's gaming community.

The participation of gaming audience and cultural dialogue between Western developer and Arab consumer was established directly through social media engagement. There was controversy over using Qur'anic verses as a musical track in the production of *Little Big Planet* (Bernal-Merino, 2014). The questions in this segment are designed to encourage discussion of both generic and specific details. The direction that this engagement was seeking was where (which network) and to whom Saudi gamers share gaming related media. This connects to Jenkins's account on the cause of why people share media:

In this network culture, we cannot identify a single cause for why people spread material. People make a series of 'socially embedded to decisions' when they choose to spread any media text: is the content worth engaging with? Is it worth sharing with others? Might it be of interest to specific people? Does it communicate something about me or my relationship with those people? What is the best platform to spread it through? Should it be circulated with a particular message attached? (Jenkins et al., 2013, p.13)

4.1. What networks do you use?

This is a generic question to investigate the preference of social media account. At this point in the interview, the participants' focus would be on video games. There was an anticipated prioritisation in terms of naming networks.

4.2. What type of content do you usually share on these networks?

This question is a precursor to the (social media engagement) network specification question. This also would shed light on practices of sharing and circulating media in an attempt to examine spreadability as defined by Jenkins et al. (2013) and whether this is connected to gaming practices.

4.3. Do you target a specific audience in your content? (Some for Saudi and some for non-Saudi?)

The research investigates how the Saudi gaming community engages with the global gaming community. It also brings to light the cause of spreading media in the gaming community, as Jenkins labelled it, "socially embedded decisions" (Jenkins et al., 2013, p. 13).

4.4. Do you specify some networks with specific topics or type of content? (Some for games? Some for game-achievement? Some for general material?)

This question attempts to narrow the search for relevant media.

4.5. What is your reaction to content that engages with Saudi Arab misrepresentation?

As a "socially embedded decision," this question engages with misrepresentation through social media and compares the reaction to that of game misrepresentation.

4.6. Can you share some celebrity gamers and gaming networks you follow online?

This question would name some online presence. It also examines whether participants are limited to local online gaming celebrities or if they have an interest in the global gaming scene.

State Regulation

With changing regulative policies, this interview section is an integral part of the research on the topic. As explained in the section of this current chapter, relevant governmental documentation of state policy that addresses video games is abundant, and the full examination of policy and documentation is discussed in Chapter 5. However, nominating specific regulation for the interview needed a process of prioritisation. This meant selecting issues that were present in different government agencies handling video games, including: GCAM General Commission of Audiovisual Media, CITC Communications and Information Technology Commission, Ministry of Media and the Ministry of Commerce. In addition, relevance is the second issue. For this, the issue had to be recent and relevant to most users. Fortunately, that task was made easier because the research examined Western and local journalism addressing gaming in Saudi Arabia. Content censoring and blacklisting game titles, and copyright violation were contenders. However, the issues have little relevance in terms of time. For example, copyright violation has been curbed. This will be examined and detailed in the chapter addressing journalism and video games. As detailed in Chapter 5, the General Commission of Audio-Visual Content introduced the first piece of legislation specifically regulating game content through introducing a blacklist comprising of 47 game titles in 2016 (GCAM, 2018a). This section's question seeks to identify themes associated with content regulation. It questions the following areas: (1) knowledge of governmental bodies and the extent of involvement of regulating content, (2) the reaction to regulation of content, (3) the need for participation in policy making in regard to game content, (4) strategies to cope with content regulation and (5) parental/vendor compliance.

Chapter Conclusion

The primary goal of this chapter has been to provide a clarification of the methodology through which this study addresses the autonomy of self-representation in video games. The research concentrates on both the social milieu that influences gaming in Saudi Arabia and the autonomous representations that emerge as a direct consequence of those circumstances. At this juncture, it is important to bring to the reader's attention the point that this research is distinct from other works on regional game studies in that it utilizes a data-driven inductive research approach. With a keen focus on the autonomy of this representation, the research does not extend the presumption of earlier works especially on Saudi Arab culture. This chapter provides an explanation of how the research maps areas of research and collects the data for analysis. The investigation began with exploration and field observation (in Saudi Arabia) in order to determine the difficulties, challenges, and relevant research areas. This stage is frequently overlooked in

other research, which led to an overgeneralization of gaming-related difficulties in Arab countries, as was demonstrated in research that had been done before on the subject. As was discussed in Chapter 2, ignoring this step was inextricably linked to various comparison methods. In other words, comparison methods could have prompted the direction of research to investigate western gaming problems in Arab production. In addition, the field observation was helpful in the process of making an informed decision regarding the selection of the materials for the study, which was done after the field observation. The systematic selection process was well defined as it addresses (1) the selection of interview participants, (2) the selection of governmental documentation, (3) the selection of journalistic works on gaming in Saudi Arabia, (4) game titles, and (5) the selection of media created from games as paratext. This method was outlined after the initial field investigation, yielding a great deal of information. Accordingly, this chapter has focused on the considerations that need to be made while choosing each of these components. The purpose of this exercise is to assist in the selection of samples for future research so that those decisions can be made more intelligently.¹⁸ As the thesis continues to answer the research questions, it will become apparent how the choice of technique had an important role in constructing the conclusion.

¹⁸ See Research Goals in Chapter 1 and in the thesis' final Conclusion.

CHAPTER 4

The Progression of Gaming Culture in Saudi Arabia

This chapter clarifies the timeline of gaming developments in Saudi Arabia, which is incomplete at best in previous studies. Most importantly it corrects a misconception in the scholarship, whereas gaming and game production is considered very recent addition to the Saudi culture. It aims to expand our understanding of Saudi gaming culture since its early days (1985) up to the late 2010s, which is the period covered by this thesis. It will show the gaming culture's generational change as well as the governmental and corporate interactions with this medium during this period. The chapter will reveal various Saudi gaming culture's quirks and the country's traditional video game history. This chapter will use Saudi media and printed press (*Al Jazirah*, *Riyadh*, *Ukaz*, *Madinah* newspapers, etc.). The chapter addresses some of the misconceptions surrounding Saudi Arabia and the state of the Saudi gaming culture. In sum, the chapter will introduce many concepts that seem unfamiliar to the international community – as per the limited state of scholarship in the field. (See Chapter 2 for an extensive review of the state of research.)

This chapter attempts to recount the history of gaming/gamers in Saudi Arabia as recorded by both Saudis and people outside of Saudi. It is an attempt to gather a clear picture of what different Saudis consider as gaming culture. It will highlight the generational development in the gaming culture since 1985 to present day. During this it will unearth many nuances particular to Saudi gaming culture and detail the conventional historical narrative of video game culture in Saudi Arabia. This chapter will rely on Saudi media and printed press (i.e., *Al Jazirah Newspaper*, *Riyadh Newspaper*, *Ukaz*, *Madinah* newspapers, etc.). It should be noted that the methodology of this chapter was influenced by the lack of work on the depiction of Saudi Arabs and the game culture in Saudi Arabia. Most notably, in the academic body addressing the subject, there is a lack of distinction in terms of multiculturalism and detail of the hybrid subcultures involved. This is, by no means, considered out of the norm in the current state of academic scholarship. The lack of focus of studies has been noted by a number of scholars in the field such as Šisler, Clément and others. Clément noted that, in general, there was a limited focus on video game studies of countries in the global south. According to Clément this was due to (1) the lower impact on the global game industry, (2) language barriers, (3) circulation issues, such as piracy, modding and (4) various internet connectivity. Clément elaborated on the scarcity of the field of ludology in the Middle East and emphasized that the state of the study was “exploratory.” He added, “The context of gaming in the Middle East has only just begun to be systematically appraised” (Clément, 2019, p. 117).

Purpose of Re-examining the Timeline of Video Games in Saudi Arabia

Clément's observation on the state of appraisal of the "context of gaming in the Middle East" (p. 117) explains a great deal of misconceptions and generalization seen in much of the scholarship addressing this topic. As noted in Chapter 2, there is a great amount of academic works by video game scholars addressing video game as a very recent addition to Arab representation in media in general. The majority of works on the topic, consider the self-representation in Arab video games as a counter-construction of Arab representation in Western video games. In these studies, Arab gaming representation could be considered as less of an autonomous approach to self-representation, nor as a form of expression, and more of a reaction to representation in Western video games. Establishing a timeline that adds much unaccounted game history would help relieve a continuously reiterated "academic logic" permeating in the most recent works on the topic. In addition, exploring the state of progression of video game culture is essential as key evidence to the continuously changing nature of acculturation exhibited differently in various Arab states.¹⁹ To explain this statement, a reiteration of the logic driving game studies on the topic of game studies in Arabia is necessary. After examining the literature on the topic of Arab representation in video games, a repetitive postulation or an inference were made as regards the state of gaming in the Middle East. The findings are connected to Šisler's (2008) observations on some Middle Eastern game developers. To summaries the reoccurring logic, it could be broken into three steps: (1) video games are a new media to all Arab states with production no earlier than 1999, (2) the Arab/Muslim production during this period came as a reaction to FPS games, increasingly popularized, Western war games: thus, (3) the polarization is connected to the procedural rhetoric in FPS games genre, and not in strategy games. To clarify the extent of Šisler's findings and how they influenced the research on the topic, the following are some extracts that stretch from 2008 to 2019. Šisler stated that video game production in the Middle East was in the early development stages (Šisler, 2008). He also added that the number of produced games was relatively low (Šisler, 2009b). Shaw called game development in the Middle East a "small but growing Arab gaming sector" (Shaw, 2010, p. 1). There was generalisation on the direction of game publishers in the Middle East, as they were generally described as setting "themselves in direct opposition to Western game publishers and produce games that are very distinctly not Western-produced games" (Naji & Iwar, 2013b, p. 125). In 2014, the game industry in the Middle East was described as being in a "fledgling state" and Afkar Media was defined as one of the first game developers in the region (Courmont & Lément, 2014, p.35). In 2019, the industry was again described as a "fledgling industry" adding that the game developers "struggle to voice an autonomous discourse" (Clément, 2019).

¹⁹ The discussion of cultural hybridity, consumer acculturation and the ethnocentrism in specific relation to the gaming community in Saudi Arabia are addressed in Chapter 7 in much detail with reference to major work in the respective fields.

The works that follow this line of logic have two things in common: they mostly refer to or discuss post-2000 game production, such as *Under Ash*, *Under Siege* and *Quraish* by Afkar production studio. Secondly, the works and sample selection are commonly limited to post-2000 game production, with no or little reference or acknowledgment of gaming culture before that. Although the majority of works do not specify the exact time of the first Arab video game, the absence of reference to Arab game production and game culture in Arabia before 1999 is noticeable. To be specific, more than 120²⁰ video games were designed and released by three companies in the period between 1983 and 1991. ALALAMIAH (Sakhr), Barq and Al Methali are three companies that produced both productivity software as well as games for the younger audience. In addition to clarifying the transformation process of gaming culture in Arabia, exploring this missing period sheds light on the influence of the Arabist/Islamist nationalist movements in its different forms on the local game production. Finding unified tropes and themes that work as a common denominator to both Arab game and Arab Gamers would help navigate cultural issues from a non-Eurocentric approach to Middle Eastern studies. It should be noted that, Penix-Tadsen briefly mentioned the existence of the Arab game console without reference to Arab games (Clément, 2019). There was a missed opportunity to explore the culturally rich production of Arab game industry in the 80s, ethnocentric themes in both marketing policies by software companies as well as emerging themes and practices in the gaming culture of Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia Journals and Video Games

The following is an account of articles written on video games in Saudi Arabia, which was based on surveying both Saudi and Western press on the topic from 1975 to 2020. As a source for Western articles, Factiva was used with parameters adjusted to Saudi Arabia as a region. There was also a non-inclusive search on various terms with the addition of “Saudi.” These terms included: video, game, arcade, Sega, Nintendo, Sakhr, MSX, entertainment and cybercafes. The search was performed on Saudi newspapers individually with a variety of translated terms in both Arabic and English. The search revealed a contrasting result between Arab and Western sources. Breaking down the Western region sources on the topic, the Gulf War (1990) seems to be a pivotal point in the type of material published in Western newspaper. Search results before this point yielded results that exhibited a sense of strong Orientalism. This means the depiction of Saudi Arabia was most likely contrasted to the West, with most types of entertainment forbidden under religious legal system. After this point, the terms *video games* and *Saudi* yielded a repeating pattern of addressing U.S. forces in the region. A great number of these articles were drawing similarities between the modern U.S. war machine and video games. Duret and Pons report that the Gulf War was indeed called the Nintendo War, because of its strong emphasis on technology,

²⁰ There are more than 120 officially released games in addition to some works by indie developers (1985-1995). This compares to the 26 games used in (Šisler, 2008) of Muslim production (1999-2008).

for example, digitally controlled bombings (Duret & Pons, 2016b). This observation affirms Reichmuth and Werning's observation on the influences of real world events on Arab depiction in video games (Reichmuth & Werning, 2006). This was also noted by Šisler (2008) and others. Around the late 1990s, the rhetoric changed into addressing copyright violation and investment perspectives of Saudi Arabia. Hinnebusch's "The Middle East in a Decade of Globalisation (1991–2001)," described the geopolitical and economical shift that the region went through (Hinnebusch, 2018). After 9/11, the search for the terms did not yield a consistent tendency, making it hard to draw conclusions about this era. However, the absence of rejection of Arab misrepresentation should be noted. This could be linked to a global direction in journalism that has seen a spike in Islamophobia in the Western press during this period, as reported by many scholars (Henke, 2020; Al-Azami, 2021).

The Public-Facing Construction of Gaming History in Saudi

According to newspapers, and unlike video game hardware/software advertisements, which have enjoyed plenty of exposure since 1985, video games were hardly considered a point of interest by opinion pieces columnists in Saudi newspapers until 2001. Using the archive search system for a newspaper like *Al Jazeera Newspaper*,²¹ search hits of the term *video games* returned two to three hits per year. The articles in these searches were mostly associating video games with children.²² Between the year 2001 and 2004 the search returned an average of 22 articles per year with articles directly associated with gaming issues. Not only are the number of articles increasing, but the details given to game's hardware, game names and designers seem to be constantly getting a more focused and specialised approach. There is also a shift with the tone of the rhetoric. In the 90s and early 2000s, the general rhetoric indicated that the general thought was that "games were geared towards children." However, in the 2000s, up to 2015, there was a noticeable change in the understanding of the gaming culture, which seemed to be more engaged with gaming in adolescent and adult gamers. It should be noted that textual analysis of these articles and the fields they engage with is very necessary to reach a better understanding of the cultural and governmental rhetorical transformation.

In contrast to Western newspapers (i.e., Associated Press Reports, Washington Post, etc.), the search highlighted specific traits and themes resulting from the interaction of video games in general and the local culture and with specific attention to Saudi Arabia's local culture. The abundance of material available in archived Saudi media sheds light on a great deal of

²¹ Important Note: *Al Jazeera* newspaper text search functions is only available in post-1998 products. Previous issues (1960-1998) are available as image scans and can be accessed by date of issue.

²² The implication of association video games with children will be addressed in Chapter 5, as compliance regulation is found to be affected with this association.

misconceptions surrounding the hybridity resulting from the interaction of Saudi Arabia and the Saudi culture. These include gamer nostalgia, adapting to globalisation, but most importantly appropriation of Western concepts to best fit the cultural and state policy framework. These are issues that are also reflected in the gaming community past and present. They will be explored in detail in Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9. Further, the hybridity of this emerging culture and the change could be understood differently from the testimonials of local writers in Saudi journals. Said stated,

Everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-à-vis the Orient; translated into his text, this location includes the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kinds of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text all of which add up to deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient, and finally, representing it or speaking in its behalf. (Said, 2003, p. 20)

With that set as a directive, there are specific findings that were a result of this research:

The printed press in Saudi, including journals and newspapers, is a reflection of the cultural aspects that correspond with the characteristics of the nationalist movement of the time. With that taken into consideration, the tone of writing shifted with time from a negative to a normalised tone. This change is most likely a result of the first generation of gamers reaching adulthood. This notion could be supported with the observation of the nostalgic tone that is associated with this normalisation.

Currently, there are limitations for researchers to explore printed press. Archives have limited accessibility and limited search tools. The digitised archives do not offer the period between 1980 and 1997, which is of importance to this research. This resulted in looking at these periods in retrospect. Another issue regarding research is the complexity resulting from different spelling of Arabised words. This means that English/Japanese words that were integrated into the mainstream daily use without translation have various Arabic spellings. Taking that into consideration, even with exhausting all possible spellings there is a slight chance of missing a spelling or term that is used by a specific group of people. This is a topic best explored by scholars in the linguistics/sociolinguistics disciplines.

The collected material gives an indication of a well-established and changing gaming culture. However, much like other industries, Saudi seems to indulge the industry on a consumer level rather than competing on the developmental level. This notion encouraged many developers from Jordan to target the market with specific cultural appeal. This strategy came with the expense of generalisation and schematisation.

In the 80s, 90s, and 2000s, competitive sports (mainly football/soccer) carried the greatest coverage. In the same manner, in 2015 competitive video gaming has seen equal attention from media outlets and governmental subsidization. Criticism of video games, of having a “dangerous negative effect” on the local culture, did not fully stop during the normalization period. However, there seems to be a reoccurring tone of sharing the blame with parents as “negligence” and

“parental supervision” seems to reoccur in later material. Overstating achievements and hyperbole are to be expected in reporting news regarding local developers and gaming businesses. The association with nationalist expressions could be detected. Further investigation is usually needed to verify statements.

Setting a New Timeline

The conventional history of video games in Saudi Arabia can be conceptualized between pivotal points and trending practices, which could help draw distinctive separation of a generational nature. The following segments introduce the key moments, elements, and major players, underpinning the three-conventional-generation outlining the history of gaming in Saudi Arabia. As will be demonstrated, the reference to the gap in game generation was much referred to in media and in the Saudi press. The evolution of social norms and the comparison of the appeal of video games and conventional games of past generations was a major point in these references (Dhuwaihi, 2015). In most cases, the older the article, the more it leans to expressing a preference for physical activities over video games (Al-Dhwai, 2000). Most importantly, within the various materials used to define this generation, it seems that video games were, themselves, a defining landmark for the 80s and a reoccurring theme in explaining progress during that period (Al-Assaff, 2012). Further examination of other material shows that there is a generational consideration in regard to trends affecting video gamers and technology in general. Within the generation that succeeded the introduction of video game consoles in the 80s, the comparison of various gaming generations continues to resonate in some newspaper columns (Al-Dughailbi, 2012). For the purpose of this research, the generations are categorized according to the following factors: (1) technical, (2) political and (3) economic. Technical being the driving factor as it influenced the other two, it will mark the beginning and the end of each generation. The generations are:

1. The early consoles generation (1980-1993).
2. The software piracy generation and the adaptation of copyright norms (first online gaming generation) (1993-2010).
3. The normalized social gamer and the progression to the mobile gamer generation (2011-present day).

The naming of these categories does not mean that it is exclusive to one technology. The naming is just for one technology of many which had great influence on the gaming scene during that period. The elaboration of each generation will be provided through three focal points. The focal points are control factors that apply to all generations. The focal points are the base of the major hypothesis of this research. These focal points are (1) the developers and industrial history, (2) governmental and regulatory bodies and (3) social practices and game locations. The collection and categorisation of the analysed materials used in this chapter is strongly influenced by Bernal-Merino’s monograph on localising video games: “Translation and Localisation in Video Games: Making Entertainment Software Global” (2016). The categorisation of games was built on the following aspects:

- Location of play, which includes looking into arcade games, desktop games,

handheld consoles and portable games.

- Gaming platforms. This will explore game consoles of each era as well as desktop handheld and portable devices.
- Mode of distribution will explore pre-packaged games and their forms (cartridge, CD and printed activation key) browser games, preinstalled games and free to play mobile games.
- Types of market will address mainstream games, serious games, casual games and games that have a cult following (Bernal-Merino, 2014).

The Early Consoles Generation. (1980-1992)

Emergence of a New Popular Culture

With little exposure of Saudi Arabia's video culture in Western media, there is a reoccurring Orientalist theme, which can be seen in different generations. In 1983, *The New York Times* reported, "Seven months ago, the Government closed video game arcades, where young people liked to congregate. In September, it announced that no new video shop licenses would be issued." The article continued with the Ministry of Information's²³ spokesman, who added that video "cassettes" were the most popular pastimes. The spokesman added that these and movies had no positive cultural advantage. The article continued to explore conservatism, oil, women's rights and criticism of the traditional dress code in Saudi Arabia (Miller, 1983). In 1988, *The Financial Times* reported that "video games are forbidden" in Saudi Arabia. This was a piece that described life being difficult for "Western expatriates" as they had to "abide by strict regulations which include a proscription on any non-Moslem religious practices" (BARRE, 1988). The general assumptions built around the status of gaming culture in Saudi Arabia in the 1980s seems to be difficult to refute or approve at the time. It seems that a great deal of Western journalist work on Saudi Arabia during this period adopted the generalizations associated with an Orientalist contrasting attitude. This topic has been explored by various scholars and was detailed in works such as Said's (1981) *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, as well as Karim's (2005a) "American Media's Coverage of Muslims: The Historical Roots of Contemporary Portrayals." These generalizations are usually passed with comparison to data collected from other countries such as Syria, Egypt, Morocco. This could be justified by the challenge of seeking data collected during the 1980s in Saudi Arabia, especially on video games. On the other hand, Saudi journalists' work seems to express a positive attitude associated with nostalgia. Therefore, this section will explore video game relevance through

²³ The Ministry of Information was the name given to the Ministry of Media at the time of the Article.

examining the cultural relevance of video games to local culture through nostalgic accounts of video games in general media. By doing so, the relevance and growth of video game culture could be evaluated in retrospect.

Game Consoles in Saudi Press

The references to video game consoles of the period (1980-1992) in Saudi journals can be arranged into two prevalent categories: (1) advertisements during the period and (2) nostalgic articles in later years. Coincidentally, these two categories have contrasting cultural peg strategies. Advertisements proposed gaming consoles as something of the future and that came from a foreign culture, while nostalgic articles and journalistic pieces, referred to gaming consoles as a piece of a past local culture.²⁴ As for video game advertisements in journals of the period, the strategy embedded three prevalent messages: (1) affordability, (2) technological advancement and (3) utility and educational potential (see Figures 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 for examples from *Al Jazeera*'s Saudi newspaper). On the other hand, nostalgic references to gaming consoles in Saudi in the 1980s, came as an echo to the past in post-2000 printed press articles. One of the most common starting points in collected materials is usually Atari, followed by other consoles. There is a common phrase associated: "then we progressed" followed by "to Sakhr," "to Sega" or "to Nintendo" (Al-Assaf, 2012). The phrase "Zaman Al-Tayyibeen," is another phrase associated with video game consoles and video games. "Zaman Al-Tayyibeen" literally translates to the days of good people, which is equivalent to the "Good ol' days" (Al-Moatin Newspaper, 2018).



Figure 3.1 *Al Jazeera Newspaper* No.5683 Dated 20.04.1988: Frontpage

advertisement by Saudi console manufacturer Bawareth. It reads "Al Mithali Home Computers, Compatible with all MSX devices with 'Unbeatable Affordable Prices': Educational programs, games, religious programs, cultural/Intellectual historical, etc."

²⁴ More on the strategy of cultural peg in advertisements will be examined in Chapter 6.

هيا بنا إلى المغامرة
أتاري ٦٠٠ إكس إل
 الجيل الجديد من ألعاب الفيديو
 الآن بأسعار مخففة بشكل لا يصدق !!

يمكنك شراءه من أي من
 وكلائنا الخمسة
 في أنحاء المملكة.



٣٠٠ ريال
 السعر المخفض
 من ٦٠٠ ريال

باعتكنا: قيادة الصواريخ، غارات النجوم، غيرة القضاء، المدافع، الكويكبات، سكان الجرات،
 وبقية الكثير... تأخذك إلى مجامير ألعاب الفيديو الأسطورية.
 والأكثر إثارة حكيمة: أتياري ٦٠٠ إكس إل الحارق أيضا !!

- ذاكرة مدخل عشوائية قدرها ١١١ كيلوبايت (يمكن توسيعها إلى ٦٤ كيلوبايت)
- ذاكرة القراءة فقط وقدرها ٢٤ ألف بايت
- لوحة مفاتيح ١٠١ زر
- شرائح أتياري المتكاملة الخاصة بالصوت، الفيديو، والرسومات
- لعبة جيسيت أتياري المدججة فيه
- ٢٤٦١ قوت، ٩٠٩ أصوات

تزيد من التفاصيل الصلوا بنا أو زوروا لتشاهدوا عرضنا لعنايتنا الفخمة أتياري...

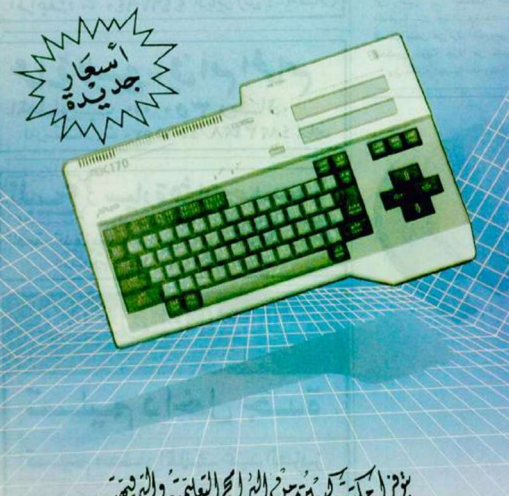
الدولية
الأجهزة الإلكترونية
Universal Electronics APL

الخط: ١١٤٨ - ١١٤٨
 البريد الإلكتروني: a@ae.com
 العنوان: ١١٤٨ - ١١٤٨
 الفاكس: ١١٤٨ - ١١٤٨

Figure 3.2 *Al Jazeera Newspaper* No. 4706
 (Dated: 17.08.1985). Advertisement: “Atari 600XL, Come to Adventure. The new generation of video games in unbelievably affordable prices. Pacman, Missile Command, Space Invaders, Star Raiders, Defender, Galaxian.” Then tech specs.

صخر

أسعار جديدة



بزرزلة مكتبة كبيرة من البرامج التعليمية والترفيهية

العلامة التجارية
Al Basmiah

١٠٠٠٠٠٠٠ / ١٠٠٠٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠٠ / ١٠٠٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠٠ / ١٠٠٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠٠ / ١٠٠٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠٠ / ١٠٠٠٠٠٠
١٠٠٠٠٠٠ / ١٠٠٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠٠ / ١٠٠٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠٠ / ١٠٠٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠٠ / ١٠٠٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠٠ / ١٠٠٠٠٠٠
١٠٠٠٠٠٠ / ١٠٠٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠٠ / ١٠٠٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠٠ / ١٠٠٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠٠ / ١٠٠٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠٠ / ١٠٠٠٠٠٠
١٠٠٠٠٠٠ / ١٠٠٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠٠ / ١٠٠٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠٠ / ١٠٠٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠٠ / ١٠٠٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠٠ / ١٠٠٠٠٠٠

Figure 3.3 *Al Jazeera Newspaper* No. 6320
 (Dated: 17.01.1990). Frontpage Advertisement: “Sakhr, New Prices,” “A Huge Selection of Educational and Entertainment Programs Available.”

The most notable enterprises and contributors to the video game industry in Saudi between 1985 and 1995 were companies who were both game developers and hardware localisers. The companies' names are Alalamiah (sakhr), Bawareth (almithali) and Barq. The former two were software and hardware companies, and the latter is limited to software game development. Early Arab console generation may be the most important stage in video games. The volume (per capita) and distribution networks may be bigger and wider than anything that came after in GCC countries, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordon and Iraq to date. The leading companies involved in this generation were involved in providing both hardware and software. Perhaps the most distinguished achievement of these companies (mostly Sakhr) was contributing strongly to bringing Arabic characters encoding to mainstream home computer. As Arabic is an RTL (right to left) language, localising computers was more than adding Arabic characters to the OS. There was a great deal of work involved, which will be addressed in Chapters 8 & 9 on localisation and addressing the global market needs. Appropriating an American OS (MSX) that works on Japanese/Korean hardware to push a culturally rich local and international content to the local users is a model that merits a wider exploration. This model of international cooperation

contradicts findings of scholars that see Arab video games as counter-gaming or a reaction to the West's in terms of game hostility and misrepresentation (Al-Madani, 2019).

One of the advantages that game producers of that era had over game Arab game producers in the 2000s was a strong local distribution network.²⁵ Al Alamiyah (Sakhr) and Al Mithali had localised showrooms in Saudi Arabia. Most importantly, shops that were carrying the Al Alamiyah brand on their shop-signs were distributors of both Western/Japanese games as well as Arab games. Bawareth (Al Mithali) on the other hand defined their space as an extension of the Saudi educational system. There was a great focus on the software production of curricular related games. However, the game aspect was somewhat related to Western cartoon characters that were aired on Saudi channel 1 at the time (e.g., *Tom and Jerry*). And within this space, there were historical and cultural aspects. On the hardware side of production, the company produced relatively affordable MSX machines. Observing this phenomenon leads to the belief that counter-gaming (counter-constructions) was not the dominant approach amongst Arab developers as stated as pointed to by Naji and Iwar (2013b). Preceding the 2000 Arab video games cited by Šisler, Naji and Iwar, and others, educational and technical development seemed to be the approach of the majority of video games of the 80s and early 90s production (Al Mosa, 2016). However, In the 90s Sakhr discontinued its video game production strategy and shifted attention to providing Arabic software solutions to internet users rather than game production. After the gulf war, the company shifted its headquarters to Cairo. From the three-building campus in the suburbs of Cairo they extended their catalogue with more than 70 educational, professional, and religious software titles. However, the development was mostly geared towards context sensitive and linguistic based search engines and search tools. The Sinbad browser and Idrisi search engine were showcased in GITEX Dubai 1996. The Hadith Encyclopedia, the Quran Program, Automatic Reader OCR and Bilingual word processor (Al-Ustaz) were recognized by PC Magazine and given the Excellence for the Arabic Personal Computing Product of the Year award (Newswire, 1996). The large impact of these companies on establishing a gaming presence in Saudi Arabia was only one part of their contribution to the industry. The strategy of introducing this medium to the Saudi public is of further interest to this research. Thus, these companies will be examined in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

²⁵ See Chapter 2: section Counter Construction studies and Comparison to the Global South. These two research paradigms do not factor Afkar Medias distribution network as a challenge.



Figure 3.1 Video footage of Sakhr showroom in Jeddah, dated 1987. source: Twitter @ameen_wz (2020).

The Software Piracy Generation and the Adaptation of Copyright Norms (First Online Gaming Generation) (1993-2010)

One of the major problems for Saudi and most other international markets as well between 1993 to the mid-2000s, was video game piracy and copyright violations. This era is defined by a various aspects of Saudi gamer culture. The first generation of 286 intel machines was becoming popular. During this period, gamers started shifting to PC gaming as the cost of a “bootleg” floppy disk game was a more affordable alternative to console game cartridge. Soon after, with the arrival of compact disc technology, the game cartridge standard was phased out. This meant a lower cost of production for companies and, most importantly, more access to Western video games. However, the new technology presented a new problem for companies, software piracy. Piracy practices included copies made in the local market as well as those imported from overseas. As manufacturers updated their hardware against piracy, so did piracy update their practices, as marketing copy-ModChips in the black market began to emerge soon after. This was a chip soldered onto the mainboard of PlayStation consoles, which enabled users to run pirated copies of video games. The reference to console ModChips could be found as far as 2003, where articles mention vulnerabilities and exploiting weaknesses in consoles (Xbox and Playstation) to enable the use of illegally obtained copies (*Al Jazeera Newspaper*, 2003b). In some instances, articles demonstrate specific technical issues with exploiting ModChip vulnerabilities before devices were released. This included comparing PlayStation II PS2BB to PlayStation P9000 models in this regard (*Al Jazeera Newspaper*, 2003a). This was not limited to PlayStation. Xbox seems to have

some attention as well, as some articles discussed how the Xbox360's TSOP chip made ModChips impossible on the platform (*Al Jazeera Newspaper*, 2006).

However, by the end of this period, Saudi Arabia did manage to curb the piracy levels in order to comply with international conventions, especially regarding World Trade Organization agreements. According to The Economist Intelligence Unit (2004), Saudi Arabia signed the 1971 Bern convention regarding copyrights protection in 1993. The new law was confirmed on the 9th of June 2003 in order to comply with international standards. Other relevant laws issued by the Saudi Government include the following: the 1960 Regulations Against Misrepresentation (Forgery); Royal Decree No. 114; Royal Decree Archive No. M/38, dated 10/06/1409 Hijri (January 17th, 1989), on patents; Royal Decree M/5 of 04/05/1404 Hijri (February 5th 1984), on trademarks (effective April 1st 1984); implementation regulations issued as Ministerial Resolution 94 of 05.08.1404 Hijri (May 6th 1984); Royal Decree 8762 of 28/07/1358 Hijri (1939), on trademarks; the Law for Protection of Copyrights of December 1989; and the Law for Protection of Copyrights of June 2003 (SNCAR, 2018). As for copyright duration for audio-visual content in Saudi Arabia, the protection lasts for 25 years. The effects of the laws cover both Saudi and foreign authors. Regarding the video game industry, the government of Saudi Arabia seems to push for a stronger application of intellectual property rights and to enforce existing legislation. The Ministry of Culture and Information (Ministry of Media) and related government agencies seizure in a single raid was 20,000 pirated Sony PlayStation CDs in 2003. During January and February in 2003 raids of warehouses in Jeddah yielded 1.2m PlayStation CDs, valued at 26 million Riyals. Similar raids were carried out in Riyadh and Al Khobar. The sweeps were done in coordination with the Business Software Alliance (BSA) and the Arabian Anti-Piracy Alliance (AAA). The destruction of the seized materials was conducted publicly in high-profile city areas. The publicity of this practice was meant to repel would-be pirates. In addition, a royal decree was issued concerning illegal PlayStation copies. The decree stated that distributing pirated copies carried fines between 250,000-500,000 Saudi Riyals (66,655-133,311 USD) (EIUCP, 2004). In the 2000s, Saudi implemented many strategies to combat software piracy. A pledge to apply harsher penalties on copyright and intellectual property violations that included incarceration, imprisonment and high fines. This followed Saudi Arabia's new membership in the World Trade Organization. Reuters reports that there was a noticeable increase in the number of raids on locations that hosted these activities. In 2005, 2.28 million pirated pieces of software were seized in Dammam, and 600,000 in other raids. The IIPA estimated the losses to private practices in Saudi Arabia reached \$134 million in 2004, \$190 million in 2003 and \$63 million in 2002. These figures include software, books, motion pictures and music (Reuters, 2006). The 2011 Global Software Piracy Study by Business Software Alliance estimated the software piracy rate in Saudi Arabia was 52% in 2010, which is a slight increase from 2009's 51%. Although being more than the U.S. average of 22% and West European's average of 33%, Saudi has a smaller piracy average than that of the Middle East and African 58% (EIUCC, 2011). In comparison to modern day Saudi, copyright violations are becoming less of a problem due to two intertwined technical

advancements: (1) access to global markets with different pricing and (2) technical advancement in copyright protection. Participants reactions to this will be addressed in Chapter 5.

Video Game Print Magazines

One of the most important emerging aspects of this era is printed gaming magazines and printed localised computer magazines. In addition to being a source informing Saudi gamers of global trends and further promoting video game culture, print magazines were also a sign of culture normalisation as noted in other countries such as the United Kingdom (Kirkpatrick, 2015). *PC Magazine* started publishing in Arabic in 1996 (AlFateh, 2020). The magazine had freeware, shareware and demo games. According to a picture contributed by [TwitterUser:@OldVgMags], a Saudi collector of Saudi game memorabilia and old video game magazines, the first Arabic print magazine was published in June 1995 (Twitter:@OldVGMags, 2016). *Mohtarif Al-Alab* magazine (Computer Professional Gamer) had reviews of consoles, game reviews, game walkthroughs and game cheats. The content of such artifacts gives an insight into the gaming scene of Saudi Arabia at the time. Most importantly, a print magazine at the time is a great indication of a well-established gaming culture preceding 1995. It should be noted that the sale and distribution was a relatively lengthy process at the time. More on licensing of media content will be addressed in Chapter 5.



Figures 3.4 (left) and 3.5 (right) Issues 1 and 3 of *Muhtarif Alab Al Computer* (Credit: Collector [Twitter @OldVgMags])

During the mid-2000s to 2010 Saudi Arabia saw much change in adapting to copyright conventions and embracing online licensing. This chronological point of examination could be one of the most important in terms of the reconsideration of the path of study on the topic, as well as justifying the need to re-establish a coherent timeline for video games in Saudi Arabia. In terms of

the scholarship examining Arab presentation in video games, the issue of copyright is considered a main contributor to the limited success of Arab developers to reach a larger audience in the 2000s. This statement was mostly attributed to Kasmiya and his experience with Afkar Media early production. He adds that the Arab countries did not adopt laws nor joined any treaty to protect intellectual law (Clément, 2019). However, although presenting a challenge during this period, software piracy might not have been the major challenge for Arab game development. The record, as presented in Saudi journals, counters Kasmiya's statement. This is especially in the case of Saudi Arabia and UAE in the mid-2000s. Since the inclusion of Saudi Arabia by the USTR in a priority list in regard to software piracy and the inclusion of the country in an out-of-cycle review in 1994, the country made some improvements in software piracy policies and procedures (USITC, 1996). Crackdowns and raids on pirated software in the computer district and downtown were reported by eyewitnesses and state supported newspapers. The raids became a reoccurring procedure by the Minister of Media to combat software piracy (Al-Hammad, 2002). The elevation of software piracy was noted and addressed by other governmental bodies. The chamber of commerce issued a warning that a notable increase of copywrite violations was common in the computing districts (*Al Jazeera Newspaper*, 1998). In summary, copyright laws and treaties were implemented in Saudi Arabia at the time. However, there was a noticeable amount of copyright violation in computer districts during the 90s, but without accurate statistics, it is very difficult to determine if 50% is an accurate assessment, as Kasmiya claimed, or to determine if this was a problem with Afkars' distribution network. which sold a mere 50,000 copies (Clément, 2019). The answer might be related to the nature of the video game market in Saudi Arabia and how gaming was perceived in society at the time. Games and play are mostly considered as concepts related to children. Part of being ushered into adulthood is to leave play and games and indulge in more serious matters in life, which include social and cultural obligations. It seems that this observation was noted as early as 2006, as newspaper articles began questioning the appeal of video games to adults. The question comes in raising the same negative connotation of the danger that video games pose for children. The article proceeds to explain how the video game industry is intentionally targeting a demography of 40+ years of age. The possibility of a mental benefit of video games was, and is, a repeating justification for this cause (Al-Jazirah, 2006). In some cases, this argument might be connected with embracing the modern Western lifestyle through demonstrating how games were perceived as an entertainment medium for adults and children alike in the West (*Al-Eqtisadiyah Newspaper*, 2008). Chapter 5 examines the implications of generational attitudes towards video games and compliance to regulation, especially age classification and parental involvement.

The second issue that emerges in Saudi journalistic work is the distribution of video and technologies associated with distribution and copyrights. As mentioned by Courmont and Clément (2014b, 2019) and others, Afkar Media's issues were the competition of pirated material and the difficulties with distribution. However, this may be a type of a challenge that the company faced specifically, not the general case. In an interview with *Al Eqtisadiyah Newspaper*, Prince

Muhammad bin Abdullah bin Khalid Al Faysal, raised the issue and emphasised the challenges it poses to Arab developers. He also added that video game addiction and how the youths obtain these copies is the sole responsibility of parents and guardians (Al-Qahtani, 2018). The prince is the head of Al Faisaliah Group, the exclusive Sony PlayStation partner in Saudi Arabia (Al Faisaliah Group, 2018). Parents' awareness, governmental crackdowns, and the advancement in hardware copy protection seemed to slowdown this problem (*Al Jazeera Newspaper*, 2003a). In addition, advanced verification procedures through store-client apps (e.g., Steam App) and constant online console firmware updates was a contributor in making piracy very difficult.

Normalized Social Gaming and the Progression to the Mobile Gamer Generation (2011-Present Day)

This period is known for clear leaps in game technology. In this period, game sales and game development saw a substantial growth, especially in mobile gaming. According to a report by Newzoo, games generated a revenue of USD520 million in 2021 with %55 of that attributed to mobile games (Elliott, 2021). Additionally, mobile gaming introduced a new social and economic adjustment for both users and game developers. As Clément described, Arab companies are capitalising on this economic model. The game developer Tamatem is one example of these companies that raised USD2.5 million (Clément, 2019). However, it should be noted that financial records and monetisation models in companies in the Middle East are not public record and figures could only be obtained through hearsay sources. Arab CEO's announcements may be subject to advertising hyperbole; thus, it is recommended to give special care to verifying the factual aspects of these announcements through different sources. The first aspect of the stigma surrounding mobile gaming in Saudi Arabia is the lack of supervision of younger gamers. This issue will be addressed in Chapter 5. The interview included a separate question regarding parents' supervision and age rating adherence. One of the issues discussed in newspapers is lack of supervision, especially of younger gamers (Al-Hmood, 2008). The ease of access seems to be a big issue with gaming in Saudi Arabia. Khalid noted that 75% of Saudis owned smartphones. The accessibility of video smartphone games contributed to the increase of video game usage. In addition, the youth demography in Saudi Arabia makes up 67% of the total population. And finally, the overall financial prosperity of this population increased the demand for video games (Khalid, 2017). Another issue noted in researching these games is that they are mostly geared toward a younger audience with specific subcultural appeal. Under the title "Psychologists Warn: Chidden Addiction to Hajwala Games" a Bahraini news outlet investigated the disadvantages of car stunts games on younger audience. The article described the Jordanian game as "a Saudi game" as they continued to note that the music tracts and practices relate to the Saudi-Bedouin-oriented subculture (Muhammad, 2017). The cultural significance in this instance is the rite of passage into manhood. As driving was, up until recently, an adult male assigned gender role.

Driving seemed to be associated with adulthood in the underage gamer demographic. One clear example to this is a game with the same name as the genre *Hajwalah* by Rababa Games. Khalid noted that Rababa Games was a Jordanian company that specifically targeted Saudi audience with relative cultural content. She added that the advertising revenue from 47 million video ads in a short period was very high (Khalid, 2017). The cars used in the game design seem to be selected from popular makes in the Saudi market (RababaGames.com, 2020). Another strategy of appeal to a younger audience is free-to-play games (F2P).

There is an abundance of locally developed games on car stunts (e.g., *Hajwalah Drift* by Rababa Games, *King of Steering* by UMX Studios, *Highway Drift* by Mad Hook, etc.), and also exposure in opinion pieces and articles in newspapers. It should be emphasised that car stunts (known as Hajwalah) are illegal in Saudi Arabia. There have been calls to legalise the practice and consider it as a hobby, provided that safety precautions are taken (Al-Harbi, 2013). In a workshop organized by Okaz Newspaper, a group of stunt enthusiasts were asked to engage in this controversial issue. The casualties that resulted from these practices were high in both participants and bystanders as these events took place in public streets. One of the issues connected to it is underage and early use of cars. This is a result of family needs for transportation. Some of these enthusiasts attribute the popularity of these stunts to the Japanese themed *Need for Speed*, making drifting an art. Some enthusiast attributes the popularity of stunts to tribal pride. The study was conducted with five Okaz members and 15 student enthusiasts (Al-Harbi & Al-Yusuf, 2012).

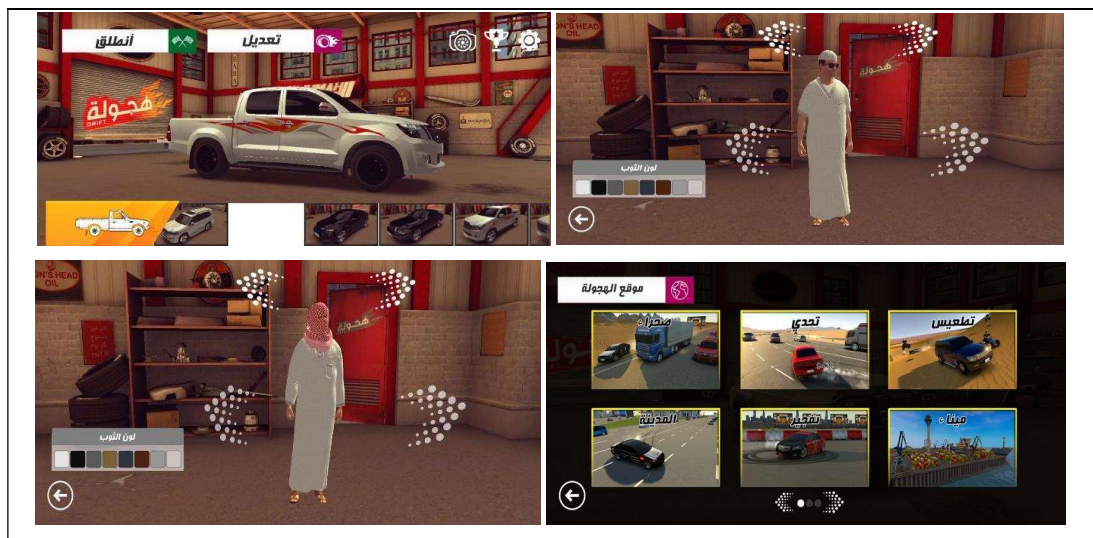


Figure 3.6 Screenshots of *Hajwala* by Rababa. Sources: Authors own collection.

Governmental Bodies, Press Exposure and Video Games

During this period (2011-Present Day), there was a notable press coverage in state supervised newspapers of governmental bodies (i.e., Chambers of Commerce, Ministry of Media, GCAM, etc.) in connection with action around video games. This association were mostly concerning the announcement of raids on retailers violating copyrights laws or, less frequently, the

announcement of new media laws. One of the increasingly covered governmental bodies in Saudi newspapers in association with video games was The General Commission of AudioVisual Content (GCAM). According to *Riyadh Newspaper*, the commission was associated with regulating video games in shops. In 2018, a taskforce combined from the GCAM, the Ministry of Media and The Chambers of Commerce, performed 200 inspection raids. *Al Riyadh Newspaper* stated that the inspections were concentrated on banned game titles that included a list of 47 games. The raids resulted in the closure of 33 shops. The newspapers add that the list was compiled through a study of game content conducted by GCAM. The raids also included illegal practices of repacking and selling used games as new ones (*Riyadh Newspaper*, 2018). The Commission was established under the Council of Ministers' Resolution No. 236 dated on June 11, 2012, and under the Council of Ministers Resolution No. 322 dated 03/09/ 2012 which makes reference to the said resolution. The latter resolution approves the first draft of GCAM's mandate and general legal frame. The final version of GCAM's mandate and legal law was established by Royal Decree M/33 on 14th Dec 2017 and outlined in the Council of Ministers' Resolution No. 170 dated December 13, 2017 (SNCAR, 2018).²⁶ The full extent of governmental bodies will be discussed in Chapter 5 in detail.

The Law vs. The Fatwa²⁷ (The Role of Religious Clergy and Islamic scholars in Shaping Attitudes on Video Games)

Another aspect that is commonly embedded in journalistic work is the association between religion and state in Saudi Arabia. While this might prove true in Iran (Šisler & Annenberg School for Communication, 2013) & (Šisler et al., 2017), it would be inaccurate to extend it to different monarchies. The use of the word *fatwa* in terms of context and usage in Western media, merits its own study. However, in relationship to video games and specifically in Saudi Arabia, there is a consistent association in Western journalistic pieces between fatwa and the legal process of the state of Saudi Arabia. For example, the Pokemon mobile game in 2016 has seen some interesting selection of titles that explain the strategy followed in these articles. "Return of the Pokémon Fatwa in Saudi Arabia" (O'Grady, 2016), "Pokémon Go Reaches Islam's Holiest Site (And Some People Aren't Happy About It)" (Dudley, 2016), "Saudi Arabia Denies Issuing New Fatwa Against Pokemon" (Reuters, 2016) and others. The shared traits of these articles are (1) the emphasis on religious terminology, (2) a notable deficiency of explanation of the legal process or policy and (3) the association of lack of progress. This falls in with the frame provided by Karim (2005a). However, the role of fatwa in the legal process is not as simple Western articles depict. Although, there is a great influence of the grand mufti in the general public's opinion on a certain

²⁶ GCAM and content policy will be examined in detail in Chapter 5.

²⁷ Fatwa literally means the clarification of a ruling. In the conventions of Islamic jurisprudence scholars, it is a narration by an Islamic scholar deduced from a Qura'nic text or Hadeeth, a consensus of Islamic scholars or what the scholar deduce himself through reasoning (Al-Jizani, 2008).

matter, his ruling and that of the Grand Council of Fatwa hardly carries any legal obligation on the legal aspect of the government. Dr. AlQahtani asserted that fatwa is mostly a conclusion reached through an argumentative process in interpretation of some text. Thus, reaching a legal stance is usually done through a lengthy legal process. This is especially in matters that do not have a verbatim ruling in Quranic texts. Al-Qahtani clarifies that: there is a difference between Fatwa and Legislation in a country that observes Islamic Sharia in its system. In legislation and law, there are many aspects to be considered in terms of advantage and disadvantage in forming law, especially when the perspective of an individual is different to that of an overall governmental system. This could not be obtained in fatwa, as it is an opinion of an individual or a limited group of people. In general, the opinion of individuals and groups do not perceive issues as legislators do, which would omit a great deal of advantages. In addition, legislation is issued in a specialised systematic manner: through consulting experts and concerned bodies, as well as being void of bias and maintaining subjectivity. This is not how fatwa is issued, as it is not organized, nor does it maintain consistency with other legislation. Finally, fatwa could be influenced by personal values, such as conservative beliefs. This could not be adopted in legislation (Al-Qahtani, 2018). Chapter 5 details the process policy and on how law is formed in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabian Federation for Electronic and Intellectual Sports

One of the semi-governmental bodies that has seen coverage in most recent years is the Saudi Arabian Federation for Electronic and Intellectual Sports (SAFEIS), which is a governmentally supported entity that regulates all electronic and intellectual sports in Saudi Arabia. Although called a federation, the organisational structure is not consistent with that of a federation. However, the name seems to be reminiscent of the International Esports Federation (IESF) and in line with other sports federations in Saudi Arabia. The federation is listed among approved federations in the Saudi Ministry of Sports website (Saudi Ministry of Sport, 2020). SAFEIS was established in 2017 and is headed by HRH Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Sultan. The federation announced that it aims to extend its activities to include, oversee and organize athletes to create the ecosystem of a gaming community. SAFEIS signed various PPPs (public-private partnership) with companies like Vanguard, a gaming event organiser. "PPP's have a major role to play in Vision 2030. The vision aims to diversify the economy and lessen Saudi's dependence on oil, but that is not all it aims for. By offering these partnerships, the best and most specialized among the private sector compete to win these investment opportunities. As such the resulting product provides the gaming community with the best possible services and experience," said SAFEIS President Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Sultan, according to a press release statement (Al Arabiya, 2019, para. 6). The SAFEIS website www.safeis.sa and twitter account (@SAFEISKSA) give strong indications that the organization is majorly interested in competitive gaming and organizing events for competitive gaming. There is no indication to this date that the organization provides any sponsorship outside that scope.

Major Influential Corporate Bodies on this Generation

Al Faisaliah Group

Al Faisaliah Group was established by HRH (His Royal Highness) Prince Abdullah Al Faisal in 1970. Prince Abdullah is the son of the late King Faisal. The company is one of the top 20 companies in Saudi Arabia. Al Faisaliah Group managed to expand through international partnerships and subsidiaries mainly in the following sectors: IT and communications, entertainment and multimedia, consumer electronics, food and beverages and specialty chemicals (Shoult, 2006). Most important to this research is Al Faisaliah's (exclusive) partnership with Sony in Saudi Arabia through Modern Electronics Company (MEC), an Al Faisaliah Group subsidiary (Al Faisaliah Group, 2018). One of the largest and first game conventions in Saudi Arabia was Gamers' Day,²⁸ an annual convention held in various locations. This event is mainly sponsored by MEC and PlayStation (Gamers' Day, 2019), which had the strongest presence in the convention as they occupied the majority of the centre stage. Whether the degree of influence of the company was positively affected with the introduction of PlayStation's online store or not, the exclusive partnership with Sony dictates that the MEC (under Al Faisaliah Groups) represents Sony in the Saudi market. As far as the scope of this chapter is concerned, Al Faisaliah is one of the most journalistically covered corporate establishments, with a great influence on the market. This is explored further in Chapter 7.

Gaming Events²⁹ in Saudi Press:

Saudi Gamers' Day

The first reported gaming event in Saudi was Sony Gamers' Day 2008 (Al-Hmood, 2008). At its beginning, the event was called Sony Gamer's Day, as the event was held in King Faisal Conference Hall in InterContinental Riyadh as an event organized by Sony ME to showcase their latest games and products. The event was more about Sony's gaming vision and gaming strategy than anything else. The games and products showcased in the event were products and titles on the PlayStation platform. Tim Stokes, the sales and marketing director for PlayStation Sony Gulf was a key speaker in the event. Al Faisaliah's Prince Muhamad Bin Khalid was at the event (True Gaming, 2008). The event seemed to evolve to expand its target audience to include other gaming platforms, while maintaining Sony's priority. The target expansion involved competitive gaming on mobile and PC platforms. The latest event was Gamers' Day 2018. The event sponsors were the SAFEIS (Saudi Arabian Federation for Electronic and Intellectual Sports), Al-Faisaliah's PlayStation and Modern Electronics, Integrated Telecom and others (Gamers' Day Website, 2019). There were plans to hold a 4-day event on the 30th of November 2019 (Tashkandil, 2019).

²⁸. The Arabic announcements of this event use the phrasing **يوم اللاعبين**.

²⁹ Conventions and events of games in Saudi Arabia are also addressed in Chapter 6. This section highlights the exposure and game-related themes in the Saudi press.

The event was cancelled due to the overpopulated schedules of Riyadh Season. Riyadh Season was a governmental initiative by the Saudi Commission of Tourism and Heritage. The initiative was governmental sponsored series of events from 11th of December 2019 to mid-December (SCTH, 2019).

Arab Game Zanga Jam (Developer Convention)

Another event that emerged during the thorough examination of the Saudi press is Zangat Al-Alaab (Game Jam Event). The event seemed to have been a popular event among aspiring game armature developers (male and female) (Alarabiya, 2012). The convention set a theme for games, and participants had to submit their work within 72 hours. In 2012 the event included 240 participants and resulted in 43 game submissions (Al-Humood, 2012). The events website Gamezanga.net is a rich place to see the products of Arab indie game developers. The events are usually held for 3 days. The last event was the 9th ZANGA held 30 August 2019 to 1st of September 2019. There are no conditions on the platform, as they state on their website, games could be on browser, Android OS or windows. According to the website Jam gathering points are located in Riyadh and Jeddah in Saudi Arabia as well as other countries: Jordan, Algeria, Iraq, Turkey, Palestine, Lebanon, UAE and Egypt. The last event had 80 game submissions (GAME ZANGA, 2020). The outcome of the JAM is listed on the itch.io website:

<https://itch.io/jam/gamezanga9/results>

The top 10 games were:

1. *Back to the Universe* by Xerise
2. *BiVERSE* by imad2b
3. *Subject 80* by Jana Games Studios
4. *Once Upon a Time in a Jam* by Sidou-GreenSide
5. *Parallel Squares* by Zexord
6. *Lost Mushroom* by TrickSept
7. *UnSky* by CodeyJs
8. *The Ghassala Effect* by Musabtulaimat
9. *Reaper* by Oussama_Bonnor
10. *Department of Shady Business* by Issa, MarwanMR1, AnonymousZiZ, TableKnightGames.

This discovery, unearthed a trove of unlimited resources of Indie Arab game developers, titles and trends. The event helped discover and shape the understanding of the nature of the gaming scene and informed the research with less known game titles designed by Saudi Arab game developers. It is worth noting that amongst the developers are Saudi female developers. See Chapter 7 for more details.

Social Practices and Game Locations:

Gaming Locations

The press exposure of video game events and locations in Saudi Arabia was very effective in shaping an informed approach to the sampling of interview participants. In addition, understanding the social and economic structure of these locations clarified many social issues attached to video gaming and gaming subcultures. Most notable of these topics are the following:

Alternatives to Arcades

Understanding gaming cafes as belonging to the evolutionary arc of arcades arenas is a fair assumption. Regardless of the transformation process of social gaming locations, there are some similarities that can be drawn for the two models. However, the point of this section is to elaborate on the nuanced, yet distinctive, social gatherings that Saudis held throughout that time, and this connects to their counterparts in Western countries (mainly the United States). Gaming arcades are a clear example on how Saudi cultural and state policy factors functioned to result in new gaming practices. Arcade manufactures attempted on various occasions to enter the Saudi market, with reports as early as 1983. However, cultural issues and cultural enforced policy seem to be a strong factor why arcade venues were not able to establish a steady footing in the Saudi market (Miller, 1983). Unlike the popularity that these locations met in the U.S. during the 80s, attempt to launch similar projects in Saudi were quite unsuccessful. It seems at the time that the idea of an arcade arena was something strongly attached to American themed entertainment establishments, for example, skating arenas and large amusement parks, such as Al Hamra (*Al Jazeera Newspaper*, 2002), StarCity (*Al Jazeera Newspaper*, 2004). It should be noted that there were attempts by Sega Enterprises to establish an arcade market in Saudi Arabia. This attempt was done through localised partnerships in Saudi Arabia and UAE. In 1995, Sega Enterprises Ltd reached an agreement with Abdul Mohsen A Al-Swailam Est. to open and equip game amusement centres in Saudi Arabia. It was supposedly the first amusement park of its kind, and five other centres were planned to open in other locations around the Kingdom (DJI, 1995). Later, in 1996, Sega Enterprises Ltd partnered with Majid al Futtaim Group, a Dubai based company, to boost their sales in the region. The partnership made Majid al Futtaim Group the exclusive sales agent of Sega machines in UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Egypt, Syria and Pakistan. The projected sales hoped to reach 500 million in addition to the established 50 million yen. They expected to increase their sales to 5 billion yen by the year 2000 (AWSJ, 1996). The business model was based on arcade gaming points inside family amusement parks. The word *family* in Saudi Arabia means that single men were not allowed access to these venues. This policy, although enforced by the private sector, was criticised for causing financial losses to the entertainment/tourism sectors. The argument behind it is, young single men have less financial independence and are less likely to spend in comparison to a family (Naffee, 2014). This might have led single men to create their own independent social venues in commercially owned cybercafes and privately owned Mulhag and Istirahah, where Saudi gamers shared a location and indulged in a social gaming experience.

Gaming Cafes

Unlike many markets, gaming cafes in Saudi Arabia are generally different to internet cafes. Gaming cafes are more of a gaming club than an open public place. This means they are subject to a membership and subsection fees. This includes activities that exceed the sole use of a station. Gaming cafes were established on the basis of a localised LAN (local network games) as broadband coverage was limited in the early stages of this business model. Reports of LAN party gaming cafes go back to the early 2000s (ADSLGATE, 2019). There were tournaments, team/game-clan organisation, and some offered online broadcasting services. Gaming cafés also maintained a higher standard of workstations as the machines were meant for high performance. In order to keep their clients from the appeal of gaming at home, these cafes usually organised and encouraged competitive gaming through tournaments and eSport festivities (CLIX Gaming Cafe', 2019; GAMENET, 2020; Xentrics Gaming, 2020). According to Hani Lutfi, a consultant on medium and small enterprises, the cost of establishing a cybercafé included meeting high standards due to the generally high living standards in Saudi. This included machines with higher specs, a warm atmosphere and services that included food and warm/cold beverages (Ali, 2016). It should be noted that the stigma of gaming cafes is different to that of internet cafes in Saudi Arabia. Internet cafes in Saudi Arabia had gained an infamous reputation over time, regarding practices and certain behaviours associated with dark private rooms and their working hours being after midnight. However, around 2010, the business model of internet cafes was facing challenges with the spread of broadband and affordable mobile plans (Al-Khalid, 2010). In a study conducted on the use of Internet in Saudi Arabia at the time, 86% of the sample was gaming online at home, 46% at work, 21% on mobile networks and 17% in internet cafes (Masmah, 2011). This might have driven some cybercafé's to update their hardware and adopt the gaming café model.

Mulhag and Istirahah

Mulhag and *Istirahah* are two terms particular to Saudi gaming culture. Both are gaming environments that emerged during the late 1990s in Saudi gaming culture, with *Mulhag* preceding *Istirahah* culture. The importance in exploring these two environments is to shed light on how economics, gender and social structure plays out in Saudi gaming culture. During the observational and interviews data collection stage, there was a reoccurring mention of the terms *Istirahah* and *Mulhag*. The term *Mulhag* (ملحق) literally translates to attachment.³⁰ It refers to a house attachment similar to *Majlis* (مجلس) in design and purpose as it is designed to receive guests in an informal setting. This means that *Majlis* could be considered as the equivalent of the "good room" in some rural Western cultures while *Mulhag* is an outside lounge room. This design was adopted in the 90s and has been associated with middle-class homes. This adaptation declined

³⁰ *Mulhag* is an annex (outside living room) with facilities attached to the conventional Saudi house.

during the 2000s due to economic factors as the middle-class income families moved to smaller residential units (Al-Sahan, 2018). Taha points out that there was a recent trend of Istirahahs during the 2000s (Taha, 2003). This could indicate that there was a shift from Mulhag to Istirahah due to economic factors.

Istirahah³¹ is another scene for a thriving gaming community. However, before describing the social aspect of Istirahah gaming, an explanation of this social phenomena is in order. The word *Istirahah* literally means rest or a place of rest. It refers to a residential establishment that consists of one or more than one room accompanied with amenities. The design and the purpose of this establishment is similar to a “man-cave,” and the place is generally regarded as a male sanctuary away from the “conservatism” of Saudi public/family life. It also could be compared to Mulhag lifestyle (Lawrence, 2015). In most cases Istirahah includes some recreational facilities (e.g., swimming pool, volleyball court) and is usually equipped with home entertainment systems and other recreational gadgets. This establishment is usually located on the outskirts of a city/town. The phenomena gained popularity during the 90s. However, the public did not look favourably towards this lifestyle. The stigma attached to this lifestyle are vaguely connected to irresponsibility and escapism (Taha, 2003). *Istirahah gamer* is mainly a derogatory term amongst gamers. It describes a person whose focus on games is purely social and with limited interest in game variety. The term was used to describe gamers whose interest was limited to the sport games genre, mainly soccer (football). As pointed out by some, the issue is more of a transition from regular sports to a modern and less labouring alternative (Al-Thwaini, 2009). This might be related to the social aspect of Istirahah, as men get together and share recreational activities (AL-Saed, 2020). It could also be related to sport as there might be a link between football fandom and Istirahah lifestyle (Al-Duaihi, 2018). Istirahah seems to be associated with all activities physical, such as sports, or otherwise, such as board games and video games, with escapism (Al Huthaifi, 2013). This observation requires further investigation to determine the nature of this phenomenon. However, as for now there is no conclusive evidence to determine if the use of ‘Istirahah gamer’ is accurately used by other gamers. The scholarship on the domestic space of gaming is expanding, and escapism, “technomascularity” and digitally mediated homosociality are intertwined into the subject of man-cave (Taylor, 2018). In the same manner, Istirahah and Mulhag gaming is linked to these observations. This topic could be explored further to unearth the relationship between gender and Saudi culture. In this regard, there is little detail in the articles, as a part of these places being predominantly linked to Saudi males, with words like *Shabab*, which literally translates to “youth”. The word is majorly used to refer to male youth but could in a very specific context refers to females as well.

Challenges and Limitations

³¹ There should be a clarification that the concept of Istirahah was expanded later to adapt more expanded social forms. The man-cave style Istirahah still exists.

There are known challenges in obtaining information from printed press articles:

1. The limitation of digitized records: most Saudi newspapers started publishing their newspaper in digital form by the end of the 90s. With the exception of *Al Jazeera Saudi Newspapers*, who provide archived scanned copies of the newspaper starting from 1960, most of the newspapers' search functions are limited to post-2000 issues. For example, *Al-Riyadh* newspaper offers very limited search tools in addition to removing all query searches in digitized material pre-2000 press as they offer a corporate paid service instead (Alriyadh Newspaper Information Centre, 2020). Attempts to contact the centre did not work. *Al Jazeera Newspaper* offers a search functionality from 1998 (Al-Jazirah Newspaper Website, 2020). *Al-Watan* offers searches post-2002 (Al-Watan Newspaper Website, 2020), *Asharq Al-Awsat* post-2002 (Asharq Al-Awsat Website, 2020), *Al Eqtisadiyah* post-2008 (Al Eqtisadiyah Website, 2020) and so on. The limited search functions are a common feature among these websites with low reliability. An exception to this is *Umm Al-Qura Newspaper*, which is owned by the Saudi Ministry of Media. The government owned newspaper offers archives that date back to 20th of June 1925. Umm Al-Qura newspaper is the formal press outlet for the government, announcing all decrees and governmental declarations. The full archive is provided by the Saudi National Center for Archives & Records NCAR (NCAR, 2020).
2. There is no unified search engine nor a Saudi news aggregation site: each news outlet had to be examined and searched separately for each topic. Some newspapers provide advanced search tools specifying date and section. However, the majority prioritise aesthetics over functionality.
3. The most challenging aspect of searching media sources is the variation of Arabic spellings of foreign words. Most video game terminology is changed to Arabic and pronounced by various speakers, which means up to four spellings for a single gaming term.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter paints a broad yet needed elaboration on the setting that creates the milieu of Saudi gamers. As the research dives deep into detailing the experiences and gaming condition in Saudi Arabia, this chapter highlights the general picture of an emerging culture as reported by the press. In terms of reporting on issues, a contrast was found between local and Western sources. While the general concern of Western sources is to present the topic with relevance to a Western audience, local press address topics with relevance to emerging local issues. This brings to light two important issues germane to exploring a topic like video games in a region like the Middle East. The first, adequate access to journalistic material of local news outlet is limited. The limitation is dictated by a lack of a functional news aggregator database/s. As a research tool, news aggregator databases are vital tool to scholars. The variation and coverage of the sources of these

databases could sway research on certain topics, and they could also affect realising the gaps in topic (Gilbert & Watkins, 2020). In addition, various news aggregator databases yield different results (Blatchford, 2020). This could particularly be the case in this chapter. Specifics and nuances of research, particular to Saudi Arabia, were deprioritised in the scholarship of video game studies on the region. This brings about the second issue. Language barriers and the limited number of English journalistic publications are limitation to non-Arabic speaking scholars. This issue was highlighted previously by Clément as one of the limitations of research (Clément, 2019). This chapter also partially affirms Karim’s observation on Western media (Karim, 2005b), revisited by Šisler (2008), in terms of highlighting headlines that are closer to the stereotype common amongst targeted audience. While there is variety on a certain topic selection from local media, such as social events, and variety as well around local policies, there is a more consistent approach on Western topic selection. Li and Zhang affirm Karim’s observation on more recent corpus-based research on American press (Jan.1, 2000 to Dec. 31, 2016). The research attributes this stereotyping (Li & Zhang, 2021). This is also true for British press (Al-Azami, 2021). However, Ewart et al. (2016) attribute the problem to the lack of Muslim voices in reporting. The exception of this tendency in Western media is, as Richardson noted, of Muslim voices being quoted when they are “Muslim Criminals” or “illegitimate terrorist organisation.” This diversion from Karim’s observation is a more accurate depiction of the situation of reporting on Saudi Arabian video game issues. As Western sources focus on copyright violation numbers, local articles are focused on the technical details of preventing copyright violations. Consequently, this adds to the importance of examining local media and local press for another voice on the topic.

Most importantly, this chapter has established a timeline and a basic overview of gaming in Saudi Arabia – of a nature that tends to be overlooked and/or underappreciated in previous studies. In addition to laying the groundwork for further concepts to be examined in this research, which is one of the objectives of this thesis, it emphasises Saudi Arabia-specific issues and themes that are essential to comprehending Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9. This further supports Shaw’s revision of comparative studies on Arab representation in video games (Shaw, 2010). It suggests that the counter-construction paradigm may hold true for a limited period of time and in a very limited context. However, a review of local press reveals that attitudes towards past and present gaming have a more complex and nuanced history. Alternatively, the conventional division of the three generational differences outlined in this study provides an overview of a general attitude that informs research on how to approach the topic of gaming in Saudi Arabia while avoiding generalisations and stereotypes. In this way, this chapter and the thesis more generally covers new ground for others to follow.

CHAPTER 5³²

Saudi Media Policy on Game Content Regulation

This chapter argues how state cultural policy affects the present state of game production, gaming communities and gaming culture in Saudi Arabia in ways that mirror global trends, but with a mix of local sensibilities. It examines the topic of cultural policy from both sides. From the inside, Saudis prefer how their cultural policy should appear, while from the outside, research on cultural policy and UNESCO policy prioritizes certain aspects of cultural policy. Saudi legislators and policymakers mediate both sides. Through examining interview participants statements, the research argues that Saudi gamers perceive local and international cultural policies differently. This research's interview participants perceived foreign culture through the lens of the creative arts, whereas they viewed their own culture through the lenses of history, religion, and language. The argument is supported by how Saudi gamers discussed other nations (mainly Western and Japanese) in the context of art and media creation. However, they discussed local culture in connection to historical narratives, religion, and language. The chapter argues that this reaction is comparable to game policy in other parts of the world. The chapters will describe the Saudi gaming community's experience as new form of Saudiness that was simultaneously unrestricted and reserved in nature. It will describe how it led them to negotiate their sense of self between the realms of regional and worldwide cultures, which is a phenomenon yet to be fully understood in the previous literature.

Between the need to produce a cultural policy that meets the focus of cultural frameworks submitted to UNISCO by other members, and a growing concern of conserving cultural heritage outside architectural and creative arts sectors, Saudi cultural policy is by no means a simple topic. On the 1st June 2018 the Ministry of Culture and Information split into two entities: The Ministry of Culture and The Ministry of Media (National Center for Archives & Records, 2018). While this reorganisation is not outside the ongoing journey of cultural policy placement in many countries, as will be explored in this chapter, it suggests an underlying sense of how global culture policy and local cultural policy seem to intersect. The scholarship about cultural policy has noted this on many occasions (Rosenstein, 2021), as will also be explored throughout this chapter. It should be noted that media policy and cultural policy in Saudi Arabia are a relatively lengthy and labyrinthian topic. The details, developments, implications of these policies could hardly be bracketed in a single project, let alone a chapter. However, the attention given to video games as a form of media with cultural dimensions is a relatively new development in Saudi media policy, and responses to it have manifested in specific additions to the legal documentation of policy in various governmental bodies. The most important of these bodies is the General Commission of

³² The findings of this chapter were instrumental in forming the article: *Cultural policy aspirations and the turn in Saudi Arabia's video game industry* in the International Journal of Cultural Policy. Authors: Al-Khamees, O. A., Yecies, B., & Moore, C.

Audio-Visual Media, which is the governmental media classification and co-regulating body. The term *co-regulation* refers to the interaction of the GCAM with other governmental and some industry establishments. Other governmental bodies involved, or involved at one point, with video game regulation are The Ministry of Media, Ministry of Sports and e-sport federation, King AbdulAziz City of Information and Technology, The Communications and Information Technology Commission, Ministry of Commerce, Chambers of Commerce and Saudi Customs Authority. Apart from GCAM's review, the review of the policy documentation provided by the governmental bodies indicates that before 2016 the major concerns with games were focused on software copywrite violations rather than the content of the games, for the most part. The role of the Ministry of Sports and e-sport federation is discussed in Chapter 5 and interactions of other bodies was addressed in Chapter 4. With a focus on the two key issues, preserving cultural heritage and meeting a suggested global view of culture, this chapter examines specific key issues which have implications for the gaming industry and consumer base in Saudi Arabia. The purpose of this chapter can be summarised in three points. First, it examines the state of change and development in the process of policymaking in Saudi Arabia, through examining policy documentation by the various governmental bodies. Secondly, it examines the influence from outside Saudi Arabia in this process. And finally, it examines how the gaming community and gaming culture is affected by these changes. I remind the reader, that video game policy plays a major role in shaping the experiences of Saudi gamers as well as shaping the landscape of gaming content.

The ongoing development in policy concerning video games in Saudi Arabia is a contributing factor to the limitations of addressing a topic of this nature, yet a contributing factor to the conception of this research. The series of developments are both institutional, where the institution handling video games change, and conceptual, where the attention to games as a medium have changed over time. Some of these aspects were briefly addressed in Chapter 4 from a public and journalistic point of view. The institutional changes are changes that are concerned with changes to the governmental entities (e.g., Ministry of Media, Ministry of Commerce, The Ministry of Culture, The Communications and Information Technology Commission, The General Commission of Audio-visual Media, etc.) and the redistribution of missions and responsibilities between the various bodies of the government. The conceptual changes are the responses that occurred within the policy to an emerging new media form or reconsiderations of a pre-existing one. An example of such is the shift in the distribution model by game manufactures as hardcopy distribution subsided in favour of downloadable softcopy. In addition to being a topic for participants in the research interview, the issue illustrates how the regulations were, and to some extents still are, geared towards older models of media delivery (e.g., broadcast). As mentioned in Chapter 4, the relevance of the issue and relevance of the response strategy came into question as users moved towards other means of distribution.

The changing dynamics of policy in Saudi Arabia could be easily understood by looking to the historical backgrounds of the governing bodies dealing with media in Saudi Arabia. Since transforming it from a General Directorate of Press and Publishing to an independent Ministry in 1963, The Saudi Ministry of Media has undergone many changes in both policies, titles and functions. Among these titles were The Ministry of Media, The Ministry of Media and Culture, followed by the division of the Ministry of Media and Culture into two Ministries with Royal Decree No. A/217 in 01/06/2018 into The Ministry of Culture and The Ministry of Media (National Center for Archives & Records, 2018). Another development was the establishment of the General Commission of Audio-Visual Media in 2016 and the migration of some of the responsibilities of the ministry to this commission (*Audio Visual Media Conent Policy*, 2017). Additional developments include the establishment of the General Authority for Culture in 2017 (NCAR, 2017) and the cancelation of the General Authority for Culture in 2020 and the reassigning of its tasks to newly formed entities (National Center for Archives & Records, 2020). During the course of the research, there has been a substantial effort to keep track of the rapid changes that have occurred since 2016, especially regarding the implementation of the new policies regarding new mediums or reconsideration of existing policies.

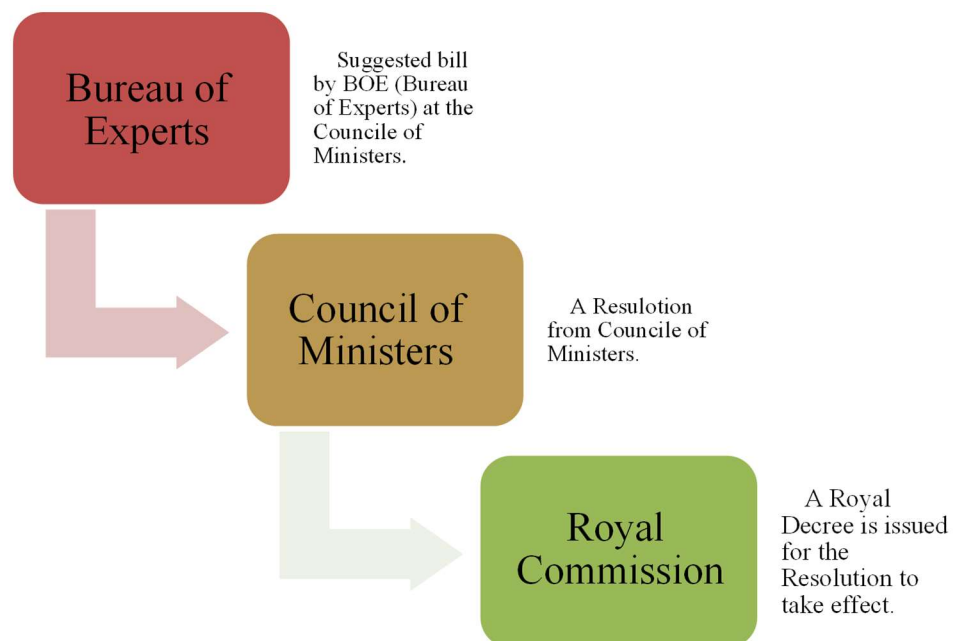


Figure 4.1 The process of creating policy as explained by the Basic Law of Governance of 1992 (*Basic Law of Governance*, 1992) and the Law of the Council of Ministers of 1993 (*Law of the Council of Ministers*, 1993)

Global Forums and Cultural Policy and the Influence on Local and International Policy

The chapter opened with a note on the separation of the Ministry of Culture and Information. This might be coincidental in its occurrence, yet it casts light on an important issue. Firstly, cultural policy was described by Miller and Yúdice (2002) as fundamentally “bureaucratic.” It was defined as “the institutional supports that channel both aesthetic creativity and collective ways of life—a bridge between the two registers. Cultural policy is embodied in systematic, regulatory guides to action that are adopted by organizations to achieve their goals” (Miller & Yúdice, 2002, p. 2). The issue is of institutionalising cultural policy and how the institutionalisation process is perceived from the international community and how it is expressed internally. This issue was addressed in various works in the early 2000s, as will be discussed further in this chapter, with concentration on the inclusion of diversity in international cultural policy forums, rather than the limited attention of cultural aspects of creative arts. In McGuigan’s assessment of the shift of paradigm the theoretical and practical dimensions of cultural policy marked by UNESCO’s World Commission on Culture and Development report titled “Our Cultural Diversity,” he elaborated on how the influence on how this shifted the policy on culture in Europe from a focus on the creative arts to “diversity.” McGuigan comments on Carl-Johan Kleberg’s highlighting a use of “a wide anthropological definition of culture,” that this moves cultural policy from “a narrow preoccupation with the arts” to a limitless scope. However, according to McGuigan, “acceptable limitation” is not quite followed in the “cultural policy discourse and rhetoric” (McGuigan, 2004, p. 99). In a similar examination, O’Regan (2004) contrasts the role of UNESCO to local actors. “The Utility of a Global Forum: UNESCO’s Significance for Communication, Culture and ICTs,” elaborates on the role of UNESCO in shaping the policy and matters of diversity in the early 2000s. O’Regan, demonstrates the role of government in engaging or distancing a country’s position on these policies. An example given was Australia’s position on human rights and cultural issues during the Keating and Hawke governments versus that of the Howard government, where one had an “exemplary record” while the other “gave the impression that it was disengaging from international forums.” O’Regan concludes, “It is also likely to continue as a significant global forum in which contests of ideology and principles are played out. UNESCO, for all its seeming marginality, remains a deceptively important player in culture and communication, including ICT development” (O’Regan, 2004, p. 78).

In recent research on the topic of cultural policy, diversity and the economic contributions of the creative arts remain two elements of the discussion in two major global forums, such as UNESCO, and the research and scholarship examining cultural policy. Firstly, spreading global cultural policy was one of the concepts resulting from a program developed by UNESCO. In its early stages of the program, UNESCO invited members to provide reports on cultural policy. According to Alasuutari and Kangas (2020), all members established ministry level governmental

bodies to work in line with the report, except the following countries: Australia, Canada and the U.S., in which it was handled at sub-state levels. Through analysis of the program, Alasuutari and Kangas found that the success of this program was attributed to two main factors: (1) the process of domestic and peer pressure, in which the report focused on supporting “national art” and cultural heritage; and (2) “diffusion of concept of cultural policy,” with countries of the same groups emulating each other through these national reports. Alasuutari and Kangas criticised the strategy of diffusion followed by UNSECO, where after institutionalising cultural policy in these states, UNSECO established “identifying factors that differentiate leaders from laggards. In such an approach, the focus is on the characteristics of the adopters, whereas the creation of a model or the ways in which it is actively promoted receives less attention.” Among other states mentioned by Alasuutari and Kangas, Saudi Arabia was one of the states to agree to the process of institutionalisation early in the process (Alasuutari & Kangas, 2020 pp. 3-4).

To better understand the situation of duality that Saudi culture is going through, there is a need to examine the state of cultural policy studies and understand how scholarly engagement interacts with how people see their own culture. Saudi Arabia is not the only country that might face challenges in joining two different logics in one encompassing policy document. According to Yúdice, the recommendation to Latin America has two tendencies: (1) the priority of the economic contribution of creative industries, as well that of arts and heritage; (2) cultural rights, which focuses on integral development and citizen well-being, empowerment, inclusion and access. Due to their different logic, Yúdice emphasises that they are difficult to be forged in a “all-encompassing policy” (Yúdice, 2018, p. 647).

The second circle of examination is that the scholarship and research on cultural policy is defining the peoples view of what is considered “culture.” In her article “Cultural Policy Archetypes, the Bathwater and the Baby, Rosenstein emphasises the importance and the value of using cultural policy archetypes in comparative cultural policy studies. Social scientists examine the difference of cultural policies in two broad ways: either (1) they build an approximation of national cultural policies, where there is a large scale comparison of different national policies, or (2) they propose a theory that can differentiate between national cultural policies, then test if the theory is salient. Both methodologies were used to examine cultural policies yielding different aspects to examine. Rosenstein distinguished between archetypes and types, where types are abstract and general rules, while archetypes are concrete examples of types. Rosenstein stressed the importance of having an understanding of “what people think a cultural policy should be like.” (p. 26) The criticism of using archetypes to analyse and compare cultural policies lies in the nature of archetypes being only an example and an interpretation. Rosenstein stated, using archetypes as a tool for analysing cultural administration leads to misunderstanding the extent to which administrative mechanisms – including both policy instruments and forms of bureaucratic organization – link up with particular political tendencies or traditions of support for culture, and it leads to undertheorizing why this linking up happens (when it does happen). Since the whole purpose of comparative study is to analyse and explain such associations, that is a serious drawback. (Rosenstein, 2021, pp. 26-27)

Rosenstein's observation is supported by the interview participants, as will be discussed. However, previous research on the topic which supports Rosenstein's premise that "people think a cultural policy should be like" (p. 26) could be applied to Saudi Arabia. In quantitative research on secular cultural policy in Islamic countries, Mehregan found that 88.1% of Saudi Arabians strongly agreed with implementing "only" Sharia Islamic laws (Mehregan, 2017). Martin et al. (2016) also indicated that 82% of Saudis in their study sample thought that more could be done for cultural preservation. The question still remains if the separation was connected to an attempt to both meet a global view of cultural policy and attend to the local view on how cultural policy should look like. There is a strong suggestion that they are linked. However, determining a causality of this decision, to separate the two governmental bodies, is not the focus of this research. The main focus of this research is Saudi Arabian gamers and their reaction to these circumstances.

Drivers of Cultural Policy

There are various aspects that control and influence cultural policy frameworks in different countries. Before examining the cultural policies that affect the gaming conditions in Saudi Arabia, this section will examine the scholarship on this topic on the global scale. Economic, ideological and educational factors all come into play in forming, reforming, and reintroducing a policy. This is strongly connected to situating cultural policy, as a scholarship, in other disciplines. For example, one of the approaches to German cultural policy is driven by "education by culture." Although explored since the 1920s, the approach has seen attention again in recent years. The approach was first intended to strengthen the sense of community through engaging with folklore and traditional songs. In the 1960s and 1970s the approach re-emerged again within left-wing political agenda. During this period, it influenced cultural policies at a local level in two major developments: (1) democratization of culture and (2) the movement of Socioculture (Soziokultur). The latter was introduced by Hermann Glaser, who was the head of the Municipal Department of Arts and Culture of the city of Nuremberg. Glaser also promoted a grass-roots initiative of democratization to promote "high-Culture." The approach has evolved to that of "new frames" in current times, according to Steigerwald (2021). Now, the policy of education by culture in Germany is subject to both educational and cultural convergence. This would include "professional associations, public foundations, private foundations, representatives of the federal government and federal funding units, as well as local authorities" (Steigerwald, 2021, p. 4). According to Durrer, and others, in terms of situating cultural policy in relationship with other disciplines, cultural policy had various interactions and different scopes in various locations and during different periods: political science, economics, sociology, arts and creative arts and others (Durrer et al., 2017). Furthermore, even in specific branches of cultural policy, as in media cultural policy, the interaction with other interests (i.e., economics and education) is very common. Dreyer noted that German cultural policy in regard to video games was driven by two obligations: the protection of minors and the protection of the rights of producers (Sörensen, 2018). In terms of

economics, and one of the most relevant of the many approaches to examining cultural policy, is the economic analysis. It should be noted that there were some challenges and contestation to this view, especially in the creative arts. Durrer et al., (2017) highlights Peacock's views on the issue. Peacock noted that while economic analysis was widely accepted in broadcasting, there was an imbalanced opposition to applying economic analysis to produce a rational system that can address the performing arts. He specified publicly funded parts of cultural sectors (such as museums), describing them as "view themselves as 'guardians of public interest' and consider themselves to know better, or be more likely to know, what is in the interests of future generations." (p. 36) Hesmondhalgh affirmed Peacock's argument about the association of cultural policy and the subsidized art sector, while the policy applicable to media and communication was usually viewed through the scope of economics and politics (Durrer et al., 2017). This supports a more fluid view of cultural policy, which strongly depends on the region and the country. This also supports Alasuutari and Kangas' assessment of UNESCO's strategy of global cultural policy and supports the focus on certain aspects of culture (Alasuutari & Kangas, 2020).

Games and Global Cultural Policy

In terms of cultural policy pertaining to video games, there are different responses across the world. Some countries consider games through a limited rhetoric. According to Sørensen, video games with their vast variations were addressed with a discourse dominantly negative, addressing them as problematic and discussing their potential harm, especially to children (Sørensen, 2018). However, some countries address them as an extension of the Film Industry. According to Webber, in the United Kingdom much of the cultural policy relating to video games was defined and promoted as "a part of creative industry," and it was subject to film policy (Webber, 2020). However, in some instances a balance must be established. According to Dreyer, in Germany the policy addressing video games is driven by two paradoxical priorities: on one hand the policy makers have the obligation to protect minors from harmful media "in an affective matter." On the other hand, third parties are entitled to fundamental rights of freedom of speech, freedom of arts and "ownership rights or occupational freedoms." Dreyer found that the aim was not to make the most affective policy to protect the youth. Rather, it was to create a compromise in the form of reassessment of a possible improvement to the state of these conflicting concerns. In other words, "to check whether it is possible to reduce interventions with fundamental rights of third parties without risking problems regarding an unimpaired personality development" (Dreyer, 2018, p. 99).

Saudi Policy Documentation

Building upon the previous discussion, cultural policy has different considerations and different drivers that have caused the classification of video game cultural policy to be classified under other broader legislation. Reflecting on this and on the recent division of the Ministry of Media and Culture division into two entities, a familiar reoccurrence can be seen to have taken

place, where the Ministry of Culture looks at museums as culture while the Ministry of Media looks at the elements of culture in media. When it comes to games and cultural policy in Saudi Arabia, the abovementioned global trends are distributed across policies of various governmental bodies. However, at the point of writing this analysis, the references to video games in policy documentation is limited to categorising it as media content, with no reference to the culture surrounding video games. The documentation of the Ministry of Culture has no direct reference to the video gaming culture in Saudi Arabia nor are there any consequential policy decisions that directly affect the representation of Saudi Arab gamers. On the other hand, the media policy in the General Commission of Audio-visual Media (GCAM) documentation displays direct (and indirect) references to video games. Furthermore, an overview of policy documentation from 1982 to 2020 shows increased development in terms of policy and policy documentation in Saudi Arabia since 2016. This can be seen in the rearrangement of governmental bodies and the inclusion of new forms of media. The source of policy documentation of governmental bodies could be narrowed down into two primary sources. The first is the policy document, which is produced by the Bureau of Experts at the Council of Ministers and attached to a Royal Decree executing the law and giving the ministry/governmental agency the right to draw upon the framework in the issued document. The second source is the implementation regulation, which is a document issued by the ministry detailing the specific elements of the law produced by The Bureau of Experts. There are tertiary sources of documentation produced by the ministries and government agencies, which were also a source of more information. These include, but are not limited to, investment guides, annual reports, brochures, webpages and media announcements. These tertiary sources are mostly a response to an issue that arose, and they might be resolved or absorbed by the implementation documentation. The sources of these documentation are addressed in Chapter II.

GCAM's Classification and Regulating Game Content in Saudi Arabia

The examination of the policy documentation of the General Commission of Audio-visual Media shows no reference to games in the original policy text produced by the Council of Ministers (*Audio Visual Media Content Policy*, 2017). However, in the implementation regulation issued by GCAM, the term *games* are mentioned six time. It is mentioned twice in the definition section, three times in “Index (A): Licenses,” and one time in “Index (B): Violations.” In the definition section, games are mentioned as an included audio/video media activity twice: “Video Games & Arcade Games,” and they were mentioned as a context of ‘examples of activities’ with other media delivery systems. In “Index (A): Licences” of the implementation regulation guide, the mention of games comes under “(1) License for Importation, Distribution, Sale and Rental of Audio/Visual Media Content.” The first mention clarifies that arcade game establishments are included under the license. The other sets the fee of 2000 Riyals for every retail license, which includes “Sharing and renting services of video games.” In “Index (A): Licences,” under

“Producing Audio/Visual Content Licence,” video games are mentioned as an applicable medium, which also costs 2000 riyals per licence. Under “Index (B): Violations,” element 11 clarifies the penalties for not observing the age restriction rating on video games, film, or visual programming. The penalty for this violation is in three classes: (1) 2000 Riyals, (2) 50,000 Riyals and (3) 10,000 Riyals.

In the documentation provided by the Communication and Information Technology Commission (CITC), the references to video games are minimal. However, there is relevant information that could contribute to understanding the Saudi culture from a consumer standing point. A scan was done of the documentation provided by the commission including the *Policy of Saudi Communication and Information Technology Commission* (CITC, 2018), *Saudi Policy of Communication* (CITC, 2018), *Report: Market Definition Designation and Dominance MDDD* (CITC, 2020) and *Report: Studying the Communications and Information Technology Market - Individuals and Families* (CITC, 2019). The information relevant to this study is that (1) examining the possibility of online shopping of video games and (2) about ownership of mobile handsets, to shed light on the statistical approaches of mobile gaming studies in Saudi Arabia. The reports showed that in 2019, 17.7% of nonmaterial online shopping was for video games, in comparison to 23.4% for films and media and 27.1% for computer software. As for mobile device ownership, the report showed 72.5% of 10-14 years old own a mobile phone, as well as 96.5% of 15-19 years old, 99.3% of 20-24 years old, 98.7 of 25-29 years old, 99.1% of 30-34 years old and 99.4% of 35-39 (CITC, 2019). The percentage could be used to explain studies focusing specifically on mobile gaming in Saudi Arabia, as in Penix-Tadsen (2019), as well as age access to games and age restrictions.

Expanding the Scope to Classification and Regulating of Media content in Saudi Arabia

In order to understand media content policy in Saudi, media classification and regulation in Saudi Arabia must be examined. The General Commission of Audio-Visual Media (GCAM from here forward) is the current governing body for content regulation in Saudi Arabia. GCAM as a governmental body was established by Council of Ministers Resolve No. 332 in 03/09 2012 (*Bill of the Organisation and Mandate of The General Commission of Audio-Visual Media*, 2012). The establishment of the resolve tasked GCAM to create the new Audio-Visual Media Content Policy. Some responsibilities were gradually moved from the Ministry of Media to the commission, such as organising retail compliance regulation in accordance with copyright laws, as explored in Chapter 4. In 2016, GCAM made its first public statement in regard to content control through officially publishing the Saudi content rating systems (GCAM Website, 2016). Other responsibilities were moved to the commission leading to a full assignment of responsibilities and mandate by royal decree in mid-December of 2017 (*Audio Visual Media Content Policy*, 2017). The following section will examine the general framework provided by GCAM’s policy document

drawn by the Bureau of Experts at the Council of Ministers and compare it with the amount of detail added by the ministry in the implementation regulation document.

The 2017 Saudi General Commission of Audi-Visual Media Policy Document³³

The new Audio-Visual Content Law was officially approved by the Council of Ministers Resolution Number 170 in 12/12/2017 and in Royal Decree no. 33 in 13/12/2017. The document outlining the general laws governing the legal documents was submitted by the Bureau of Experts to the Council of Ministers. The outlined legal document carries numerous definitions and general elements of the Audio-Visual Content Law. As the legal document covers a great deal of articles that are not directly linked to the topic, only the following articles will be address: 1, 2, 5, 6, 11, 13, 14 and 25.

Article I: Definitions

This section contains 16 definitions. Among them, the following definitions are directly connected to the topic of this thesis:

8 - Media Content: visual content, sound content, or both.

9 - Broadcast: Sending receivable media content via wired or warless signals.

10- Rebroadcast: Sending media content with no change.

11- Audio and Visual Content: Broadcasting or rebroadcasting media content, as well as producing for broadcast, distributing or selling it to reach an audience. Content that resembles private messaging is not included. (Saudi Audio-Visual Content Law, 2017, p. 3)

Article II: Goal

As stated in section II of the document (page: 2) titled “Aim of Policy,” “The goal of AudioVisual Media Law is to organise audio and visual media in the Kingdom, develop it, and work to provide an appropriate investment environment for this content, as well as working to make this content agree with the Kingdoms policies on media content.” (Saudi Audio-Visual Content Law, 2017, p. 4)

Article V: Guidelines on Media Content

The following are rules and guidelines for all workers in the field of audio and visual media in Saudi Arabia:

³³ With no prior examination of these laws, and due to the difference in how Saudi law functions in comparison to other countries, the major articles of the legal documents are presented here. For the sake of clarity, all commentary, comparison, and reflection will be given after presenting the Policy Document and the Implementation Document.

- 1- Adherence to the Kingdom's media policies.
- 2- Refraining from offending, insulting, or going against God, the Angels, Quran, the messengers and prophets, the Messenger's (Muhammad) wives, His fellow, or anything that relates to the Islamic principles.
- 3- Refraining from offending the King and The Royal Prince.
- 4- Refraining from provoking strife, discrimination and hatred among citizens, agitation and violence, and disturbing the public peace.
- 5- Observing copyright laws in Saudi Arabia.
- 6- Respecting humanity.
- 7- Refraining from that which might negatively affect the relationship with Arab, Muslim and allied countries.
- 8- No material inciting terrorism, disturbing national or international security.
- 9- Refraining from broadcasting advertisements for medication, or health supplements, or investment content, which is not licenced, as well as marketing these materials.
- 10- Refraining from any media content that includes false information, which are not based on facts and verified information, or that which invades personal privacy.
- 11- Respecting freedom of speech and expression,³⁴ which is compliant with regulations and relevant standards, as well as what is required by law.
- 12- Refraining from breaching the law, national security and what is needed for public interest.
- 13- Refraining from displaying inappropriate content,³⁵ in which nudity, indecent dress code, or content that demonstrates profanity.
- 14- All female announcers working in television channels, licenced to work in the Kingdom, should comply with the decent dress code. The standards of decency are set by Islamic teachings and the common customs of Saudi Arabia.
- 15- Refraining from promoting illegal drugs, or approving their use, as well as any other intoxicants, alcohol, tobacco, or their products.
- 16- Maintaining balance in terms of periods of advertisement and media content, in which it does not negatively impact the grade and quality of listening and watching.
- 17- Any other regulation approved by the Council. (Audio-Visual Content Law, 2017, pp. 4-5)

Article VI: Obligations of Licenced Parties

All licenced parties are obliged to adhere to the following:

1. Observe the terms and conditions of the certifications and limit themselves to the licenced content.
2. Facilitating the responsibilities of competent authorities.
3. Fulfilling commitments to due fees in time.

³⁴ The literal translation is "freedom of expression and opinion."

³⁵ The literal translation is "conflict with public morals."

4. Observing the technical specifications set for broadcasting, rebroadcasting, and reception devices.
5. Commitment to providing any required data to the commission regarding activities of broadcasting, rebroadcasting, production, or distribution.
6. In the case of emergencies or disasters, licenced parties should adhere to the commission's approved directions.
7. In term of resources, Saudi financial and human resources are given priority if available. This is in accordance with regulations or whatever is decided by the commission.
8. Participation in national manufacturing pertaining to the national production of audio and video media in accordance with implementation regulations.
9. Compliance with decisions made by the commission. (Audio-Visual Content Law, 2017, pp. 5-6)

Article XI: Technical Specifications in Compliance with the Communications and Information Technology Commission

1. Before granting the license of broadcast in which specific frequencies are used (in accordance with the policy and the implementation regulations of the law),³⁶ a fulfilment of the Communications and Information Technology Commission's requirement on the specification and license of using frequencies is necessary. This is done in accordance with the Communications and Information Technology Commission policy.
2. The commission,³⁷ in coordination with the Communications and Information Technology Commission and its function determined by law will update the technical specifications for audio and visual media broadcasting equipment, as well as issuing approval of importation and authorisation of these devices. (Audio-Visual Content Law, 2017, p. 7)

Article XIII: Examination of Media Content

"If requested, licenced parties are required to provide the commission with media content before broadcasting, in order to broadcast it or rebroadcast it. The actionable procedures and conditions are decided by relevant policy (statutory regulation)." (Audio-Visual Content Law, 2017, p. 7)

Article XIV: Fair Competition Law

- 1- With consideration to the policy of competition, it is prohibited to licensed parties to participate in anything that negatively affects the market of broadcasting, rebroadcasting, production of audio and visual media, in addition to any connected matter. The implementation policy sets the regulation for this matter.
- 2- It is prohibited to encrypt any media content which are related to festivities of a nationalistic

³⁶ The word "law" was not specified. It could refer to the law of audio media commission policy, communication policy, or the Saudi law in general.

³⁷ Referring to the GCAM (general commission of Audio-visual Media)

nature. This is assigned by the commission in accordance with the implementation regulations. (Audio-Visual Content Law, 2017, pp. 7-8)

Article XXV

This policy cancels any other policy that contradicts it. (Audio-Visual Content Law, 2017, p. 10)

The Implementation Regulation by GCAM³⁸

Before discussing on how GCAM, as a governmental body, interprets and implements the mandate mentioned in the *Audio-Visual Media Content Policy* (2017), this section offers an overview of the Executive Regulation on Audio-Video Content Regulations (2018). The document containing the implementation regulation by GCAM is a 53 pages document, translating and expanding the original legal document with details and specification. The amount of information in the document is quite substantial, and as discussed in Chapter 3, this information is accessible to the public via the websites of governmental bodies, the Bureau of Experts at the Council of Ministers and the National Records. Therefore, only relevant expansions and details are going to be mentioned in this brief exploration of the Audio and Visual Media Policy in Saudi Arabia. A discussion and comparison if it in relation to other policies will be presented at the end of the section.

Additional definitions

In the definitions section, there are additional details expanding the ones produced by the Bureau's Legal Policy document. The details are an interpolation and extension of the original *Audio-Visual Media Content Policy* (2017) document. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, ministries in Saudi Arabia are tasked with interpreting the law and issuing supporting documentation explaining the law through publishing implementation guides such as this one. This procedure is particular to Saudi Arabia as laws are drafted with specific reference to a specific governmental body. This contrasts, for example, to Germany (Sörensen, 2018), the United Kingdom (Webber, 2020) and Japan (Roth et al., 2021), where the process of forming policy involves more parties and addresses a wide range of governmental and private bodies. Since the extension is substantial, only relevant items are highlighted.

First: Definitions

The definition sections observe more specification and distinction addressing types of media delivery systems. The definition of audio and visual media, for example, was expanded to

³⁸ As stated previously the commentary and reflection will follow the presentation of the legal document for clarity reasons.

video/audio via satellite, cable, digital broadcast, terrestrial television, radio, cinema, video on demand (VOD), IPTV, OTT, video games and arcades. Some of these terms are also added to the definition, which was not part of the original policy details. The phrase “Free or Paid” repeats through the document. Among the definitions concerning this research is “local content.” Local content is defined as “professional media content, created in Saudi Arabia, or content partially created by content providers based in Saudi Arabia. As well as content majorly written by one or more Saudi nationals and created by workers in Saudi Arabia. In addition to any other standard set by the commission.” (Executive Regulation on Audio-Video Content, 2018, p. 3)

Section Four: Regulations of Media Content

The regulation is similar to the original document but with more details. With additions to the listed items in the policy legal document, the implementation regulation adds:

- 1- Maintaining and supporting the high quality of media content.
- 2- Observing the principles of public decency.
- 3- Protecting national security, economy, health care, public interest national symbols.
- 4- Strengthening, the Kingdom’s unique identity and its values and cultural heritage.
- 5- Protecting public security and national unity, in addition to maintaining the social fabric.
- 6- Maintaining virtue and values amongst the young and enforcing social values by highlighting the role of family as a building block of society.
- 7- Choosing the appropriate individuals for hosting or participation.
- 8- Observing required procedures in broadcasting events. More specifically, not broadcasting any event pertaining to cultural heritage and tribal heritage until obtaining the required approval.
- 9- Educating and increasing knowledge in the audience, as well as, supporting intellectual and cultural participation.
- 10- Refraining from displaying audio/visual media content that contains nudity, indecent dress code, lude behaviour, obscenity, and profanity.
- 11- Observing the age rating of the commission.
- 12- Content rated to 18 years and above is restricted to broadcast on devices that could be secured and unlocked with passcode.
- 13- Refraining from audio/visual media content that promotes, encourages or leads to violence, intimidation, sorcery and witchcraft.
- 14- Refraining from directly or indirectly promoting, marketing, or advertising tobacco, alcohol, illegal drugs, or their products.
- 15- Observing the principles of objectivity, integrity, accuracy, confidentiality, and impartiality in dealing with different topics. In addition, following standards and practices related to media in broadcasting news, services, and advertisement.
- 16- Refraining from violating the constant of the Kingdom as they are set in the Law of Governance.
- 17- Refraining from inciting overthrowing of the government, encouragement of violence to change social and economic principles of the Kingdom.

- 18- Refraining from glorifying groups which have damaging political, racial, economic, financial, ideological, or social agenda, against the Kingdom and its interests.
- 19- Refraining from relying on allegations and false information that could mislead others.
- 20- Refraining from harming women's rights and children's rights in the Kingdom.
- 21- Refraining from slandering individuals and their private life, as well as, offending them and belittling them.
- 22- Refraining from whatever may negatively affect the relationship of Saudi with allied countries.
- 23- Refraining from affecting the Saudi currency's value, which may result in negatively affecting the economic stability of the Kingdom. Refraining from exposing the bankruptcy of businessmen, corporations, banks or any cases that are under investigation, unless done according to policy and set regulations.
- 24- Refraining from disclosing deliberations done in official meetings or transcribed in documents and records classified as confidential and by the government.
- 25- Unless exempted, refraining from disclosing news pertaining to classified official communications, agreements, treaties, or memoranda of understanding, held by the Kingdom or any of its official agencies, before it is officially released. (Executive Regulation on Audio-Video Content , 2018, p. 6)

Infractions in Foreign Content

This section is relevant as it explains the procedure for international content which does not fall under the jurisdiction of Saudi governmental bodies yet reaches the Saudi market. For example, international gaming content and services which could not be blocked through a local agent (e.g., STEAM, Origin and others). The policy states, "In case an unlicensed foreign broadcaster, whose signal could be received in the Kingdom violates the Kingdoms broadcasting policy, the commission observes the following procedure:

1. Sending a communique, through diplomatic channels, to the foreign broadcaster and requesting of blocking the signal to the Kingdom.
2. In case of the foreign broadcaster does not respond to the commission's request (in step 1), the commission would commence to contact its counterpart through diplomatic channels, requesting legal action towards the foreign broadcaster.
3. The commission maintains the right to legally prosecute the foreign broadcaster for said violation." (Executive Regulation on Audio-Video Content Regulations, 2018, p. 8)

Media Classification, Age Restrictions and Censorship

The clearest document outlining the regulation of censorship and classification is the 2018 annual report. The annual report of 2019 does not contain this clarity. The original policy document issued by the Council of Ministers does not mention video games. The implementation policy document issued by GCAM mentioned games in a limited context. In the documentation

obtained from GCAM regarding game policy and content regulation, two strategies could be observed: (1) censorship of content and (2) age classification. The explanation of the regulation could be obtained initiating an online application process and could be found distributed in different locations. Censorship policies are applied to sexual, cultural and religious content. Censorship could be re-examined if the media is presented through a device that offers encryption and passcode protection. Classification is a requirement of all media and content is categorised according to issues of violence, fantasy, and politics. For a full list of age restriction criteria, iconography and symbolism chart of GCAM', see Index VI.1.

As demonstrated earlier in the chapter, various countries have an age restriction and content rating system. The following is taken from the website of GCAM, on the 24/08/2021, as the latest iteration of the age rating system. GCAM defines its age rating system as “a rating system to evaluate the suitability of Audio-visual content to different age groups in accordance with the principles and standards which are approved by the commission.” Furthermore, the content regulation in other countries is defined within the framework it aims to serve. The aim of the Saudi system in Saudi Arabia is derived through the familiar framework seen in other policy documentation. On the website, GCAM states

The rating system is designed to provide adults with societal assistance. Most importance of these is: aiding adults in selecting suitable content for themselves and for the children under their guardianship to provide protection from content that may cause them harm or disturbance. In addition, it provides sufficient information on the categorised. It also affirms social values, public principles and the standards that govern media content within Saudi Arabia in accordance with Saudi law.

Content is evaluated and would pass from the censorship stage to the age rating system (see Figure 4.2).

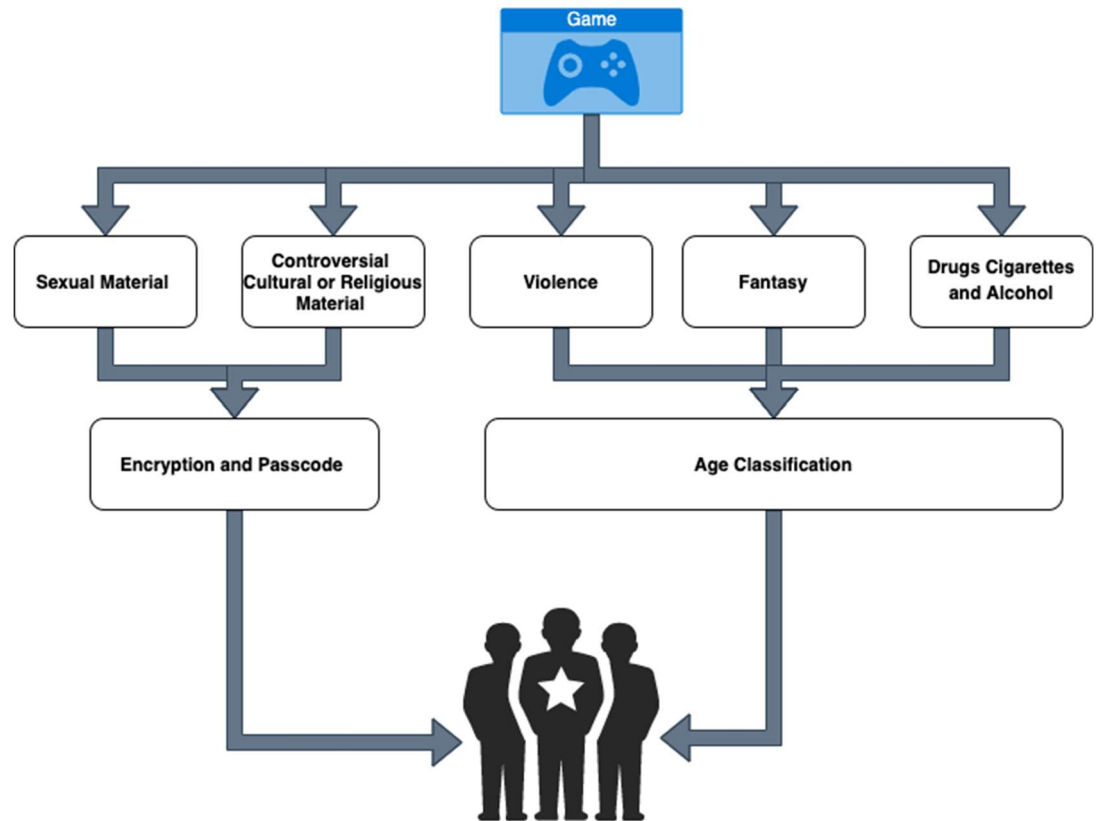


Figure 4.2 Content regulation policy in Saudi Arabia sets the procedure of media content classification, with violent, fantasy and intoxicants going through age classification process, while sexual and culturally controversial material requires encrypted accesses.

Censorship and Blacklisted Games in Saudi Arabia

One of the major issues that made the headlines in various publication is the ban on some video games in Saudi Arabia (Francis, 2018) (Lemon, 2018). The articles specify 47 games that are banned. As will be examined, the list contains more than 47 games (63 in the latest version) that were blacklisted for various reason. In its early days, GCAM published an updated list of games with content that did not meet the content regulations of media content policy. GCAM's website was redesigned without the blacklisted games, in favour of an annual report of the number of certified games and the latest titles on the whitelist. The latest blacklist on record was obtained from the website in 2018 and is extended to all platforms (see Table 4.1).³⁹

³⁹ The website of GCAM puts "all devices," meaning any gaming platform, including PC/PS/XBOX/Nintendo and others.

Game Title	Episode / Part	Mentioned by Interview Participants ⁴⁰
Grand Theft Auto	Whole Series	28
Dante's Inferno		
God of War	Whole Series	5
Homefront		
Far Cry	Whole Series	
Mafia II		
Red Dead Redemption		
Red Dead Redemption Undead Nightmare		
Resident Evil 6	6	
Saints Row	Whole Series	
Sleeping Dogs		
Sleeping Dogs: Definitive Edition 2		
Payday 2		
50 Cent: Blood on the Sand		
Clash of The Titans		
Fable	Whole Series	
Fist of the North Star: Ken's Rage 2		
Heavy Rain		
Resistance 2		
Resistance 3		
SplatterHouse		
The Saboteur		
Assassin's Creed II		
Ninja Gaiden 3		
Metro Redux		
Thief		
Wolfenstein: The New Order		
Yaiba: Ninja Gaiden Z		
The Order: 1886		
DMC Devil May Cry: Definitive Edition		
Final Fantasy X/X-2 HD Remaster		
Final Fantasy Type-0 HD		1
Watch Dogs		
Mortal Kombat X		
Dragon Age: Inquisition		
Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor 2 Record Breaker		
The Last of US	Whole Series	
Hitman	Whole Series	3
The Witcher	Whole Series	
Home World Remastered Collection		
The Walking Dead Season Two		

⁴⁰ See Figure 4.3 in Chapter 6.

The Elder Scrolls Online: Tamriel Unlimited		
Dead Rising 3 Apocalypse		
Deception IV Nightmare Princess		
Dishonored Definitive Edition		
Halo 4 Game of the Year Edition GOTY		
Samurai Warriors 4-II		
Might & Magic Heroes VII		
Guitar Hero Live		
Guild Wars 2 Heart		
Metal Gear Solider The Phantom Pain		
Yo Kai Watch		
Fallout 4		
Worms Global Worming		
DeadPool		
Street Fighter V		
DEVIL'S THIRD		
AR NO SURGE		
UFC 2		
ONE PIECE BURNING BLOOD		
PRISON ARCHITECT		
DEUS EX MANKIND DIVIDED DAY ONE EDITION		
Resident Evil 5		2

Table 4.1: Blacklisted games obtained from GCAM website. (Source: GCAM website (GCAM, 2018c))

The GCAM 2018 report documented the prohibited content behind banning a game title: “If any of the following aspects are present in a video game, the commission is not able to certify it, unless this content is ‘encrypted’ or ‘removed.’ This could be arranged with the commission through email” (GCAM, 2018b).

The following categories were listed specifically for games:

- (i) Nudity, Sexual Connotation and Homosexuality:
 - a. Displaying private parts of female or male bodies whether cartoon or real.
 - b. Sexual intercourse scenes with or without clothing.
 - c. Clear and open promotion of homosexuality.
 - d. The presence of brothels in video games, engagement with them or whatever is inside them.

- (ii) Religious and Social Restrictions:
- a. The presence of mosques and sacred places in an unsuitable way for Muslims in the game (e.g., that could be detonated, desecrated, etc.).
 - b. The presence of the Quran (or a book that resembles the Quran), Quranic texts, or texts that contain one of the names of God in unsuitable or unclean places (e.g., on the floor, in the toilets/bathrooms or strip clubs).
 - c. Using religious symbols on the game cover or the title cover of the game in the digital store.
 - d. Using religious symbols to directly or indirectly promote specific religions.
 - e. Using the prophets as main characters, with or without indication to their religion. In addition, the use of the divine religions' (Abrahamic religions) messengers as main or supporting characters.
 - f. Insulting the Islamic religion, depicting Muslims in a bad context, depicting Arab or Muslim countries as enemies, or using Arab flags in a derogatory manner.
 - g. A presence of a terrorist group claiming affiliation to Islam.
 - h. Using Qur'anic verses as song lyrics, playing music and Quran simultaneously in the game.
 - i. Directly or indirectly insulting or defaming any of the divine religions (Abrahamic religions).
 - j. The presence of content that depicts any of the present Arab governments in an offensive or inappropriate manner. (GCAM, 2018b)

Summary of Media Policy Documentation

- 1- The official language of the Kingdom is Arabic; thus, all policy documentation is issued in Arabic.
- 2- There is an emphasis on preserving culture.
- 3- The cultural elements could be divided into elements of Islamic origins and elements of local customs.
- 4- There is a great emphasis on national security and maintaining the stability of the political structure.
- 5- The media policy issued by the Bureau of Experts at the Council of Ministers is focus on centralised legacy media concentrating on broadcasting and press.
- 6- There is a notable similarity between the documentation of Ministry of Media policy issued in 1982 and recent media divisions, in particular that of maintaining cultural aspects of Saudi Arabia.
- 7- The implementation regulation documents issued by governmental bodies offer more options and often add more recent mediums.
- 8- With consideration to a noticeable shift to digitisation and the conversion of legal procedures to online application, there is a discernible need for further explanation of the requirements of these

procedures.

- 9- The review indicates that the instruction of distribution of media material is state-regulated and not self-regulated. However, the research did not yield how this arrangement is conducted with online video game stores.
- 10- GCAM charges 2000 Saudi Riyals (533.16 USD) per game title age certificate. There is no clear indication how that arrangement is conducted with games that have a large game selection (e.g., stream, Playstation Sony Store, etc.).

In 2019, the annual report indicated that there were 340 certified games and 331 classified games compared to 2018, which had 236 certified game titles (GCAM, 2019).

GCAM Policy Review

As a general theme, Saudi Arabia has always maintained an Islamic inspired policy as stated in the General Law of Governance (*Basic Law of Governance*, 1992), and which transfers to other policies in newly formed governmental agencies, such as that stated in the General Commission of Audio-visual Media (GCAM) (*Audio Visual Media Content Policy*, 2017). However, GCAM shares a great deal with other international standards from other countries. In the most part, the issues that are regulated in Saudi are content of a sexual nature, content of ideological connotations, content of political repercussions, violence, home security and content that is outlined by a partial local tradition and cultural framework. Although the classification of this outline was announced in various versions preceding the media law of 1982 of Saudi Arabia, the age rating system was recently introduced in 2016. There are two strategies followed in regulating content:

First, as examined earlier, censorship is directed at sexual, ideological and cultural issues. Censorship, as a strategy is not new to Saudi Arabia according to Alfahad's review (Alfahad, 2015). This is not limited to Saudi Arabia. In addition to violence and nationalism, censorship of games due to sexual connotations and political elements is common in Middle Eastern and Asian countries according to Costales. *GTA* and war games are an example for this type of censorship (Costales, 2012a). However, According to Zittrain et al. (2017), transparency in filtering content varies from one country to another. In general, MENA countries (including Saudi Arabia) have more transparency around blocking content on cultural and social grounds. In addition, the practice comes with the country clarifying the reason behind blocking content (Zittrain et al., 2017). In a qualitative study on censorship in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and UAE, as a strategy of preserving culture, Martin et al. (2016) discussed how a majority of audiences in these regions supported the use of the strategy to manage media content across various mediums. This included printed media, some music genres and titles and visual media. Martin et al. found that a high percentage of their Saudi sample demonstrated support for strategies of censorship: "The strongest single predictor of support for censorship among any of the variables in any of the countries was the belief in Saudi Arabia that more entertainment should be based on one's own

culture and history. That Saudi Arabia has been a sovereign country for longer than the other two nations, is the largest country among this study's three, has perhaps the strongest sense of national identity, and is the birthplace of Islam may help explain why a desire for more indigenous entertainment media in that country correlates with greater support for censoring contemporary entertainment." (Martin et al., 2016, p. 3415) According to Ballantyne, censorship laws were relaxed in later years. However, Ballantyne suggested using global organisations, such as WTO, to pressure the country to stop all censorship practices: "The proliferation of censorship in these countries will not abate without the international community rallying around fundamental reform granting equal access for the domestic distribution of foreign films and bringing both countries to full compliance with their WTO obligations. Imposing sanctions and strengthening trade policy against censorship would likely yield results in both China and Saudi Arabia." (Ballantyne, 2021, p. 45) However, Ballantyne does not offer details on the Saudi media policy and the distinction between censorship and age restriction. The suggestion of imposing policy through international agencies conflicts with Martin et al.'s findings on the concerns of the Saudi audience and their concerns of cultural preservation.

Concerns of cultural preservation are not limited to Saudi Arabia. Many countries support policies that are associated with cultural preservation, especially when contrasted with globalisation strategies. As mentioned by Tolkach and Pratt (2021), cultural preservation is a major concern in terms of globalisation. In various reactions, other countries may go as far as suppressing technologies due to the concern over a lack of control. For example, According to Talebian (2020), Iranian media policy was built around broadcast services, where the government had a monopoly and full control. These policies included putting limitations on individuals and commercial parties. Among these limitations was suppressing new technologies that the state could not control. Talebian attributed the suppression of new technologies, such as "Internet-based broadcasting and services in the field of broadcasting technologies," (p. 163) to the difficulties of content control in the same way as in broadcasting. (Talebian, 2020). However, restricting cultural products is not always driven by cultural preservation. In cases like in United Kingdom, as examined by Webber, the governments are fearful of domination of foreign films in terms of circulation, and that fear is driven by economic reasons. However, games are not so far from the pressure of global economics and global cultural influence, with U.S. and Japanese games dominating the market games could face more resistance in many locations. According to Webber, these sensitivities were "strongly" demonstrated in East and Southeast Asia. This was attributed to the tensions between Japan and the former colonies (i.e., China and South Korea). This resistance is not new, as Japanese cultural products have had difficulties in these two markets (Webber, 2020). Webber's findings were also supported by Pieterse's suggestions on globalisation paradigms, which are also re-examined by Tolkach & Pratt (2021). According to Tolkach and Pratt, the perception of globalisation in local communities was met with different reactions. According to Tolkach and Pratt, it was often met with a perception of being a threat to the local and traditional culture. The Pieterse paradigms, explaining the cultural change during the process

are the clash of civilisations, McDonaldisation⁴¹ and hybridisation. Tolkach and Pratt noted that the clash of civilisations, and McDonaldisation, are modernist approaches; hybridisation is considered a postmodern approach to examining cultural change. A clash of cultures is in line with the view dividing the world into two opposing sides: the West vs. the opposing forces of the Islamic, communist and Asian powers. The McDonaldisation paradigm perceives the world as a uniform group of cultures impacted by multi-national corporations. Hybridisation views culture as a fluid concept, where boundaries are blurred and cross-over is possible (Tolkach & Pratt, 2021). Hybridisation applies especially to games markets. Webber describes the strategy followed by Japanese game makers in (South) East Asia as a state of hybridity, adopting foreign ideas and technology while simultaneously maintaining cultural subjectivity. Webber suggests that British game makers could follow suit and present a “nationally recognized Britishness” in addition to other forms of hybrid Britishness. Webber reports that this process was referred to by Kerr as a form of localisation: “hybridity by design.” Webber pointed to the use of hybrid culture as a fluid understanding of British culture, “which can respect many different ways in which games might be British” (Webber, 2020, p. 145). As will be demonstrated, the concept of hybridity has its own local flavour in Saudi Arabia.

Second is content classification. The classification system of both film and games were introduced by GCAM in 2016. The classification system shares much of the age classification system in terms of age groups, yet it differs as it is limited to issues of violence and fantasy for the most part. Compared to Saudi Arabia, Japan’s current Eirin film classification system has 4 ratings: G, PG12, R15+ and R18+. G is for all ages, PG12 is for parental guidance, and R15+ is restricted to 15 years of age and above and R18+ is restricted to 18 years of age and above (Grealy et al., 2020). Taking this into consideration, the policy should be compared in both its recent form and in its evolutionary stages to other systems. For example, in its early stages Eirin was divergent from the U.S. system. In its conception, Eirin acted as a mediator between GHQ and the film industry, particularly on film censorship. According to Grealy and others, film was a fundamental element in the U.S. plans for Japan in pre-occupation stages in relation to demilitarisation and democratisation. The approach of censorship introduced by the Allied forces occupying Japan in the 1940s were what some call, “democracy by intervention,” as the idea of democracy was promoted through banning feudal films. Through the “directive on the ‘Elimination of Undemocratic Motion Pictures’,” films were categorised into desirable and undesirable depending on their position on the issue of causing “mistrust and resentment” of the forces occupying Japan at the time. The self-regulated U.S. film industry standard was discussed with representatives of

⁴¹ First suggested by George Ritzer (1993), McDonaldisation is a view on a worldwide homogenisation of cultures through to globalization. Adapting society, its institutions, and its organizations to have the same traits as those seen in fast-food franchises is a phenomenon known as “McDonaldization of Society”. Uniformity, calculability, control, efficiency, and predictability are a few of these.

the studios. They were urged to prove that the implementation of a self-regulated system could be trusted, to avoid the involvement of the state. “The extent of the occupation officials’ role in this development cannot be understated,” according to Grealy et al. (2020, pp. 7-10). Age restriction was introduced later, in the 1950s, with the Erien’s 1955 guidelines specifying adult films (18+) in the following way:

1. entice spectators to anti-democratic thoughts and actions;
 2. incite actions that violate public order and morals based on societal standards;
 3. tolerate or praise violence;
 4. impede the normal progression of sexual maturation;
 5. stimulate in any other way that interferes with the nurturing of healthy human beings.
- (Grealy et al., 2020, p. 16).

In countries like the United Kingdom and Japan, the rating systems evolved and gained independence from film industry studios, which only determine the policy not the rating (i.e., The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) and Japan’s Film Classification and Rating Committee, Eiga Rinri Linkai EIRIN). However, Lampe and McRae (2021) noted that in Germany, Iceland, Japan, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom rating legislation could be described as “co-regulated,” with regulating bodies connected to the cinema industry, yet the legal requirement was attached to production or release (Lampe & McRae, 2021). This brings about the possibility of self-regulation in Saudi Arabia, as an economic contributor to both the creative industry and the art industry as one of the prioritized drivers suggested by UNESCO’s report.

A Possibility of a Co-Regulated System and Economic Contribution

According to Lampe and McRae, most rating system can be categorized around two dimensions: (1) the structure of the certification and (2) the type of regulation. The structure of certification can be divided into three types: “(i) a minimum recommended age that does not impose any restrictions on admission, (ii) a minimum unaccompanied age, below which minors are only admitted with an adult guardian, (iii) a minimum restricted age, below which minors are not admitted.” The study shows that European countries have a more moderate stance towards censorship than the U.S. and some Asian countries. As for classification systems in the 31 countries looked at by Lampe and McRae, 25 had rating systems regulated by the state and the certification being issues by statutory agencies. Australia’s classification, for example, is based on the Classification (Publications, Film and Computer Games) Act of 1995. In many countries, the state regulating body is housed within the ministry of culture (Lampe & McRae, 2021).

The term *self-regulation* has seen changes over time. Campbell stated, “Self-regulation means

different things to different people.” The spectrum of definitions ranges from governmental delegation and oversight to a perception by the private sector of a need for self-regulation to carry out its ethical duties. The “self” may mean a company or a collective of companies. Regulating includes three elements: legislation, enforcement and adjudication. Legislation is “defining the appropriate rules,” enforcement includes engagements with violators, and adjudication is “deciding whether a violation has taken place and imposing an appropriate sanction” (Campbell, 1999). As regards self-regulatory rating bodies, in the U.S., United Kingdom, Japan, Germany, Iceland, and the Netherlands the classifying films falls on the film industry, either directly or via a board which is determined by the film industry (e.g., Motion Picture Association of America MPAA in the U.S., the Netherlands Institute for the Classification of Audio-visual Media (NICAM) in the Netherlands, Head Organization of Film Industry (SPIO)’s Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle der Filmwirtschaft in Germany (Lampe & McRae, 2021)). However, a distinction should be emphasized as some countries devised a specific rating approach to video games different to that for film. The German approach to classifying and regulating games, the USK (Unterhaltungssoftware-Selbstkontrolle “Entertainment Software Self-Control”) devised a procedure to determine the age where a specific game does not cause potential impairment of development and education in children. Schank reported that the method was different to other rating system as it came from a neutral position on a specific game. In other words, it does not assume that games were harmful. The objectiveness of USK comes from experience of playing the game in question. “Strictly speaking, from a legal standpoint, the ratings are issued as administrative acts of the state youth authority.” He added that the clause in the legal document permitted the authority to implement a joint rating procedure. The joint procedure included “organisations of voluntary self-control ... supported by industrial association” (Schank, 2018, 121).

The Economic Benefits of State Regulation

As a counter argument, the state regulating content is not fully deprived from economic benefit. As demonstrated, Saudi Arabia’s policy follows a state regulated model. In order to be certified for distribution or broadcasting, a game needs to acquire certification and classification from the government's classification body (i.e., GCAM). While the topic of banned game titles and game content is not new in video games, the extent of the ban, the causes behind the ban and strategies employed are different from one country to another. These strategies could be based on the type of content, for example, as in countries Germany (Mueller, 2015), as part of “political economy” and “neo- techno-nationalist policies,” as in China (Jiang & Fung, 2019) or relating to pornographic Japanese games (Driscoll & Grealy, 2019). In a comparable region to Saudi Arabia, Iran’s state regulated policy contributed in some way to the economic growth of the industry. According to Šisler, Iran practices censorship in video games as well as other forms of media. Any game title needs to pass The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance’s approval process to be distributed. However, this task was moved to the Iran Computer and Video Games Foundation

(ICVGF). This served two goals: (1) to increase economic growth through supporting the development of video games, and (2) to promote Iranian Islamic values (Šisler et al., 2017). This highlights a need for a solution that incorporates more parties. Self-regulation is a known concern in terms of prioritising profit over ethical and cultural concerns (Campbell, 1999). Co-regulation could be a solution that enables concerned parties (state, game industry and gaming community) to contribute to regulation. This practice has been applied in different forms in various countries: in Germany, Iceland, Japan, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom rating legislation could be described as “co-regulated,” with regulating bodies, in a way, connected to the cinema industry yet the legal requirement is attached to production or release (Lampe & McRae, 2021).

Interview Findings and User Experience

Among the key policy aims outlined above, the concepts of (1) censorship and content control, (2) compliance with regulation, (3) cultural preservation and (4) the process of policymaking stand out the most as having a strong connection among the gamers investigated in this thesis. First, in terms of reaction to censorship, the general attitude of participants is agreement on some media topics but varies in terms of the approach of censorship. The participants were split into the three groups: agreement to blacklist games on specific topics, disagreement to blacklist games, partial agreement on the approach. Out of 20 participants, nine participants seemed to agree with a ban of specific games that carried particular types of content. The topics that emerged with participants were (1) violence, (2) sexual content and (3) ideological religious topics. Game titles that were mentioned were *Grand Theft Auto (GTA)* (Rockstar North, 2013) and *God of War* (Sony Interactive, 2005). The main concern among this group was the effect of violence and sexual content on younger audience, as well as discomfort towards games that demonstrate some strong non-Muslim ideological themes. [Moon Guy] describes his reaction to this, “Games that touch on religious issues. Games like *God of War*. I am really surprised at how much people like it here. Despite the fact that it has paganism. Paganism is something that goes against my inner feelings when I play a game. when I play a game like that, I would not really be comfortable. That's why I support the ban.” On the other hand, some participants are more concerned with the ways violence and sexual content are magnified in what they consider as a Saudi cultural aspect. [Abo Omar] noted that guns were a part of some sub-cultures in Saudi Arabia, as they are mostly used in celebrations and in hunting. He added that he was concerned on how violence is associated with these elements in some games.

On the other hand, nine out of 20 users acknowledge some of these concerns, yet do not agree with the approach. Unlike the previous group, this group seems to consider the issue from a personal perspective. There is strong expression of emotions towards the issue: “I was really annoyed by it” [Majeed79], “I think they took it too far” [Moath], “I was shocked when I logged into my steam account,” [Yazeed] describe the emotions associated with the ban. This group emphasized the role of parental supervision and the distinction between an underage audience and an older audience. [Carbon] explained, “I don't think there are games that are bad enough to be

banned. Except that they are banned for children. That's OK. But this is up to the parents. Parents have the authority to ban these games for their kids. It's not everybody's problem. Take away the mobile phone from your kid or delete that game. It's not our problem. You get these underage children playing *Grand Theft Auto*. This is not a big deal for adults; they don't care about the strip club in the game. Adults usually play the game and try to finish it." Furthermore, among this group, there was a notable emphasis on age rating and regulation. Some suggested that the age rating system followed the "international standard" as some described it. [Nerf] explains his suggestion,

Plus 18 games already list that the content has nudity profanity and violence. Not anyone is allowed to use this game. Shop would not sell it until you provide them with an ID. This is the regulation followed internationally (in most countries). Unfortunately, the only country that bans games is Saudi Arabia. Even in the Gulf countries it's only Saudi. It used to be Saudi Arabia and Emirates. But now the emirate market is open. It seems like Bahrain is a distributor of banned games.

The games mentioned in this group are: *GTA* (Rockstar North, 2013), *God of War* (Sony Interactive, 2005) and Player Unknown's *Battlegrounds* (PUBG Corporation, 2017).

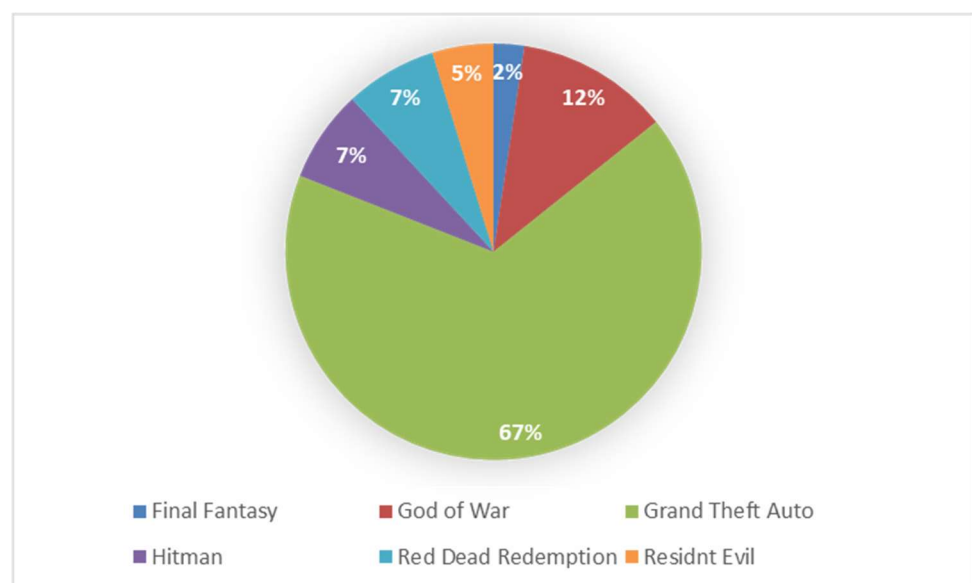


Figure 4.3 Percentage of banned game titles mentions by interview participants.

The third group, which has common ground with both groups on some issues, does not hold strong feelings towards the issue. This group consists of individuals that stated that they cared little for the games in the list, yet they understand both arguments. This group saw a place for improvement on both sides: regulatory and consumer. [Abdullah] thought that consumers carried the responsibility of making a choice in their game selection as "every gamer has his own principles." [Onithunder] stated that the regulatory body bears some responsibility for conducting a deeper investigation, as well as, demonstrating to the public the reason behind this choice: "From a cultural perspective, I understand why they banned it. But my question is why did a game

with the same cultural issue be partially banned? Maybe it's for the sexual content. There are games that they gave a pass. And there are games that they banned.” [Ericson] thought that the issues contained in these games was becoming part of the new norm, “In the past if we would buy *GTA*, my dad would beat us up. But now he stopped caring.” The games mentioned in this group were *GTA* (Rockstar North, 2013), *God of War* (Sony Interactive, 2005), and *The Witcher* (CD Projekt, 2015).

Second, in terms of bypassing regulation, there was an overwhelming agreement among most participants that it is a common practice, which they may have done at one point or another. These include the use of (1) international online stores (2) local vendors (3) pirated illegal content. The international online stores were the biggest category in this area. Eleven out of 20 participants said they used international online stores or changed their setting to use another country’s regional online store. This was due to the following reasons: release dates, game variety, partially censored content, fully censored titles, and pricing of games. The leading reason for bypassing local markets to international ones (13 out of 20 participants) was partial or full censorship of games. This includes blacklisted game titles or redacted content, as [Abo Bander] describes it, “Me as a gamer I like variety in the store. I like different offers. And I want products to be complete. The product should be complete, 100%, not like when you get a product in Saudi with 60% of the content. Like they erase some details because they don't like it.” Some users, such as [Ososo], expressed their need to participate within a global gaming community: “Let's say you want to try a game that the whole world is trying. It's not fair that's you can't. Something like *Red Dead*.” “Missing-out” was not limited to a sense of global belonging. On the local level, there was reported peer pressure to obtain games that were not available on the local market. [Wiseman] reports, most users use it because of the blacklist. The ministry might ban something due to political, sexual or cultural reasons. However, the gamer would hear about the game from his peers. You, as a family member, could not prohibit certain games from your children because all their peers are talking about it. They might have an idea about the reason of ban, for example, it insults the Islamic deity, like *God of War*. Even if they are aware of the ideological issues and they are against it, they would probably like the gameplay. In addition, his peers are all talking about it. This all pushes them to bypass restrictions.

Likewise, nine out of 20 participants attributed their use of international online stores to the variety of game titles available. [Majeed79] said, “Also, different versions of the same games affect my decision. Because some games have deluxe and other versions.” Release dates is the third reason; four out of 20 said that they are keen on participating with the global gaming community as a game is released. This also is extended to hard copies of other local versions from local vendors. [Al Taeib] reported on this observation, “American versions are launched first. They would be smuggled and sold for a higher price here. Up to 500 Riyals. Where the regular price is 250. And the delay usually is just two weeks. But people can't wait.” Pricing is another reason for switching to international online stores, with four out of 20 saying this was a reason for

them to engage with this practice. Some participants complained about previous arrangements of locales of some services and the effect of the exchange rate. [OniThunder] explained, “Our problem in Saudi Arabia is that we follow European online stores. Most of our game servers belong to Europe. And as you know, the American standard is NTC and European is PAL. And I've noticed in a lot of online stores when I switch to Saudi Arabia, I get the pricing in Euros. For example, Origin EA's online store, Blizzard's *BattleNet* and *Uplay*. All these online stores use Euros when I switch to the Saudi region.” However, some participants report some different prices even with fixed exchange rates (USD1 = 3.75 Saudi Riyal). [Majeed79] reported, “I once wanted to buy *Uno*. In the American store it was \$10, but in the Saudi store it was \$15. Sometimes the American store is cheaper and vice versa.”

Age Regulation Compliance

When asked did they think consumers and vendors complied to the age regulation, 15 out of 20 participants expressed their concerns about the parental role in the compliance of age restrictions. [CJ] expressed the parental role from a cultural point of view: “This is something that is not the responsibility of the Commission. ‘All of you are guardians, and you are all responsible for your families’ (hadith)... Hard copies have age restrictions and the appropriate age on them... We are not responsible for your kids. It is the responsibility of parents. Most parents do not follow age restriction regulations.” This could be a cultural association that many parents have with games and playing them. [AboLooloah] explained that “The word *libah* in Arabic also means toy. This is something trivial in the Arab culture.” [Ososo] emphasised an important point as an older generation of parents came to realise their new roles as media policy moved from a strict censorship strategy to a policy that includes censorship and age restriction: “The other day I heard something that made me laugh. This guy was telling me, ‘In the past, the government used to raise our kids. But now when the government stopped raising our kids, parents got upset’.” However, there seems to be a distinction, as many of this group pointed out that parental awareness is strongly related to generational acculturation. [Wiseman], who is a gamer in his late 30s, explained, “As for parents, the new generation of parents, which is ours, grew up with games. They would know games and their histories. Compared to our time when we were little children, our parents did not know anything about video games. In addition, games were not technically and graphically advanced as they are now. They were simple things and did not have much of the cultural impact they have now. And most of the games back then were educational. So, in comparison to this, we have a greater duty. You can't really ban them; the world is open now.”

Thus, the awareness of parental (guardian) responsibility coincides with the acculturation of gaming culture process. Interestingly, the issue of compliance with age restrictions and parental supervision is not limited to Saudi Arabia. Similar concerns were found in Spain. According to Gil-Juárez and Feliu, there was an identifiable consensus on certain concerns and emotions among different groups of parents regarding games. This group was diverse in terms of their experience with computers, gender, the number of children and the way they confront these

concerns. The concerns were the same although the groups consisted of former gamers and ones that did not play games before. The difference was the source of the concerns, as ones who did not play before shared (“echoed”) concerns they had seen in other media forms (i.e., TV programmes). The concerns came in the form of “citing a moral panic” and policy regarding video games. According to Gil-Juárez and Feliu, this did not mean they necessarily endorsed this panic. On the contrary, Gil-Juárez and Feliu suspected that “showing concern” was a “saving face” strategy, as parents voiced these concerns to “appear worried,” yet they did not stop their children from playing these games. “Consequently, a consensus is built on the need to implement rules for computer game use at home, which means computer gaming is clearly a priority in parents’ governance agenda of their children” (Gil-Juárez & Feliu, 2018, p. 260). This correlates with what some participants pointed out, that this was a result of peer-pressure, where a majority is non-compliant, putting pressure on parents to “give in” after some pressure.

In terms of vendors compliance, 17 out of 20 participants believed that there was little or no compliance on their part. They attributed this to many factors. The most common factor mentioned by participants was financial aspects. According to the participants, selling games to underaged customers is a lucrative business for vendors: “They would tell you that they will get you this game for double the price” [Charming]; “They would sell young customers things out of their age restriction rating. Without any hesitation... Because the profit margin is very high on these games” [MoonGuy]. Similar sentiments were expressed by the rest of the group. Participants thought that the lack of enforcement is one issue that contributed to the lack of compliance. [Abo Omar] commented on this, “I don't think the age restriction of GCAM is reliable... during the sale there is no enforcement of the laws, whether it's to a child or a teenager. [Ososo] added, “I've heard stories that they ask for ID. I don't think it's true. I don't think they would say no to 300 and 200 Riyals.” However, there were minor accounts of changes in regulation enforcement (3 out of 20). [OniThunder] said, “I've noticed that GCAM is monitoring stores. Not like in the past. I have no idea what's going on right now.”

Fourth, in terms of getting feedback from, and communicating awareness of both policy and consumer related matters to, an audience, a majority (14 out of 20) saw that there was no or very little communication between GCAM and a game’s audience. [Al Taeeb] elaborated on this type of communication, “I never hear anything, with the exception being the case when there's a bad game.” The unawareness of GCAM’s role is mostly seen through censorship rather than age regulation. [Abo Bander] strongly stated, “There is no governmental commission that tells shopkeepers not to sell to children under a restricted age. Nobody follows the rules. Anything that comes in, and the ministry of media agreed on it, they sell it; they are following the rules. The government did not put the rules to sell specific games for specific ages. Shopkeepers are following rules 100%. But there are no rules.” Furthermore, two out of 20 did not know of the existence of this body: “To be honest, this is the first time I've heard of them” [Erickson], and “This is the first time I've ever heard of them. I tried to report a couple of shops that sold banned

games before and there was no communication. Now I'm very convinced that you should not ban.” [Wiseman].

A minor group (4 out of 20) thought that communication was present, yet attention was not given to all concerned parties. [AboLooloah] considered that parents should be targeted as well in awareness campaigns. [Charming] comments on this topic: “I see a lot of shortcomings on their side. Especially when it comes to informing parents of their responsibility. Parents are ignorant to the content of games. They don't know that a lot of games contain sexual themes. Clips that are fit for an older audience not younger.” However, [Onithunder] is attributed this miscommunication between GCAM and parents and guardians to the nature of the social structure: “They were spreading awareness between parents that they have to monitor their kids. There is a general acceptance of video games. They are trying, but the question remains, ‘Is the other side listening?’ This all depends on the individual. I have the feeling that the message was delivered.” This corresponded to other responses regarding parents’ awareness and compliance game classification.

Chapter Conclusion

A major influence on gaming conditions in Saudi Arabia, is the policies that govern game title availability and game content creation. As examined in the various chapters preceding this chapter, the Saudi gaming culture is vibrant, complex and has been in continuous flux since as early as 1985. This fact remains underappreciated in most studies. The major influences that shape and continuously influence this culture are shared between policy, game economics, community contributions and the advancement of technology. In that regard, it could be compared to Picard’s elaboration on the gaming “gēmu” culture in Japan. Picard described the gēmu culture in Japan as being “increasingly transnational mode.” (p. 15) He elaborated that, while being influenced by Japan’s national and industrial regulations and policies, changes of artistic and technological development and marketing strategies also shaped the manifestation of this culture. Picard added, “These cultural manifestations are themselves travelling and shifting under the influence and regulation of industrial infrastructures (console manufacturers, publishers, developers, marketers, localizers)” (Roth et al., 2021, p. 16). However, in term of discourse, gēmu culture and the Saudi gaming culture, the distinction could warrant further academic attention. As the concept of gēmu is “influenced by various discourses (from the industry, the fans, the academia) and practices that evolve according to social, cultural, economic, and (trans)national contexts,” the academic attention to gaming and gaming practices in the Middle East is best described by Clément as being “relatively scarce” (Clément, 2019, p. 119). This chapter uncovers some aspects of the policy influencing this culture in Saudi Arabia.

Cultural policy has seen much change and has been re-examined through different lenses since as early as the 1920s. The many scopes of the scholarships that address it (economic, political, social), the historical influences, and even the linguistic and historical influences, makes it a topic that occupies many positions at one time. Relevantly, much like Schrödinger's cat, Saudi

gaming culture is in a state of many things, considering the position of the conscious observer. Some influence is related to what is happening to cultural policy in Saudi Arabia, in general. As demonstrated, Saudi culture was examined from the inside, with Saudis observing and stating their preference to what their cultural policy should look like; and from the outside, with the scholarship of cultural policy and UNESCO policy prioritising some aspects over others in cultural policy. Then, there is the Saudi legislators and policy makers, an in-between mediator with obligations, responsibilities and strategies towards both parties. Finally, there are the Saudi gamers and the gaming community in Saudi Arabia, who look at both local and foreign cultural policies. With this large compass, the chapter attempted to highlight the major areas that are at play. Previous research indicated that a large majority of the Saudi population supported the prestation of certain aspects of culture through policy. Accordingly, the research in the present chapter adds critical details to this aspect of the topic.

As addressed in previous chapters, the gaming community in Saudi Arabia demonstrated a strong engagement with the global community and a level of global consumer acculturation. This chapter addressed how this community reacted to this multidimensional environment. The majority of participants addressed foreign culture from the perspective of being creative arts, yet they looked at their own in terms of a historical, religious and linguistic scope. As many of them expressed, they understand the justification and connotation of the policies implemented internally, yet they also have a strong connection with a global culture of creative arts. Thus, many of them agreed with, and adapted to, the policies, finding a way around these when needed. This type of hybridity is not new to gaming communities around the world. It is similar to that described by Webber (2020) where creators in Britain found a new form of Britishness. In the same manner, Saudi gaming community found a new form of Saudiness, simultaneously open and reserved.

User Experience, as shown through the interview feedback of participants, demonstrated a shared ground between the audience and the reasoning behind some policy aspects. Concerns related to the preservation of cultural values emerged as one of the most important themes that emerged from the conversations. The vast majority of individuals have indicated that they are aware of the challenges associated with cultural protection and the necessity of developing policies to handle those challenges. The divergence between interview feedback and policies can be broken down into two primary categories: (1) the strategic implementation of the policies, and (2) awareness of the policies. In regard to the latter, a number of the individuals demonstrated an inadequate comprehension of the policies. Regarding the former, more than half of the participants concurred with existing censoring policies, whereas the majority of the remaining participants disagreed. However, participants did agree with the need for age regulation. Taking all of this into account, participants have voiced their concerns about the effectiveness of game media control. They attribute this concern to the compliance of both game vendors and parents. Some participants attributed this to lack of enforcement.

Cultural policy in Saudi Arabia affects the present state. Saudi culture was examined from both sides. From the inside, Saudis view and have a preference for how their cultural policy should appear, while from the outside, research on cultural policy and UNESCO policy prioritizes certain aspects of cultural policy. Saudi legislators and policymakers mediate both sides. Saudi gamers examined local and international cultural policies, according to studies. This research's interview participants perceived foreign culture through the lens of the creative arts, whereas they viewed their own culture through the lenses of history, religion, and language. Saudi gamers discussed other nations (mainly Western and Japanese) in the context of art and media creation. However, they discussed local culture in connection to historical narratives, religion, and language. According to the majority of these participants, they comprehended the rationale and significance of the internal policies and had a strong connection to a global culture of the creative arts. Thus, many have accepted and adapted to the laws, finding methods to avoid them when required. Hybridization is common in worldwide gaming communities. The statement draws a parallel between the discovery of a new form of Britishness by British innovators, as described by Webber in 2020, and the gēmu culture of Japan, as discussed by Roth et al. in 2021. The Saudi gaming community experienced a novel form of Saudiness that was simultaneously unrestricted and limited in nature. This required them to negotiate their sense of self between the realms of regional and worldwide cultures, thereby unearthing new local trends and their connections to global phenomenon.

CHAPTER 6

Arabs and Game Global Consumer Acculturation

To examine the extent of global influence on the Saudi community and the extent of hybridity⁴² within, this research examines the cultural artifact, symbols, and values, as they manifest in video game content and game paratext. In so doing, this chapter (and indeed this thesis more broadly) seeks to reimagine the landscape of hybrid culture by focusing on how the gaming community and game developers make use of cultural symbols and values to communicate their own understanding of culture. There is a great emphasis here on the usage of the phrase "their own understanding of culture." This is just one of many archetypes of Saudi Arabs that are mentioned in the methodology laid out in Chapter 3. This chapter, which is the first of three chapters focussing on acculturation, examines cultural symbols in motion as they are constructed and move from one culture circle to another. The global consumer cultural symbols and the values that are affiliated with them are examined in Chapter 6 as they are disseminated into the hybrid cultural space. In Chapter 8, the reader is exposed to how Saudi game developers (both independent and corporate) are using the medium of video games to try to disseminate the emblems and artifices that symbolise their cultural values to other countries around the world. Chapter 9 concludes by examining how the game medium is appropriated and transformed by adding local cultural symbols through the process of localisation by the hybrid space community to the local community through strategies such as game cloning and game-modding.

This chapter offers a counterargument to the prevailing academic stance of the global north with respect to Arab gaming culture. The argument posits that the process of acculturation, specifically between global and local cultures, is a multifaceted and intricate phenomenon that surpasses the scope of prior scholarly literature on the portrayal of Arab culture in video games. The process of acculturation is a reciprocal phenomenon in which both parties involved make contributions. The subject of Arab representation in video games has been previously explored in academic literature. Scholars have classified Arab game developers and the gaming community into two distinct categories: (1) the counter-construction paradigm, as identified by Shaw (2010), and (2) assimilated consumers, as described by Clément (2019). The preceding investigations' limited sample size concerning video games led to an inference that aligned with Pieterse's conclusions on postmodern hybridization. The perspective presented in this chapter is supported by its conclusion. The present chapter's findings indicate that the utilization of Berry's (2008) framework to examine the process of acculturation is a more accurate representation of the gaming community in Saudi

⁴² Due to the varied, and sometimes contradicting, concepts associated with hybridity (Kraidy, 2005), the definition will be explored after the introduction of this chapter. Suffice to say it will focus on the rejection of cultural essentialism and the change of culture as distinguished by Ott, (2022).

Arabia. This results in four possible outcomes, namely assimilation, separation, integration, and deculturation or marginalization. Despite differences in the extent of cultural blending, these four groups engage in interviews and choose from a range of historical and contemporary games. The utilization of the acculturation process as a theoretical framework for research provides an enhanced comprehension of the intricate characteristics of the gaming community in Saudi Arabia, which was previously absent in the majority of earlier studies.

This chapter starts by distinguishing the different use of the term *hybridisation* and the term *acculturation* in this research. It focuses on the benefits of using the term acculturation to describe the change of gaming culture in Saudi Arabia. Then it expands on the concept of acculturations and explain the four mods of outcome from the process. This will explain how, the counter-construction model (Šisler, 2017; Šisler et al., 2017) is only one outcome. Before expanding on the values/dimensions of the acculturation to the global consumer culture (AGCC), the chapter will address key topics that explain “why use it, how is it relevant to hybridity, and what are they key concepts that it is built on.” Amongst these topics is the concept of ethnocentrism, a concept connected to rejecting foreign products and buying local products due to a perceived ethical value. The chapter moves to expand on the specifics of global consumer acculturations and to explain the values of AGCC and how they relate to the hybrid gaming community. The chapter finishes by exploring how AGCC has influenced both cooperate and indie game producers in Saudi Arabia, to move from the ethnocentric strategy, prevalent in the 1980 to 1990s⁴³, to targeting a hybrid gaming community.

Acculturation with Dominant Culture vs. Global Hybridity

Before exploring the hybrid space of gaming in Saudi Arabia, a terminology matter should be cleared regarding hybridity and acculturation. Although one might be inclusive of the other, they describe two different perspectives. Hybridisation is mentioned in the discourse of globalisation. It is an identification of the change during the process of globalisation in one of Pieterse’s paradigms: clash of civilisation, McDonaldisation and hybridisation (Tolkach & Pratt, 2021). In order to understand the meaning of the hybrid culture of the Saudi gaming community, it is important to understand the term *gaming culture* within the national context. A national game culture is defined as “groups of people who have some practices, values and interests in common and who form through their interaction a distinct group within a larger culture” (Šisler et al., 2017, p. 3860; Mayra, 2008). Since a unified definition of hybridity is quite a difficult task, scholarships, such as Kraidy (2005), examined the topic in the context of cultural transculturalism⁴⁴. However, national gaming groups in countries like Iran and Czechia have been described as hybrid cultures (Šisler et al., 2017).

⁴³ See Chapters 4 and 6 for video game strategies in the 1980 and 1990s.

⁴⁴ A framework by Kraidy (2005, P. vi), “not to come up with an all-purpose, final definition of hybridity, but to find a way to integrate different types of hybridity in a framework that makes the connections between these types both intelligible and usable”.

Hence, the hybrid video game culture of Saudi Arabia can be loosely defined as “groups of people who have some practices, values and interests” (Mayra, 2008) that exhibit both global and local Saudi values of cultural and economic dimensions. Acculturation, on the other hand, is a two-directional exchange between two converging cultures, where one is more dominant than the other (Celeste et al., 2014). Most importantly, acculturation looks at the two merging cultures and predicts outcomes. In a comparison between globalisation and acculturation, Berry challenged the dominant assumptions surrounding this process. The assumptions were (1) more change happens in the non-dominant group and (2) there is a loss of cultural and behavioural features in the non-dominant group. These assumptions conclude with a vision of a homophonous global society that shares values, beliefs, social structures and consumer preferences: (1) assimilation (2) separation (3) integration and (4) deculturation or marginalization (Berry, 2008). Vuong and Napier define these outcomes. Assimilation is defined as the absence of a person’s feeling guilt or regret, leading to isolation from others and interaction with the other culture; these individuals are ready to pursue interaction. Separation is retraining based on interaction with other cultures and finding a higher value in this behaviour. Integration is a middle ground where individuals hold on to their cultural integrity yet interact with the other culture. Deculturation or marginalization is the absence of pursuing cultural interaction as well keeping their own culture (Vuong & Napier, 2015). Berry (2008) stated that these outcomes could happen either within societies or internationally. Even with the concept of hybridisation looking at culture as fluid, changing and complex, the major focus is the end process, in comparison to globalisation. On the other hand, acculturation, as described by Berry (2008) is focused on the investigation of the processes involved in the merging of two cultures: dominant and minority, and how they simultaneously affect each other. Examining acculturation is a considerably better strategy as it escapes the vague nature of hybridity as well as the naturalisation of culture associated with the concept (hybridity). Further explanation will be provided in the section “Between Cross-Cultural Frameworks and Hybridity.”

This brings about the topic of situating the current research in relation to other works mentioned in Chapter 2. As demonstrated, the previous scholarships addressing Arab representation in video games examined the reaction to the Western production (Šisler, 2008, 2009a; 2017; Shaw, 2010; Courmont & Clément, 2014b; Šisler & Mohseni, 2017a; Clément, 2019). As the effect of global acculturation enlists a two-way cultural exchange (Berry, 2008), there are differences in how individuals react to it globally and locally. Vuong and Napier stated that the globalisation process is not limited to products and commodities. It is also responsible for creating global citizens. According to Vuong and Napier, global citizens with “acculturation experience” behave differently from those who do not perceive culture with the same perspective (Vuong & Napier, 2015). This is due to the process of cultural mixing. According to Harush et al. (2016), cultural mixing is expected in a globalised environment. Simply defined, cultural mixing is when various cultures and their symbols occupy the same space (Harush et al., 2016). The shared space in the case of this research is game space. However, there are gaps in the research on this area of investigation, which Chapters 7, 8 and 9 address. According to Harush et al., the

phenomena of mixing “local national” and global artifacts are continuously increasing. However, the responses of individuals that are exposed to this phenomenon lack “sufficient theoretical explanation” (Harush et al., 2016). Furthermore, Kipnis et al. (2014) emphasise the need for expanding acculturation theory so it could accommodate the ongoing complication of “cultural factors within multicultural marketplaces” (Ibarra-Cantu & Cheetham, 2021). This chapter, and the two that follow, address this gap, expanding and linking to the three paradigms in Chapter 2: counter-construction, the cultural heritage model, and the global south comparison models.

Between Cross-Cultural Frameworks and Hybridity

This research approaches the topic of gaming in Saudi Arabia with an awareness of the hybridity of this culture. With consideration to hybridity, there is the issue of defining cultural values, which has been addressed at two ends of the spectrum. On one hand, there is an established school of examining other cultures through cross-cultural analysis of dimensions and values (e.g., House et al., 2004; Schwartz, 2012). On the other hand, there is a rise of studies that approach culture with a more global view. Ott (2022) elaborates on this conflict between the two approaches to studying other cultures. There are conflicting issues between cross-cultural studies and scholarships that explore culture through the lens of hybridity in a conflict of stereotyping vs. avoiding neutralisation. There is considerable scholarship with many vested methodologies that is dedicated to exploring cross-cultural difference through examining specific values; however, this approach came to be criticised as global hybridity came to redefine cultures. Ott underlines a “dilemma” in terms of research. Cross-cultural works are largely criticised by supporters of cultural hybridity, claiming that it leads to stereotyping. To simplify the difference, cross-cultural scholarship looks at the difference while hybridity looks to a blurred line of these differences with a keen look to the role of individuality. Ott labels the clash as cross-cultural “distortion” vs. hybridity “neutralization.” He summaries five known issues regarding cross-cultural studies: (1) using the term “culture” and “nation” interchangeably, (2) typology is based on an observation and perception approach, (3) the assumption of binary nature of immutable characteristics, (4) the approach “reinforces prejudice, promotes stereotyping, and legitimates inequality” and (5) the misappropriation of one dimension/category does not mean that the original dimension is not valid. Ott concludes that both approaches need to consider the use of the other (Ott, 2022). With much consideration to Ott, references to dimensions will be used only to define the characteristics/category, as there is much empirical work that describes them and connects them to other disciplines, such as psychology and sociology. The categories will not be used to generalise a cultural dimension or simplify the complexity of a continuously changing culture. In choosing the tools to identify the cultural change in both gaming communities, it is important to secure the following requirements:

- (1) Accommodating hybridity while acknowledging cross-cultural differences.
- (2) The tools should be well-established through empirical research and scholarly review.
- (3) The connection of these frameworks should be present; in the same manner, the research areas are connected.
- (4) The frameworks should be non-exclusive to Saudi culture, to extend the findings in other

samples.

These conditions are all present in Cleveland and Laroche's Acculturation of Global Consumer Culture (AGCC) framework. One of the advantages of using AGCC is that it incorporated cross-cultural frameworks in its conception while essentially maintaining the role of the hybridity (Cleveland & Laroche, 2007a). Specific elements in both scales were studied, and a relationship between specific elements in both frameworks was introduced (Carpenter et al., 2013). Thus, the framework of AGCC will be used to identify areas of change in the local gaming community over time. These areas will also define the amount of cultural resistance to global values.

Consumer Ethnocentrism

Before preceding to discuss the dimensions of global consumer acculturation, it is crucial to introduce the term *ethnocentrism* as a form of cultural resistance. This relates to the outcomes of the process of acculturation by Berry (2008) presented earlier, and it will be referred to throughout the chapter.⁴⁵

The origin of consumer ethnocentrism branched from Adorno et al.'s (1950)'s initial definition, and it was considered to be a personality trait, the "appropriateness, indeed morality, of purchasing foreign-made products." The definition of ethnocentrism regarding the topic of consumer attitudes and behaviour is explained Shimp and Sharma's definition that "an ethnocentric consumer, purchasing imported products is immoral and unpatriotic, hurts the domestic economy, and leads to a loss of domestic jobs. Ethnocentric consumers tend to perceive domestic products as superior to foreign alternatives" (Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015, p. 68). Regarding globalism,⁴⁶ it is important to note that the concept of consumer ethnocentrism was mostly examined in the Western consumer base. Carpenter indicates the lack of study directed to examining this in international consumers. The concept of acculturation to the global consumer culture framework AGCC is a relatively novel approach to examining cultural values. According to Carpenter, the understudied gap is particularly clear in the "retail context" in regard to "consumer ethnocentrism towards international retailers." Even with the considerable research on the topic of the internationalisation of businesses and retailers in the past 40 years, there is little attention given to the attitude and behaviour of the consumers towards international retailers (Carpenter et al., 2013). This was expanded upon in later works, and there is special attention to ethnocentrism throughout this chapter, and this concept will be examined in both old and new

⁴⁵ It is also important because there is a connection that can be drawn from it that offers alternative view to Clément's (2019) essay on copyright challenges of Arab game developers. It will be addressed in Chapter 9 and the thesis's final conclusion. (Chapter 10).

⁴⁶ In order to stay on topic here, the definition and usage of globalism is within the lines of Mir's (2019) work on globalization and the Arab culture: [globalisation] is the increased incorporation of the nations and peoples of the globe brought about by the massive decrease in costs of transportation and communication, and the lowering of artificial barriers to the movement of commodities, services, money, information, and (to a lesser degree) people across borders.

Arab game production. For example, Afkar Media's games production and the interviews provided by the developers (Šisler, 2009; Naji & Iwar, 2013; Courmont & Clément, 2014; Clément, 2019) express strong ethnocentric strategy. Before that, as discussed in Chapter 4 and 6, Sakhr also followed a strategy based on ethnocentric marketing. However, interview participants demonstrated a different view on the topic.

The interview data shows very little enthusiasm for local development. When asked if they knew the names of any Saudi Arab game developers, the majority of responses were linked to paratextual content, such as a game review, a social media thread or a mobile game advertisement. Some participants would not afford locally produced games even a simple trial. In other words, they believed that local games had a bad track record of lower value production, thus they are not worth the time. This can be seen in the reaction of [Abo Bandar] "I don't know specifics of Arab game production. But in general, Arab games do not appeal to me." However, some criticised Saudi games as being targeted towards specific cultural segments or ages. [Khalid] gave an example of this trend: "Most of the Saudi games are Hajwalah (car stunts) and drifting games. I don't know why they would choose Hajwalah (car stunts) games. I suspect they are targeting children gamers audiences. Children like these things. Especially the new generation of children. They like Hajwalah, and these types of songs we call Kasrat. These game developers know that children are internet." Hajwalah, as explained in Chapter 3, means car stunts. Other users specify their dissatisfaction with local development due to a lack of originality. They described games as "rip-offs" or clones of Western games, meaning that they are "too" similar to games from Western game developers. Drawing similarities to original ideas from the global game, *Unearthed: The Trail of Ibn Battuta* (Semaphore, 2013) was a "rip-off" of *Uncharted* and *Abo Khashem* (Moving Dimensions, 2018) was too similar to *GTA*. While this might be true in some games, it is likely an intentional strategy followed by Saudi game developers, as will be discussed with detail in Chapter 8. Finally, the number of global game titles and global game developers mentioned was almost double that of local productions and local developers. However, the important point here is how ethnocentrism is not likely a motivation amongst Saudi gamers. This means, that they like the "idea" of local game production, yet "alone" it does not provide enough incentive to engage with Saudi games.

The Acculturation to the Global Consumer Culture (AGCC)

Cleveland and Laroche's acculturation to the global consumer culture (AGCC) is a conceptualised approach to investigating the phenomenon of global consumer reaction to the globalisation of markets. The development of this concept was made through grounded research and was followed by the development of measurement tools. This resulted in a scale measuring 64 items to determine seven dimensions (Carpenter et al., 2013). The AGCC examines the skills, knowledge, and behaviour required for a consumer to engage and function within a global consumer culture. The seven major drivers of AGCC are (1) cosmopolitanism, (2) exposure to marketing activities of multinational companies, (3) English language usage and exposure, (4)

social interactions, (5) global mass media exposure, (6) openness to and desire to emulate global consumer culture and (7) self-identification with global consumer culture (Carpenter et al., 2013). AGCC, as a framework, sets itself apart from marketing strategies by examining the individual reaction in a cultural sense. One of the prevalent characteristics of early global consumer culture adopted by companies was the direct homogeneous manner that this consumer culture was introduced through various standardised strategies. Academic works relating to this observation might not agree on the strategies employed in this process, yet they confirm that these strategies eventually achieved this type of relationship between the international consumer and these companies (Carpenter et al., 2013). Thus, the importance of the AGCC concept can be seen, to understand the reaction of the global gaming consumer outside the bounds of marketing strategies issued by multinational gaming corporations.

To better understand the acculturation process that video game producers went through in Arabia, an examination of the dimensional shift of AGCC between older and newer production would reveal shed light on this process. As pointed out by other scholars with no specific reference to the period of production or game titles, older Arab games had an educational theme attached to them (Clément, 2019). Although many of them (Al Alamiah's *Monuments and Ruins I & II*, Al Alamiah's *Our Arab World*) could be considered "serious games," they maintained the general game format of the period. Serious games are games designed for a specific purpose, to assist professional training and raising awareness of certain social issues (Bernal-Merino, 2014). As established previously, linking the utility of video games to the product was a strategic marketing approach at the time. As demonstrated in Chapter 4 and 6 in the late 1980s and early 1990s, video game console manufacturers showed through advertisements and production the utility of video games and the benefits of owning one of their platforms which ran on MSX OS. In an interview, Mr Riyadh Al Sharekh, the head of the educational software division in Sakhr, explained the company's strategy: "Sakhr adopted a marketing slogan as a general strategy 'Let them learn as they play.'" With the educational theme taken into consideration, games were different in presentation. From 112 games released between 1985 and 1995, a large portion used a standard gaming platform and others were focused on education with a gaming element attached to them. Game standards of the time included (1) an introductory splash-screen with simple animation and a title, (2) the phrase "press space to continue, and most importantly (3) the choice of "1-One Player, 2-Two Players." The last element is a deciding factor as it defines the user as a "player." For a full list of these video games and screenshots, consult Appendix 3: 1985-1995 Video Games (also see Figure 6.1).



Figure 6.1 Some of Sakhr’s games, *Knowledge Race*, *Ibn Malik*, *Double Jaw* and *a Trip to Makkah* (1985-1991), showing common game standard: splash screen, player selection and “press bar to continue.”

The first dimension of AGCA is cosmopolitanism. The term *cosmopolitanism* refers to specific characteristics in individuals that enable them to engage with other cultures willingly, a certain amount of intellect that gives them comfort in their own cultures as well as others, the desire, and the skill to immerse themselves in other cultures. However, the difference between a cosmopolitan and a tourist is the level of immersion in other cultures. It is similar to the difference between spectators and those who “want to be able to sneak backstage” (p. 119) as explained by Cleveland and Laroche (2007b). Hannerz argued “that cosmopolitanism is more a matter of degree and situational in nature rather than constituting an absolute trait, and due to the culture-shaping power of the media, a person can be cosmopolitan without ever having left his/her country of origin” (p.120) (Cleveland & Laroche, 2007b). According to Carpenter, cosmopolitanism was the most empirically examined dimension of the seven dimensions of AGCC (Carpenter et al., 2013). This dimension could be used to evaluate the level of othering, as will be demonstrated in the examination of the relationship between ethnocentrism and the AGCC. There is evidence in recent adjacent research that cosmopolitanism is strongly linked to accepting and examining other cultures in detail. In a study conducted in France by Cicchelli & Octobre, on aesthetico-cultural

cosmopolitanism⁴⁷, highly educated urban male participants were found to prefer to watch and play video games in the production's original language, rather than in French. This find was correlated with international sociability, knowledge and use of other languages as well as the expressing the desire to learn other languages (Cicchelli & Octobre, 2017). The primary data reflects some of the nuances of the core elements in the AGCC framework. This also corresponds with the elements seen in video games by Saudi game developers.

The second dimension is exposure to/use of the English language. It reflects how much a person is exposed to English, as a medium of communication, as well as their use of the English language in that regard. Besides the dominance that the English language has over popular culture and media production, English is also considered the bridge language, or *lingua franca* as Huntington describes it, to diplomacy, international institutions, and multinational business. Even in countries that exhibit little fluency in English, such as Japan, the language is used in packaging and marketing to bear a "symbolic forms meaning" and to target an international audience (Cleveland & Laroche, 2007b). In Saudi Arabia, however, there was a contrasting approach to the use of English in video games. Although many Arab games of the late 1980s and early 1990 had the option of an Arabic/English interface (see Figure 6.2), presenting games with an Arabic interface was the main goal of game manufacturers in Arabia. Riyadh Al Sharekh, the head of educational software in Sakhr, explained, "It was a limited option in a limited number of programs which were meant to be used in a bilingual capacity (e.g., educational and word processing software)." Al Alamiah's Sakhr platform could be considered as the first company to present the user with an Arabic interface. Thus, there was special attention to the aspect of Arabic in both modified MSX OS and software (including games). Mr Al Sharekh adds that to achieve that mandate, the company had to face some challenges:

1. Finding Arab staff that has the technical understanding of the concept of Arabization/localisation and the requirements and tools of the process.
2. Finding international manufacturers which were prepared to invest in the Arabic computer project. Most technology back then was exclusively in English.
3. A price/type feasibility study of the product.
4. Arab user/market attitude towards a technology/computer that has been developed by an Arab Gulf country.
5. Finding the right price point that guarantees marketing in an Arab/global market.
6. Finding a marketing network both locally and internationally.
7. Continuous product development and improvement on both the specs and quality sides to gain the Arab user's trust and loyalty. [Al Sharekh] Interview.

⁴⁷ Aesthetico-cultural cosmopolitanism is a cultural disposition characterised by a "openness" to people, places, and experiences from many cultures, particularly those from other "nations" (Cicchelli & Octobre, 2017, p. 3).



Figure 6.2: ALALAMIAHS Language options. Games: *Seahorse*, *Zoo* and *ALI BABA* (source: Author's own collection).

Recent Arab production seems to realise the importance of appealing to the global market with better Arabic locales, which includes relevant global cultural references. The choice of using English is usually available, but it varies. Some games, like *Abo Khashem* (Moving Dimensions 2018), contracted Western voice actors to perform a full overhaul of the North American locale. Some video games settle for translating menus and providing subtitles to in-game cut scenes, like *Badiya* (Semaphore 2017). This also extends to Arab mobile games. The English language option is a standard among Arab Saudi games. An extensive elaboration on the topic will be provided in Chapters 7, 8, and 9.

The attitude demonstrated by most interview participants was a general realisation of the importance of English as a medium of global communication. As for using English in video games, whether it is the game interface or the story, all 20 participants answered that they use English more often than localisation. However, the justification behind this is different. Many participants attribute this to the quality of localisation. [Abo Omar] explained, “I would use English because it’s more accurate and clearer, compared to using the local language, unfortunately. Unfortunately, there’s not much attention given to the localization of foreign games here.” [Abo Looloah] explained that following the storyline in English is a lot easier than the localised version: “I usually play my game In English. When I play a game, I want this as a developer wanted, not his B plan. So, nothing gets lost in translation.” Some players would attribute this to the general use of English in games, specifically the terminology of games. [Abo Abdullah] “I would choose English. I have trouble finding settings options when it’s in Arabic. I got used to using English in games, thus I don’t know the Arabic terms for them. I would listen to them in Arabic and read the English subtitles.” Yet, some of the participants seem to extend this to

a sense of immersion with English-speaking characters using their own worlds. [Charming] explained how dialectical localisation interferes with the cultural aspect of the game: “I usually used English. Because when they put Arabic, it’s mostly dialect, not real Arabic. Also, the character is an English speaker. For the sake of immersion, I choose his language, which is English.” Some gamers seemed to embrace the idea of an association of English as a global standard for video games, while Arabic seems to be a late addition for an already globalised user. [Erreicsson] explained, “English is tidier in games. Besides, all our lives we got used to playing games in English. Adding Arabic to games is just new. There was no Arabic at all in games in the past. My English is not that good. But I got used to playing with English pre-settings.” The same was said by [Wiseman], “I use English. This is due to me growing up with English being the game language.” [Nerf] elaborated on this phenomenon, “*Rainbow* has a lot of strategic terminologies. And most Arabs gaming is built on English terminology concerning this game. Even Arabs. They started using this game when it was in English, so they kept on using the English language and terminology. I tried it once. I had it for one week set to Arabic. When they tell me something in the hallway, I could not understand which room it was because I read it in Arabic. I was shouting ‘Rudahah, in the Rudhah.’ They were shouting back ‘what the hell is Rudhah?’ I had to apologize a lot.” [OniThunder] stated that “I always use English. However, when I see an Arabic option, I try it. I do it “for the giggles.”⁴⁸

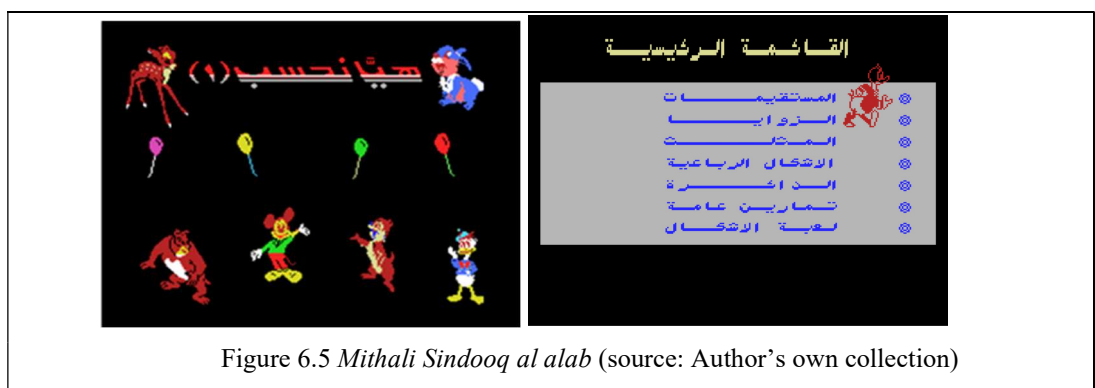
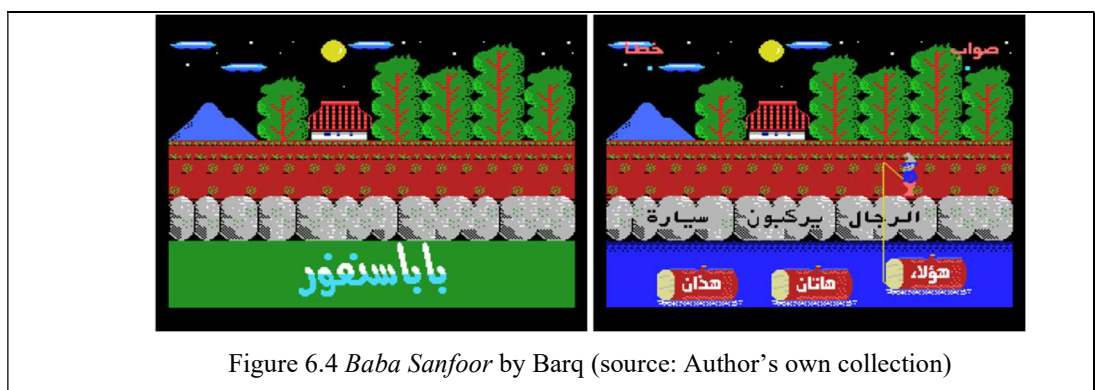
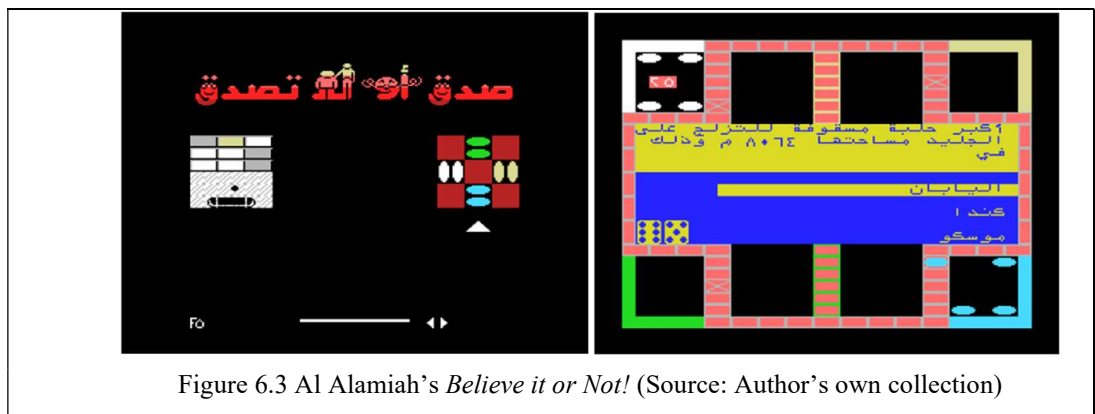
The third and fourth dimensions are addressed in Chapters 6 in details. The third dimension is exposure to marketing activities of multi-national corporations. This dimension describes the level of exposure, which a certain individual faces, to multinational and global corporations’ advertisements and marketing campaigns (Cleveland & Laroche, 2007b). This was partially addressed in Chapter 7, where it is a part of the paratextual content. The fourth dimension is social interactions with foreigners, including travel, migration and contacts. Mass social interaction with other cultures contributes greatly to the spread of global culture. This is not limited to tourism and business travel. This is also achieved by foreign workers, immigrants, government officials and international students moving back and forth to their cultures, then interacting with members of the local community. This is a two-way process, and a great deal of culture is disbursed through this process to both sides (Cleveland & Laroche, 2007b). The original definition, proposed by Redfield et al. in 1936, stated that acculturation was a process that affected both the majority and minority (Celeste et al., 2014). This was partially addressed in Chapter 7 in terms of initiating a cultural dialogue by using cultural pegs.

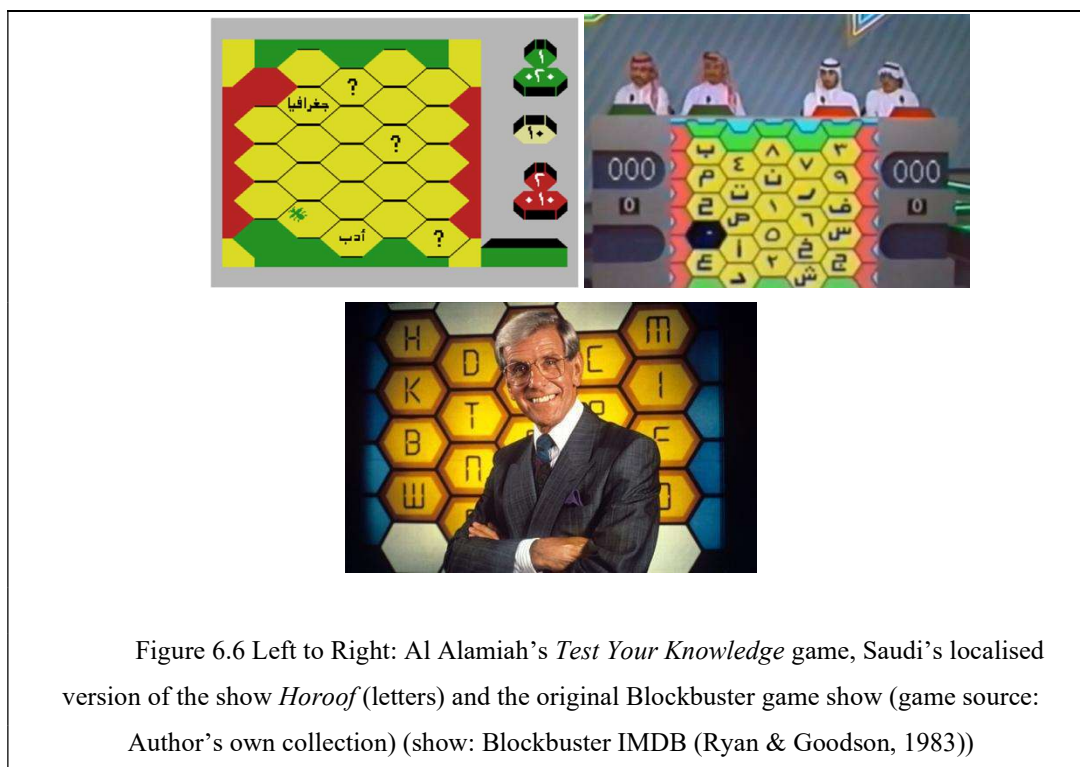
The fifth dimension is global/foreign mass media exposure. The ideology of consumption is strongly connected to the media of television. This can be seen through the global availability of European, Asian, and American television shows (programmes) and films. There is an emphasis

⁴⁸ Chapter 9: expands on this topic.

on the role of American originated mass media in creating learning and sharing of “consumption symbols” (Cleveland & Laroche, 2007b). This dimension affirms the underlying principles of transmedia storytelling. Schiller argues that sharing the same media experience is strongly in accord with marketing strategies. According to Schiller, since people are “social beings,” they would naturally find value in experiencing the same media, “reading the same books, watching the same television shows.” Sharing the same social activity increases their sense of social belonging. This can be seen in widely accepted works, as a book or television programme is discussed with great popularity. People engage with these discussions as a social activity. (Schiller, 2018).

Determining the shift of global media exposure can be seen through observing gaming production between 1985 to 2021. In early production (1985-1995), there was hardly any reference to global media symbols. However, there was some reference to localised media production with Western origins. Within the total of 112 Arab games collected from that period on the MSX platform, there are only five games that have that indirect connection. Arabic *Believe it or Not (Saddiq aw la Tosaddiq)* prepared and presented by Layla Al Atrash (Kafood & Al Atrash, 1983) was a localised version of Ripley’s *Believe It or Not!* Al Alamiah’s *Believe it or Not!*, was a trivia interactive game. Two gaming interfaces were available. One looks like the Ludo table game. Advancing is achieved through answering general knowledge and trivia questions. Another early 1990s game that took inspiration from a localised TV program, is Al Alamiah’s *Test Your Knowledge III*. The program took inspiration from the localised version of the *Blockbuster* game show. The localised version was called *Horoof* (letters). Another inspiration from a localised production is *Baba Sanfoor*. Baba Sanfoor was the translated name of Papa Smurf in the localised version of the 1980s popular cartoon *Smurfs*. *Baba Sanfoor* was a game produced by Braq. The game featured a bearded Smurf hooking up some floating logs. The selection was based on the Arabic language grammatical rules. The third reference is that of MGM’s *Tom and Jerry*. *Tom and Jerry* series was locally broadcasted on Saudi TV in the 1980s and 1990s, which required little localisation as the content contained little verbal content. The fourth reference is made by Al Alamiah’s *Lets Learn Math (I)* game, which had what resembles characters from localised Western content. The characters that appeared on the splash screen were Mickey Mouse, Bambi, one of the Chipmunks, Donald Duck from Disney and what looks like Taz the Tasmanian Devil from Warner Bros. The fifth and final instance is Bawareth’s use of Donald Duck as a selection pointer in their game collection *Sindooq Al Alab* (Toy Box). Other than these five instances of indirect use of localised mass media symbols, there does not seem to be any obvious connection between old Arab game production and global mass media in terms of content creation.





Of all the AGCC dimensions, exposure to global mass media seems to offer the most revealing aspects of the interviews. The context in which global mass media was mentioned was more negative than positive, with 13 negative references, 9 mixed references, 3 neutral and only 3 positive references. The coding of these references revealed 22 very negative incidents, 30 moderately negative, 13 moderately positive, and only 4 that demonstrated incidents of positive context. The engagements are various and include references to both Western media and Eastern media, specifically Anime. The participants demonstrated a great deal of knowledge of global media. Global media symbols were mentioned repeatedly during the interviews (e.g., Hollywood, BBC, Batman movies, Netflix, CNN, Fake news, the Joker, etc.). There is no surprise in the knowledge of these symbols. However, the association of these symbols with video games is at the core of this research. In most cases, the engagement was related to the comparison between images in video games and media. This was followed by the aesthetics of a stereotypical Arab in Western media. There are two directions observed in the samples. The first direction attributes the effect of media on a video game to human limitation and individual choices.

[Wiseman] explained,

Even in the film industry, the people who write movies are one or two people. You have a lot of people working in the making of one game. Maybe more than 1,000 people working for one game. But when it comes to the manufacturing of characters, the writing of scenarios, this is usually limited to a little group of people. This little group of people is only human. They would be influenced like anyone else. In some instances, they dedicated their lives to a cause that is not their own.... The general mainstream culture is most likely to influence these people. So, when these people come to this place, they would probably

have some intellectual agenda that they would like to address. Thus, you would see the director is always under the spotlight, not the writer. The writer is not looking for the spotlight. We don't know a lot about Hollywood scriptwriters. We mostly know directors. There is very little likelihood that the director would intervene to change a little aspect of the game. Or maybe the general direction of the game. But we always ask ourselves why they wrote this story. They are human and they have goals.

Answers that attribute the misrepresentation of Arabs to human error are usually followed by a critique of the professionalism of game designers. [MoonGuy] said, "There are those who do not follow movies and TV. They probably would either invent something or do their research on the matter. I consider this a type of success. Because you can't watch everything you watch on TV. A depiction copied from TV is a wrong depiction." [Abo Bandar] described this practice as a failure in one element of the game. "I am not uncomfortable with this depiction, as much as I consider their work not good in this area. That means that they failed in this section of the game." However, the majority of participants highlighted the most notable interaction between Saudi cultural symbols and global mass media, which is the aesthetical depiction of Arabic articles of clothing. "Shemagh" and "thobe" were at the top of the list. These two symbols were most mentioned in the context of protest. Other related elements are "deserts," "ISIS" and "terror." This leads to an issue discussed later, under the seventh dimension and global exclusion. Thus, a conclusion can be drawn from interviewees' reactions associated with this dimension. Most participants thought that the misrepresentation of Arabs in video games is rooted in sigma inherited from that of the depiction of Arabs in global mass media. However, most of the participants attributed this to an element of "human nature," such as bad professional practices or individual bias.

The sixth dimension is openness to and desire to emulate global consumer culture; Globalization does not necessarily mean the creation of a single culture with duplicated values and beliefs. Globalisation creates a "single forum" that entitles individuals to peruse and compares their goals to those of others. Research found that there is a difference in this pursuit across generations due to the selectivity that individuals exhibit in appropriating ideas from this global forum. In Asia, for example, each generation selects their own global culture. This is based on their selective approach shaped by "familiar Western themes and values" in Western media and the support of the consumerist lifestyle encouraged in young consumers during the marketing of goods and services (Cleveland & Laroche, 2007b). In the interview sample, OPE seems to manifest clearly in sharing a common future with the global community. When asked which period they would like to see depicted, some interview participants indicated that they would like to see the future. [Abo Bandar] explained this view: "The stereotypical image has been already established through the curriculum in the educational system. This is something all cultures have in common. But if you divert out of this, like spaceman galaxies, something futuristic, this gives you a chance to renew your ideas. To give something new for the gamer." The same sentiment

was expressed in contrasting the past and the future. [Abo Looloah] added, “Frankly, our present. We are still building it. And our future it’s still being built.” This also could be seen in some new video games. Games like *Misk School Quest* (2020). This future mostly is inspired by a Western media production, with elements of local cultural values.

***Misk School Quest* (2020)**

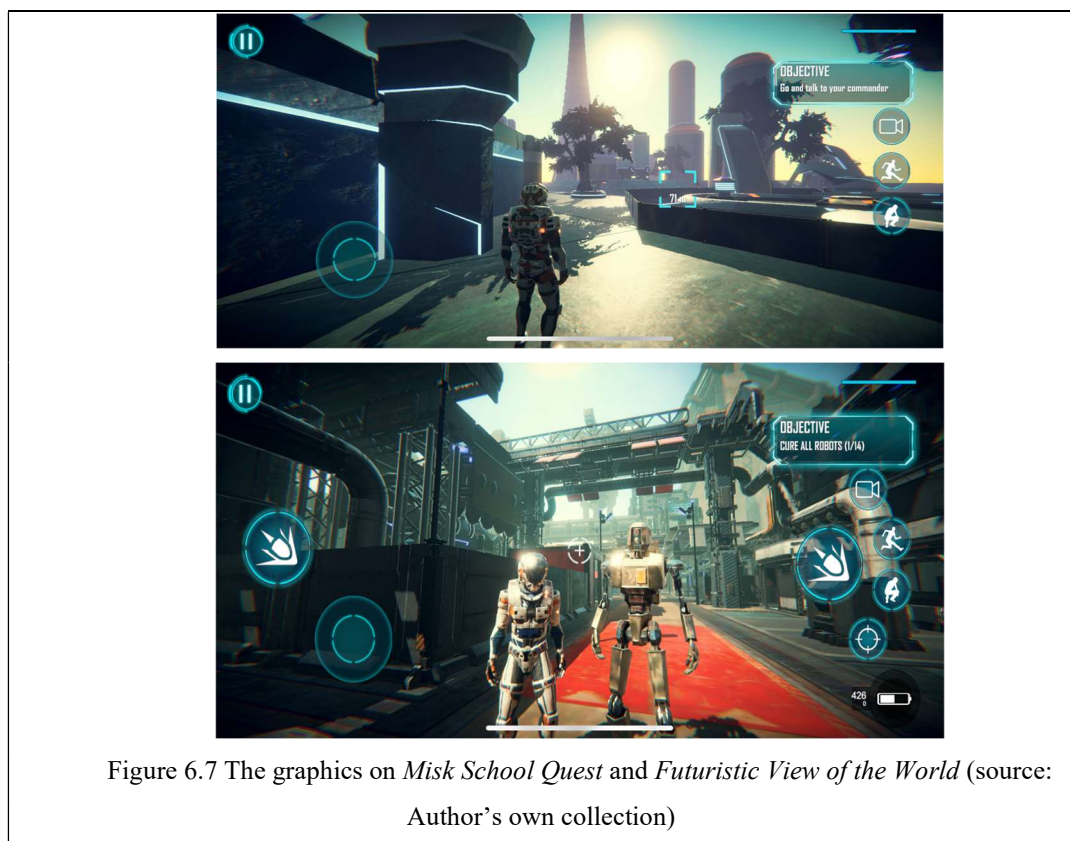


Figure 6.7 The graphics on *Misk School Quest* and *Futuristic View of the World* (source: Author’s own collection)

As mentioned before, during the interview a great deal of the interviewees demonstrated knowledge of international developers and international games (e.g., Ubisoft, Activision, TellTales, etc.) more than they did in local developers and local games. When asked if they know any Saudi developers, many of the participants would give a description or a title of a game developed by a company. This might contrast to a knowledge of Western products, as they are mentioned by name as well as their developers. However, Semaphore, a Saudi video game company, as mentioned by name as well by product description. *Misk School Quest* is a mobile game developed by Semaphore on PS4, Android and Apple devices. The game was developed as a collaboration with Misk School’s “creative team.” In the game credits, there is no indication of what role the students had. In the beginning of the credits, eight student names are mentioned under the title “Misk School Students” but with no assigned role titles and nothing more specific given. The students are mostly from primary levels: two students from Level 3, two students from Level 4 and 5, two students from Level 6 and two students from Level 7. Misk School is part of the Misk Foundation and considered one of

Saudi's elite private schools (Misk Schools, 2021). Interestingly, this may indicate a potential research venue connecting game production in Saudi with contributions from high-income society.

The video game is a futuristic look at Saudi Arabia, as apparently imagined by Misk school students. It imagines the world's future, where, because of pollution, humans have decided to live in floating modern cities. In that future, people do not need to work as all work is done by robots. The game starts with this "In the year 3020, Earth became so polluted that humans built floating cities above clouds and filled them with service robots to take care of most aspects of life. You are the Elite Robot Officer Misk802 who is assigned to the city Alpha Cloud. You just received an urgent call to report to your commander in the headquarters." As the player advances, he gets the order to deal with some "uncompliant" robots, which were affected by a virus that resulted in them hurting people. "Salam Misk802, we received reports that service robots in some sectors of the city got infected by a computer virus and are attacking the citizens. Your mission is to visit each sector and cure all the robots in them from the virus. Remember, we do not want to destroy them, but just reprogram them using your non-lethal laser beam until we figure out what happened. Good luck!" The gamer advances to the sector and disables these robots. None of the robots speaks or explains the nature of the virus. The player roams around what seems like an industrial area and disables all the robots in the sector.

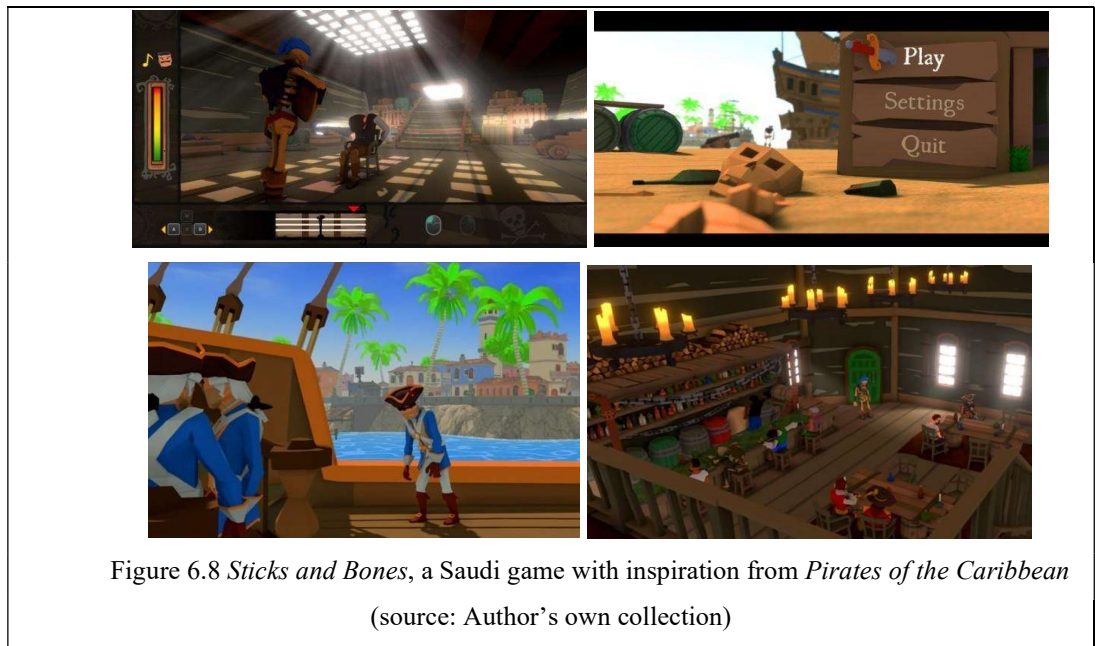
The aesthetics of the game present what seems to be a potential future of Saudi Arabia. Although the location is not specifically stated as Riyadh, it is safe to assume that naming the Elite Robot Misk802 is linked to making it a Riyadh/Saudi-related future. The main character design is different to the rest of the service robots. The main character has more human-like features, while the service robots are designed to appear as a more primitive version with less humanoid features. There are playable human characters in the game, nor do they appear as NPCs. The robots are the majority, with a minority of humans who live in the sky cities. The design of the main arena, Misk Headquarters, is futuristic and clean and shows special details on architecture and light effects. The HQ area, although located in a floating city, is full of high towers and skyscrapers. The tower has no recumbence to any Saudi landmark. There are no elements that resemble Islamic/Arabic architecture in this area. The lack of mosques, minarets, domes are an extension of a generic global vision of the future. As the character moves from one area to another in missions, the correctional elite robot uses a hover bike, that carries a great similarity to that of the one used in *Ratchet and Clank 2: Locked and Loaded* (Int. title: *Ratchet & Clank 2: Going Commando*) (InsomniacGames, 2003). In this loading (in between level) stage, the elite robot hovers over an endless concrete cube-like buildings across the city where the service robots work. The design of the bottom of the city is reminiscent of Brutalist architectural design. Moving between levels, robots at the bottom of the city are located in industrial areas that carry various designs. The designs of these levels include an oil-refinery looking stage, an underbelly-spaceship-like level, and others. The design choices of the game indicate a contrast between two classes of living. In the architecture there is a notable neo-futuristic style for the upper class, contrasting to Brutalism and industrial type of architecture for

the working robots. There is also a contrast in character choice as the elite robot carries more humanoid features, while the service robots exhibit mechanical movement and simple robotic design.

As for gameplay, *Misk School Quest* is a third-person shooter, that has one choice of weapon. The choice is a robot disabling laser. The ludic contract is the same all across the game. The character walks to robots and shoots them with the laser and avoids their laser. Shooting these robots produces a large battery pack that the character can pick up as ammunition. The other play aspect is a hover-bike driving part between the levels, where the character moves between levels. *Misk School Quest* shares a great deal with other Semaphore games, in terms of movement and game mechanics, as well as other issues. The main character movement lacks variation. This was noted on Semaphore's other games by interviewees. [Nerf] describes games by Semaphore: "I got the feeling that the physics in the game was really, really bad, compared to the inflated media coverage that this game had.... You get the feeling that you are moving a robot in Badiyah." Furthermore, the game's AI seems to be very limited. The robots do not pose an intelligent challenge other than a proximity field of attack. In addition, the difficulty between levels is not noticeable, as it seems that the number of "enemies" increases with no difference in strategy. The camera movement is very restrictive, especially in levels with small quarters. In terms of Fung et al.'s (2016) findings on the requirements of reaching the global market of video games, although this game embraces "cultural hybridization" it has a notable shortcoming in terms of "sophisticated game designs and visual effects."

Examining this game reveals many cultural aspects of significance to the topic at hand. The game does not depict an egalitarian future. On the contrary, there seems a strong hierarchal theme. The contrast between residential areas and robot design supports this. In addition, the idea of servitude is not discussed. By the end of the game, all "defective" service robots are disabled by the elite robot. There is a missed opportunity to draw reflection on domestic servitude and the lack of empathy towards domestic workers, a hot topic in Saudi Arabia. However, the game's narrative acknowledges this culture and draws a futuristic version of this problem. Another issue is the embracing of a dystopian future. In the game, the topic of the environmental impact of industrial development seems to be accepted. In the beginning of the game, the problem of pollution is presented in a splash screen. The game's narrative presents the escape of some humans in floating cities as an acceptable compromise. Throughout the game, there is no mention of the environment nor discussion of the issue. There is no indication that these cultural issues were intentionally chosen. The issue of the environmental impact of industrial development is not an essential issue of Saudi culture as the country, as the oil production is relatively recent in terms of historical context. This provides evidence that selectivity on cultural values is possible in consumer acculturation. This means that while cultural values are indeed transferred via the acculturation process, the selection and amount of this transfer is subject to individual variation.

Sticks and Bones (2019)



In contrast to major game publishers in Saudi Arabia (e.g., Semaphore), indie developers seem to follow a different strategy. Mohammad Arkobi was mentioned by an interview participant [Ososo] as “Indie Saudi talent.” The game follows the story of a reanimated skeleton who wakes up to peruse his previous life’s goal and find treasure. Beyond the obvious English word play included in the title, the game follows a Caribbean treasure hunt with an uncanny stylistic homage to the genre and big productions, such as *Treasure Island* and *Pirates of the Caribbean*. The character’s mannerisms and inebriated movement is reminiscent to that of Caprine Jack Sparrow’s Sea legs. Bad fortune and old vendettas and constant distrust are motifs that can be seen throughout the storyline as the game continues. The character rescues an ally to be betrayed by him later as the game advances. Then the betrayal is paid back. The treasure map acts as a MacGuffin, driving the plot forward. This is another inspiration that is drawn from the film genre, as the franchise usually centred around a MacGuffin, whether a coin or a heart. It is worth noting that the developer emphasised that he did draw inspiration from video games: “And, No, this game is not like *Monkey Island*; no monkeys” (Arkobi, 2019).

Examining consumer symbols within a world/universe created or expanded through transmedia storytelling can indicate the type of the market and its association with the global or local market. There are many elements that can be read as global consumer symbols, signifying the process of acculturation. Taking the example of the pirate tavern scene in *Sticks and Bones*, and examining the elements that are clearly non-Saudi, it can be seen that they show how Saudi production perceives a certain trend in global production. Consuming alcohol and establishments linked to that activity are strictly prohibited. Nevertheless, the game designer engages with the

romanticised 'Caribbean pirate' universe. He brings an element, although foreign to himself and to a local audience, yet it is part of a universe accepted in the global market. The tavern fight, the liquor bottles, wine barrels and gambling are part of the experience that is associated with that fantasy world. The wanted poster with the protagonist that reads, "Wanted Dead or Dead" is native to the universe of the Western film genre (Aquila, 1996) yet blending with Arab works, as the common phrased used is إهدار الدم or إشاعة الدم ("Unprotected blood") (Syulaibek, 2012). The crosses on ships and on churches within the town square displays stay true to the Westerns genre universe. As the game advances, there seems not to be a single motif that carries a Saudi/Arab cultural aspect. This could be considered as demonstrating a shift from the local to the global market.

The visual elements are one of the strongest aspects of this game. The design is intentionally cartoonish, which contributes to the comic atmosphere. However, the director of the game has chosen to divide the story into small segments with cut-scenes between mini-levels. The vantage point of the scene angles gives a movie effect with a different angle for each mini level. The Unity engine provides advanced lighting options, which compensates for the lack of detail in the graphics. A comparison is *Grim Fandango* (Schafer, 1998), a game with some similarities yet a disadvantage in terms of 3D engine, which it compensates for with artistic design. With its approach to Aztec/30s art déco themes, *Grim Fandango* introduces the intentional design choices along with a comical aspect. This also can be compared to *Medieval* (Sorrell, 1998). The soundtracks are mostly a composite of Western classical music with some Spanish guitars tracks for some action scenes, and the music used in the production has no clearly discernible Arabic music instrument. *Sticks and Bones*' music, directing and aesthetics seems to draw heavily from the Western re-imagination of romanticised piracy. These elements demonstrate a strong influence on global media production.

The influence of global media can also be seen in *Sticks and Bones*' comedic approach. The game takes inspiration from Western silent films, rather than being inspired by Arab silent films. In comparison between the two, there is very little to be said about silent film (silent cinema) in Arabic production. The record of films shot in that period was very little and the production that survived poor storing conditions was even less. The oldest surviving film was *Barsoum Looking for a Job* (Bayoumi, 1923). According to *Alanba Newspaper*, the only surviving films of that era were *A Kiss in the Desert* (Lama, 1927), *Layla* (Ameer, 1927), *The Sea is Laughing* (Rosti, 1928), *Gypsy Suad* (Schutz, 1928), *A Tragedy over the Pyramid* (Lama, 1928), *Daughter of the Nile* (Wasfy, 1929), *Belle of Desert* (Orfa, 1929), and *Zaynab* (M. Karim, 1930) (AlanbaNewspaper, 2017). Suffice to say that the game does not show any discernible inspiration from any of these films. Most of the films on this list are that of a dramatic nature. The game, on the other hand, draws greatly from silent humour of Western production. The game utilizes physical humour, which is demonstrated in slapsticks and satire, very reminiscent of what is seen in Charlie Chaplin's films and later in Rowan Atkinson's *Mr. Bean*.

SOS: Shout of Survival (2017)

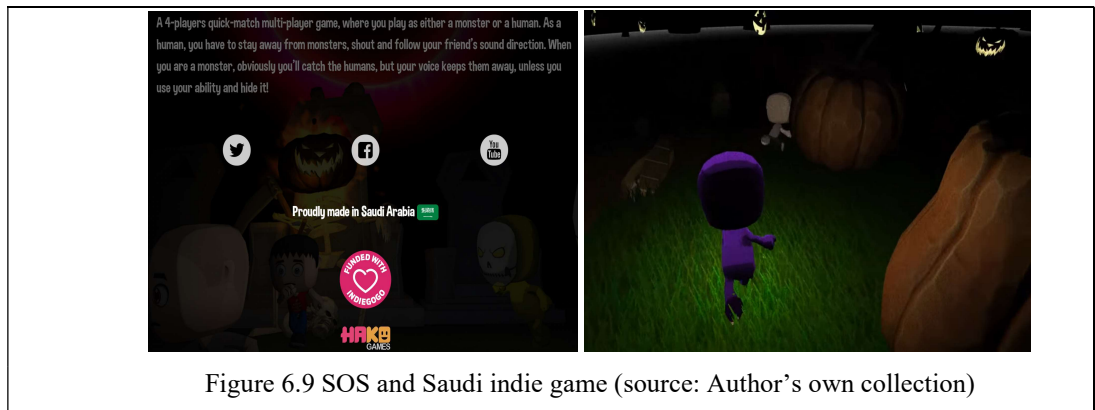


Figure 6.9 SOS and Saudi indie game (source: Author's own collection)

The game *SOS: Shout of Survival* by Hako Games, a Saudi Game development group, is a simple demonstration of cosmopolitanism COS in modern Saudi video game production. Aesthetically, the game, in its alpha release, borrows a great deal from Western cultures. The stages exhibit a dark Halloween theme. Carved pumpkins, medieval European castles, dark pine forests are all motifs borrowed from what would be expected from a Halloween story. The game uses no Saudi Arabian cultural symbols. Examining the paratextual content surrounding the game introduces another dimension of AGCC in this production. Securing funding for game development through fans is not new to the gaming community. While this does not quite demonstrate the dimension of EXM (exposure to marketing activities of multinational companies), it utilizes a principle that works on a paratextual level, as securing funding works as an advertisement. However, unlike advertisements, funding pages allow fan engagement. The design team of this game started their project with an IndieGoGo funding campaign. The game secured USD16,999 of the USD20,000 they set as a target. As the developer, Abdullah Konash, explains, the team was made up of five developers (Konash, 2016). Another AGCC dimension that can be seen in *SOS: Shout of Survival* is the use of elements of GMM (global mass media), as the game borrows heavily from Halloween media production. The monsters have a variety of masks (e.g., plague doctor mask, skull mask, etc.) which can be connected to a variety of media production within the genre of horror/slasher movies. The levels in the game also share a great deal with media production within the same genre. The dark forest level, the medieval castle, Halloween pumpkin, the haunted mansion level and the nursery level are all reminiscent of famous movies. The blood-moon is another media symbol that can be seen in this production.

One game play factor in *SOS: Shout of Survival* is quite new in its concept, using voice as a play element. The horror game involves four players: two humans and two monsters. The two human players try to find each other by shouting to each other, which in turn exposes their location to the monsters. If the two players meet, they win. If one monster catches one of the humans through a game of tag, they steal their souls and become humans, allowing them to switch roles in the next round. In its original conceptualisation, the game was built on another game by

the same company, *Al-liqa'* ("The Reunion"). *Al-liqa'* was a 2D game about a boy finding his father in a dark forest and running into pitfall-like obstacles. However, *SOS: Shout of Survival* seems to be directed to a global market.

The seventh and final dimension is self-identification with global consumer culture. As clarified by Cleveland and Laroche (2007b), this was not listed initially within the six main dimensions yet was added in the discussion as Cleveland and Laroche noted elements of another dimension (openness to and desire to emulate global consumer culture, exposure to marketing activities, and global/foreign mass media exposure) were moved to this dimension. It evaluates the degree to which a certain individual identifies with the global consumer culture. The thematic analysis of the interviews shows a great engagement with the topic of globalisation. The general attitude of the interview participants towards the global community and globalisation was different from what other research had noted on Arabic game production. Earlier research on self-representation by Arab game developers stated that it followed two paths: (1) a polarisation attitude of "us against them," and (2) serious educational games that presented Arabic culture in strategy games (see Chapter 2). However, the interviews clarified how Saudi gamers engaged with the global gaming community and perceived misrepresentation, as well as the targeted harassment by other players.

Some participants highlighted a feeling of exclusion from the global community. The attitude towards exclusion from globalisation seemed to be more focused towards game producers rather than non-Saudi gamers. Participants attributed the misrepresentation observed in Western developers' depictions of Saudis in video games as being down to a lack of care that is motivated by othering. It was best described by [Abo Looloah]'s statement:

It is true that I am an Arab; it is true that I am a Saudi. However, I am a part of this world. So, if I wanted to depict a group of people, I have to study them very well. So, let's say I'm an American who wants to develop a game about the Saudi people. 'Ethically' and respectfully, I should travel to Saudi and live there for at least 6 months. I will study all their games. This is for two reasons: I would produce a game with high quality and reflects something beautiful. Secondly, I would not touch sensitive issues or be hurtful.

[Majeed79] explains his frustration with exclusion from the global community "As for now, I wish Western developers would not depict any Arab in their games, at all. But in the future, I wish they would try to understand Arabs. There is no difference between us and them. To appeal to more gamers. I have a lot of relatives, gamers that quit gaming, because of bad depictions that offend us as Muslims." [MoonGuy] attributes the Western developers' attitude of excluding Saudis from the global community to the historical context: "You know that there was a lot of conflict between them and the Arab nations in the past couple of years. This resulted in a 'grudge.' I think this ignorance is intentional. This is what I observed. So, they probably know the culture, but they don't want to include exactly what's going on. It's more of the condescending attitude. And I'm really upset with

this.” It is difficult to isolate one cause of this attitude. Governmental media policies could be one of many reasons.

Finally, after examining the primary data, elements of the AGCC framework emerged in interview participants’ feedback. Through observation, AGCC dimensions were detected in varying degrees. An overwhelming majority of interview participants referred to what could be seen as one or more of these dimensions during the interview. There were 129 incidents concerning the dimensions, with the highest being that of English language usage and exposure, scoring at least 33 engagements by all 20 interview participants. Global mass media exposure followed, with at least 28 engagements by 16 participants. The third topic with the most engagement was social interactions with foreigners, with 22 incidents by 13 participants. Exposure to marketing activities of multinational companies was coded 21 times by 11 participants. Cosmopolitanism was difficult to determine as participants showed a selective attitude with the willingness to engage with others in specific cultural topics. However, there were 16 incidents by 7 participants which illustrated the issue of cosmopolitanism in Saudi gamers. Openness to/and desire to emulate global consumer culture and IDT self-identification with global consumer culture were also quite difficult to determine. Many of the participants expressed the desire to emulate the global consumer market on a personal level. However, they seemed to agree with the policy against it (see Chapter 5). Thus, only 9 incidents were elected for the thematic analysis of the interviews, which elaborate on this finding.

Relationship between AGCC Dimensions, Cross-Cultural Values, Ethnocentrism and Consumer Demographics

The findings of the various research done on the AGCC dimensions have been relatively consistent. This includes different sampling locations. However, Carpenter suggests that the effect of demographics on AGCC is unclear due to the limited empirical research on the topic (Carpenter et al., 2013). Yet, age and education seem to be the most consistent demographical variables in AGCC dimensions. Age negatively affects the following dimensions: COS, EXM, SIN and IDT, while education positively affects the same dimensions (Cleveland et al., 2011; Cleveland et al., 2009). The income of the individual seems to influence cosmopolitanism COS in some studies (Cleveland et al., 2011; Cleveland et al., 2009) and to have some influence on self-identification in others (J. M. Carpenter et al., 2013). As for gender, some studies found that females exhibit a higher level of cosmopolitanism COS (Cleveland et al., 2009). Other research found that the combined variables of gender (male) and education positively affected EXM (exposure to marketing activities of multinational companies) and age negatively affected EXM). In contrast, combined gender (male) and education exhibited a positive effect on the degree of SIN (social interactions), and age had a negative effect on this (Carpenter et al., 2013). The initial expectation was a positive effect of individualism on AGCC dimensions. However, more recently, there has been an improvement in specifying which AGCC dimensions are affected by Hofstede’s cultural

dimensions. Carpenter et al. found that there was a positive effect of Hofstede's individualism dimension on AGCC's cosmopolitanism (COS) and social interactions (SIN) dimensions. However, there was no effect on exposure to marketing activities of multinational companies (EXM) and openness to emulate global consumer culture (OPE) dimensions. On the other hand, Carpenter et al, suggested that there was no significant effect of uncertainty avoidance on any of AGCC's dimensions. (Carpenter et al., 2013). As for ethnocentrism, Cleveland and Laroche indicate that there is a relationship between cosmopolitanism and ethnocentrism (Cleveland et al., 2009). The study by Carpenter et al. (2013) indicated a negative effect of cosmopolitanism (COS), as well as social interactions (SIN) on ethnocentrism. In contrast, openness to embrace global consumer culture (OPE) and self-identifying as a global consumer (IDT) seemed to have a positive effect on ethnocentrism. However, Carpenter et al.'s (2013) study was conducted specifically on retailers of food and fashion markets. Furthermore, Carpenter et al. suggested that the effect of AGCC on ethnocentrism was not direct; rather, "While COS and SIN appear to mitigate ethnocentrism, OPE and IDT operate in the opposite manner." There is a negative relationship between ethnocentrism and the dimension of cosmopolitanism (CO) (Carpenter et al., 2009; Cleveland et al., 2013, p. 286).

Chapter Conclusion

Exploring the milieu of the gaming community sheds light on the extent of cultural exchange between the local community and the wider global community. These gaming conditions ultimately contribute to the overall vibrant image seen through the prism of autonomous self-representation. This chapter set out to explore some of the nuances of an acculturation process that appears to be occurring among the Saudi gaming community, particularly in the context of their engagement with the global gaming community. First is a finding that significantly adds to the scholarship examining Arab representation in video games, that is, the community's the reactions to both local (i.e., Saudi) games and international games. As examined in the five previous chapters, building on the scholarship discussing the topic of Arab representation in video, the studies put Arab game developers/gaming community into two camps: (1) developers' counter-construction paradigm (Shaw, 2010) and (2) assimilated consumers (Clément, 2019). To reiterate, the smaller sample of video games resulted into a view that was in line with Pieterse's observations on post-modernist hybridisation. The conclusion of this chapter adds to this view. In conclusion the findings of this chapter have detailed how viewing the process of acculturation in light of Berry's (2008) framework is more representative of the gaming community in Saudi Arabia, resulting in the following four outcomes: (1) assimilation (2) separation (3) integration and (4) deculturation or marginalization. Interview participation and game selection of past and present, even with varying degrees of "cultural mixing," are within these four groups. In light of this, the acculturation process, as a research model, yields a better understanding of the nuanced nature of the gaming community in Saudi Arabia, which is an understanding that hitherto had been missing in most other previous studies.

Second, in terms of user experience, most interview participants were found to relate to a global consumer identity, demonstrating various levels of AGCC dimensions. Global consumer identity is not limited to these dimensions; however, they are indicative of a positive attitude towards globalism. Furthermore, a majority of these interviewees expressed a general unrest (or annoyance) with being excluded from the global community that they identified with. This is expressed with either annoyance about a game's misuse of cultural symbols by Western/Japanese developers (e.g., *Devil May Cry*'s use of the decoration of the doors of the Grand Mosque in Medina) or the absence of any association to Saudi and modern consumer symbols in Western/Japanese games. In newer Saudi game production, there is a general embracing of global culture as observed through global mass media, seen in *Sticks and Bones* and *Misk School Quest*. This includes storytelling in worlds void of any obvious Saudi cultural symbols. However, the creative process in these games makes use of already established motifs that border on clone-like concepts. This was a point of criticism made by numerous interview participants. In comparison to older game production, there is little direct inspiration from global media. The world created in most games is relatively limited to the narrative inspired by the local historical record, seen in games like *Ibn Malik* and *Knowledge Race* from Sakhr. This reflects on ethnocentrism, as participants demonstrated that they had no attachment to the ethnocentric moral obligation of buying and preferring local products to global ones. On the contrary, users expressed their preference for global products. The significance of this finding is the identification of an identifiable shift in attitude. This signifies the impact of the acculturation process on the nationalist strategies mentioned in Chapter 4.

Regarding AGCC and governmental policy, there was a connection that could be identified by looking to different periods of the acculturation process, as there was varying change in the different dimensions during the acculturation process. First, interaction with global mass media seems to be the most easily identified in this process. The early Arab game production was little influenced by global mass media production. Of this generation of games, there are only a very few games that show even a limited influence of global mass media. However, this limited influence was not direct. Games were only influenced by global media production that went through a process of localisation. This is important because localisation means that governmental policy influenced the production. No direct influence is clear through examining the games of that era. On the other hand, new Arab games are heavily influenced by global media. This influence uses a form of transmedia storytelling, with narratives exploring the established world favoured over global mass media production. As for modern users, the majority of them demonstrated a strong knowledge of global media, pointing out the influence of global media on the perpetuation of stereotypes surrounding Arabs, which again puts into question the role of policy, as discussed in Chapter 5. However, they also demonstrated an ability to distinguish between global media bias and the global media community. As for the dimension of usage and exposure to English language, older Arab video games focused on Arabic as a medium of directive in their production. This was coupled with an ethnocentric marketing strategy with some pan-Arab nationalism attached to both product and content (also see Chapters 4 and 6). On the other hand, all new Saudi

games come with English as a standard language option, and some Saudi games come with only English as an interface language. In terms of users, all users seemed to use English in video games. Some users considered English as “the language of the game,” while others used English due to poor localisation practices. The increase observed in this dimension (usage and exposure of English language) seems to agree with the modernisation process in governmental policies discussed in Chapter 5. In terms of cosmopolitanism, examination of and interaction with other cultures seems to be minimal as there were no depictions of cosmopolitanism. There were indications of accepting global cultural symbols that underwent a process of commercialisation. On the other hand, the users seemed to welcome the idea of cultural interaction with other cultures, most specifically American and Japanese. The final conclusion in the matter of linking governmental policy to the acculturation process is more of a causality dilemma (a chicken and egg situation). Is governmental policy the reason for the acceleration of the acculturation process, or is the acculturation process causing policy to change and embrace a new stance on cultural issues? The answer might not be as important as knowing the direction of movement.

This chapter argues against the conventional scholarly position of the global north regarding Arab gaming culture. It argues that acculturation (between global and local) is more complex and nuanced than previous works on Arab representation in video games have indicated. The acculturation process is also a two-way process in which both parties contribute. Previous research on the topic of Arab representation in video games categorized Arab game developers and the gaming community into two groups: (1) the counter-construction paradigm (Shaw, 2010) and (2) assimilated consumers (Clément, 2019). The smaller sample size of video games in these earlier studies resulted in an interpretation that was consistent with Pieterse's findings regarding postmodernist hybridization. This chapter's conclusion lends to this view. In conclusion, this chapter's findings demonstrate that viewing the process of acculturation through the lens of Berry's (2008) framework is more representative of the gaming community in Saudi Arabia, resulting in four outcomes: (1) assimilation; (2) separation; (3) integration; and (4) deculturation or marginalization. Even with varying degrees of "cultural mixing," these four groups include interview participation and the selection of past and present games. In light of this, the acculturation process as a theoretical framework for research yields a greater understanding of the nuanced nature of the gaming community in Saudi Arabia, an understanding that was lacking from the majority of previous studies.

CHAPTER 7

The Paratext of Gaming in Saudi Arabia

This chapter argues that the paratextual spaces of video games play a major role in the cultural exchange between global and Saudi gaming communities. The argument seeks to examine what constitutes as “paratext” of game, supported by major works of game studies. The chapter moves to argue a less addressed topic in game studies which is the intersection between culture and paratext. Game paratext in Saudi Arabia provided a new perspective on the gaming industry's acculturation (See chapter 6 for details global acculturation) beyond ludic and textual study. To support this argument the chapter will examine government, companies, and end-users used contribution to the cultural exchange within the gaming paratext space.

When a Saudi public fund owned company like Savvy Gaming buys ESL and FACEIT for US\$1.5bn (Dixon, 2022), this highlights the importance of competitive gaming to the strategy of Saudi investment in the entertainment sector. Amongst many factors, this move carries strong links to the power of video game paratext. The importance of video game paratext to the research is an element that unfolded while conducting the data collection. Initially, the research plan was designed to address paratextual effects within other forms of transtextuality, as they are addressed in various chapters of this research. However, as the research came to the final stages of formulation, it became increasingly apparent that the issue of paratext was more importance than initially perceived. At the beginning, the importance of the issue was raised by observation and examination of the paratextual material in the Saudi press and other media forms. However, the determining point to give special attention to the topic was during the interview data collection. When asked about Arab representation in video games, many participants referred to the representation of eSport events. Then as the interview progressed, interview participants raised elements that had paratext as common ground. Thus, the placement of this chapter in the research came after considering the status of the effect that paratext has on the processes involved in the acculturation⁴⁹ of the hybrid gaming culture in Saudi Arabia. This chapter is meant to work as a precursor to the chapters addressing “Game Global Acculturation in Saudi Arabia” as well as to tie-in to the previous chapter, “Video Game Progression.” I would like to remind the reader that traditionally, the paratext is introduced before the body of a text. Therefore, it is necessary to position this chapter before investigating deeper levels of acculturation. It will examine the importance of paratext in marketing strategies, followed by early video game industry corporate entities (1985-1995), the emergence of other new forms of paratext and the use of paratext by the modern Saudi Arab gamer to re-introduce another representation of Arab identity. It ultimately informs the answers to the question on how game paratext is used as a form autonomous self-representation.

⁴⁹ Later, in Chapter 7, there will be a discussion on the use of the term *hybridisation* and the term *acculturation*.

This chapter will start with an examination of the concept of paratext in video games. Beginning with the original definition of the literary *paratext*, introduced by Genette, the chapter explains how the term differs from the modern use in game paratext. The main point of difference between the two is the source of the paratext, where Genette originally gave authority to the original text as a condition for paratext. The chapter will argue that the “authority” over the text has changed over time and is less applicable in the modern context. Then the chapter will explore the three frameworks that define paratext in video games, starting with the most recent and most used game studies and then discussing previous definitions. The chapter will explain why the most recent definition is most suited to address the current research and how participatory culture comes into play within this definition. After exploring the definitions, the chapter will move to exploring paratextual applications in the early stages of Gaming culture, to be able to compare them later in the chapter to new practices. Then, the chapter will move to the modern use of game paratext in Saudi Arabia that includes two prominent practices: (1) game streaming and (2) competitive gaming. The chapter will introduce research supporting the paratextual dimensions of these practices and the applications of these on Saudi users. Finally, the chapter will compare paratext in early gaming in Saudi to newer ones, further linking it to the importance of establishing a timeline and to observing the effect of game paratext on the representation of Saudi Arabs in video games.

Paratext in Video Games

Exploring the practices within the paratextual content of video games is not a new concept in game studies. The concept of associating content created by third parties can be traced back to 1997. In “Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature,” Aarseth states, “Common unofficial paratext is the ‘walkthrou’ a step-by-step recipe that contains the solutions” (Aarseth, 1997). And while competitive gaming is a topic that might not be new in video games, the association between the paratext and competitive gaming has gained much attention in recent years. The underlying principles and practices of video games have always encouraged competition amongst players: from high-score screens to game achievement trophies. However, in terms of video game scholarship, the phenomenon was brought again to light with the expansion of social media. Streaming a competitive eSport event, for example, was found to be a multi-layered topic that demanded much attention to the associated practices, including the shared video recording, the commentary, the different variations of game-play type (professional-armature) and the type of commentary. Furthermore, game streaming itself includes a variation in purposes: (walkthrough, review, eSport events, etc.). Although being an entity of their own, these concepts, were found to be a “threshold” for a separate text/content. This makes it important to re-examine the Genette’s original definition of paratext as a threshold for literary text and to consider these new forms of thresholds in a relatively new medium.

Redefining Paratext for the Game Medium

There are two reasons for discussing the definition of paratext in video games prior to examining its role in the acculturation process. The first is that there is no consensus in the field of game studies regarding the definition of game paratext. As will be demonstrated, there are three main definitions of paratext in game studies in addition to the original definition. The selection of one of these three perspectives requires an explanation of why and how it works within the sphere of convergence culture. The second reason is the issue of paratext created by individuals besides the author. Within the framework of "paratext," this was a prerequisite for anything to be regarded as "paratext." This chapter will demonstrate that this is no longer the case, which will lead the reader to explore paratextual content created by the Saudi gaming community and other various Saudi entities for the purpose of establishing a cultural exchange, which is the core of this study.

In a review of the topic, Švelch elaborated on the importance of paratext as a conceptual focal point in game studies in recent years. In the 2010s, there was an intense exploration of the concept, with approximately 300 engagements in academic works on game studies. It should be noted that these engagements are more in line with Consalvo's expanded definition, rather than Genette's initial definition of 1982 (Švelch, 2020). This observation demonstrates how appropriating the concept, from its original textual association to a more expanded definition, helped accommodate the character of the medium. Furthermore, while this research maintains a methodology that observes video games through the scope of convergence culture in relationship to video games, an expanded conceptualization of paratext has been used elsewhere in a similar manner within the creative industry. Švelch highlights this in Lunenfeld's observation of the importance of paratext in the idea of decentralization of cultural industries (Švelch, 2020). Lunenfeld stated, "the backstory--the information about how a narrative object comes into being--is fast becoming almost as important as that object itself. For a vast percentage of new media titles, backstories are probably more interesting, in fact, than the narratives themselves" (Lunenfeld, 1999, p. 14). In this research, Consalvo's 2007 definition, as well as work that built on it, will be used as a framework to address paratext in Saudi Arabia. In addition to being the most common framework in research on the topic between 2010 to 2020 (Švelch, 2020), Consalvo's framework shares common ground with participatory culture on key issues. However, in order to differentiate and clarify the use of the terminology in this research, a brief overview of different definitions of paratext used in the field of game studies will be given, which includes four major frameworks. In his review, Švelch summarized the stages of paratextuality in video games. The evolution of the term usage is contained within three major frameworks: the original definition, the expanded definition, and the reduced definition (Švelch, 2020). A fourth framework was provided by Dunne in *Contemporary Research on Intertextuality in Video Games* (Duret & Pons, 2016a).

The Original Definition

In the original definition, paratextuality is the relationship between the *para*, which means *besides*, and the text. It is a study of the elements that surround the text. It includes book titles and authors' name, covers, editor introduction, footnotes, illustrations, acknowledgements, and similar elements that are not considered a part of the original text. It also includes print conventions, including *peritext* and *epitext*, that act as a medium that introduces the reader to the text. "Titles and subtitles, pseudonyms, forewords, dedications, epigraphs, prefaces, intertitles, notes, epilogues, and afterwords" are all considered paratext (Mirenayat & Soofastaei, 2015, p. 534). In its simplest form, paratext is a threshold to the text. Paratext in its original form is defined by its textual nature by Genette: "Thus the paratext is for us the means by which a text makes a book of itself and proposes itself as such to its readers, and more generally to the public." It is most importantly defined as a "threshold" that gives the choice for the people to proceed to the text or turn back. This makes this area "an undecided zone between the inside and the outside" (Genette & Maclean, 1991a, pp. 262-262). The origins of the concept were brought to light by Genette during the early 1980s as a part of his work on categorising textual works in *Textual Transcendence*. *Textual Transcendence*'s typology includes intertextuality, meta textuality, hypertextuality, archtextuality and paratextuality (Mirenayat & Soofastaei, 2015). However, Genette emphasises the notion of the non-exclusivity of these elements in one text. This means that within one text, an element could be given one or more label of textual transcendence typology (Švelch, 2020). However, the original definition of paratextuality, also, sets distinctive parameters in comparison to other types of transtextuality: "The pragmatic status of a paratextual element is defined by the characteristics of its communicatory instance or situation: nature of the addresser, of the addressee, degree of authority and responsibility of the first, illocutionary force of his message, and probably some others which have escaped me" (Genette & Maclean, 1991a, p. 266). In other words, authorship is a requirement for an element to be considered paratext. The authorship in this case includes the original author, editor, publisher, or someone that assumes responsibility for the original text. This issue will be discussed in the expanded definition of paratext. Genette uses the term *addresser* in this case. Genette defines the addresser of a paratextual "by putative attribution and by assumed responsibility" and not necessarily the person who wrote it. This means it could be the author or the publisher or the editor if the cover is not signed by the author (Genette & Maclean, 1991a). This requirement is the major difference between Genette's original definition and the expanded definition that came after. It is important to note that Genette did not limit the paratext to textual content. On the contrary, Genette identified various similar substances that can be considered as paratext. Illustration, typography and factual can all be considered paratext. However, Genette was very clear on the authorship of paratext, which presents a predicament to the study of the game medium. The condition of something to be considered as paratext is having the author or one of his associates accept responsibility for the material, or a degree of responsibility. This condition, although relaxed by works in modern game studies, was essential to distinguish between metatextual and paratextual in literary studies. The difference between paratextual and metatextual according to Genette, is that paratextual is limited to elements created by the original author or any of the collective surrounding

the production. The metatextual, on the other hand, is a collection of external commentary. Through this distinction, there is no conflict between the authors and the producers (Švelch, 2020).

Under Genette's original conceptualisation of paratext, there are two main categories of elements: peritext and epitext. Peritext are the elements surrounding the text and conjoined with and related directly to it. They are also called "joined paratextual" elements. There are specific characteristics of peritext elements, and these include the dependency of text on these elements. They explain and give a clear description of the text. It is comprised of book titles, chapter titles, prefaces, epigraph notes and subtitles, and they are in general part of the meaning. The other category is epitext. They are elements that are associated with the main text indirectly. However, these elements are separated from the text. They act as an intermediary for communication, advertisement, or possible critique of the original text. According to Genette, this usually includes newspaper articles, publication and signing events, author interviews, cover design advertisements, and brochures (Mirenayat & Soofastaei, 2015). The main difference between these two subsets is spatiality: "The epitext is any paratextual element not materially appended." (p. 277) In general, peritext are the paratextual elements that are materially (physically) connected to the book, while epitext are not. However, there is an emphasis on the link between epitext and the original text. This connection could be an indirect connection to the author, the editor, or the publishing company (Duret & Pons, 2016a). The distinction between the two categories is important as it relates to Dunne's proposed ludologist paratext, which will be discussed later after addressing the expanded definition.

The Expanded Definition

Importing the concept into video game studies was initially done by Consalvo and Jones (Švelch, 2020). One of the issues with Genette's original conceptualisation of paratext is its dependency on the textual nature of the original medium. However, in other various media platforms, some elements are indeed considered a "threshold" to the text. These elements in Genette's description act as a medium world that invites someone from outside of the text to the inside world of the text. Yet, the strict conditions of text responsibility (authorship) that Genette sets are more in line with the traditional mediums. Giving consideration to the nature of the participatory culture associated with game culture, this might be a challenging issue to resolve. Another condition Genette sets for paratexts is that they should not attract more attention than the text itself. Švelch noted that this explicitly dismissed the cultural effect of the paratextual elements. The conflict here is clarified by movie/game trailers as they are considered by description a threshold to the original text, making it paratext by definition. However, the cultural importance of trailers "offer a self-contained aesthetic and entertainment value" (Švelch, 2020, p. n.a.). In addition, Egliston highlighted the limitation of Genette's original definition due to its origins. According to Egliston, since paratextuality was conceived to address print media, there is an expected limitation in "adequately plotting the interface between game play and observatory

media.” Therefore, works like Consalvo’s on paratext use a broad definition of intertextuality to include the epitext, enabling it to explore an array of paratextual material in video games (Egliston, 2016).

Chronologically speaking, an expanded definition of the paratextual has its origins before Consalvo, and the expanded definition of paratext is majorly attributed to early works of Aarseth. In the early stages, paratext in video games was used to describe works of game magazines, walkthroughs and player commentary (Aarseth, 1997). At the very beginning, this conflicted with Genette’s original framework due to the issue of authorship. According to Genette’s original definition, game magazines and similar materials are considered more metatextual. Furthermore, the expanded definition includes “various hypertextual artifacts” such as “alternate reality games, tie-in novels, or web series.” According to Švelch (2020), the expanded definition of paratextual is similar to the term *cultural epiphenomena*, which is used in screen studies to refer to material connected to onscreen material yet different. Examples of cultural epiphenomena are letters from fans, movie reviews, movie posters, movie trailers, and movie reviews. Recently, the term *paratextual* is also used to address cultural epiphenomena in screen studies.

The association between the expanded definition of paratext convergence practices has seen much approval, especially in more recent scholarly publications. Much of this is connected with Lunenfeld’s re-examination of the importance of paratext to digital media. Schmalzer and Guay-Bélanger affirmed Lunenfeld’s emphasis on this observation in terms of digital media. Lunenfeld stated that distinguishing text from paratext was especially difficult in digital media (Schmalzer, 2020; Guay-Bélanger, 2021). As previously examined in Švelch’s review, the expanded definition gained more academic engagement in game studies than Genette’s original. By relaxing the original limitations of authorship (addresser), scholars were able to address paratextual issues on decentralised content (Lunenfeld, 1999) and explore worlds through the scope of convergence culture and especially in transmedia storytelling. The expanded form of paratext suggested by Lunenfeld, of adapting “Genette’s paratext to include broader elements of the experience and production of media and the creative labor of readers, watchers and players,” has been supported by scholars in various disciplines (Gardner & Tanenbaum, 2021). In “Playing as a Mutant in a Virtual World: Understanding Overlapping Story Worlds in Popular Culture Video Games,” Rowsell et al. drew attention to how paratext helped learners negotiate overlapping worlds in a story told over multiple worlds. Through observing the transmediated story of X-men, the connection could be established between transmedia storytelling and paratextual practices. They found that there was an expected transforming associated with such practices in order to reach a gaming text form. This expansion could be viewed as development in storytelling amongst gamers (Rowsell et al., 2014). Another demonstration of how paratext is used to establish new worlds with new arcs is creating alternative worlds. One of the radical approaches seen in many comic book collections is the practice of creating alternative versions of worlds. This is used in addition to reboots and crossovers. This is done to move the character into a new world. The paratext in this case is important as it is used to

explain the context of the comic book *Parallel Earth*, where everyone is a zombie or a darker version of themselves (Mellier, 2017). Di Filippo considered all information surrounding the game, including advertisements, the detailed information on the official site, the information printed on the game packaging and the login screen in MMRPG games a part of the paratext which could be used as “locally realized resources.” The information about the original creator of famous non-game works (such as novels) can help establish a continuity between the game and the work which the game was based on (Di Filippo, 2018).

The Reduced Definition

There is a third proposed, and more limited, version of paratextuality. The definition was suggested by Wolf and has been used in a few works in the field. The usage is considered a niche in the field of game studies. Wolf limits paratext to Genette’s original definition, which is a subcategory of verbal pretext. According to Wolf, only game intros and menus are considered paratext. The argument behinds Wolf’s proposed definition is connected to Genette’s notes on “factual paratext” (Švelch, 2020). By factual pretext, Genette considered any material (textual or otherwise) that bears an influence of commentary or reception on the public by its mere existence. “But one must bear in mind the paratextual value which can belong to other types of expression: iconic (the illustrations), material (everything which proceeds, for example, from the sometimes very significant typographical choices made in the composition of a book), or purely factual. I call factual that paratext which consists, not in an explicit message (verbal or other), but in a fact whose mere existence, if it is known to the public, makes some commentary on the text and bears on its reception” (Genette & Maclean, 1991a, p. 265).

Dunne’s Proposed Ludologist Paratext

A fourth framework, not mentioned by Švelch in the 2020 review, is one proposed by Dunne (2016). However, Švelch did discuss it in “‘Footage Not Representative’: Redefining Paratextuality for the Analysis of Official Communication in the Video Game Industry” (Švelch, 2016). The framework seems to build on the reduced definition by Wolf. However, it takes into consideration the spatiality and temporality observed by Genette’s original definition. This definition is more in line with game design, with little transmedia application. Dunne proposed an expanded version of paratext. The framework considered Genette’s original framework and the role of spatiality in distinguishing between peritext and epitext. Dunne proposed not limiting the system running the game but broadening the definition to encompass the notion of game play and narrative. Using a spatial approach, these elements can be divided into three subcategories, as discussed below: in-game paratext, in-system paratext and in-world paratext. These could be linked to the peritext and epitext classifications of the original definition by Genette (page. 126).

In-Game Paratext

In-game paratext is the appended text in the game, which informs the player. It occurs while the player is playing the game. According to Dunne, these elements include “menus, system mechanics, company promotional videos, commentaries, loading bars” in addition to in-game head up display (HUD) and user interface. These elements are not considered “gameplay” nor “narrative.” These elements offer support to “help the overall feel and actual performance of the game.” According to this definition, this is the most common and most identifiable paratextual elements in a game.

In-system Paratext

In-system paratext is any internal event that informs the player within the system. It is a requirement to play the game and necessary for the text. This includes accessing and executing files and commands, installing games, searching the internet or altering the hardware of the system. Dunne defines it as the machine space between the player and game text. It mostly involves the technical procedures that enable the player to access the game.

In-World Paratext

In-world paratext is the tangible elements within the real world that surround the player. These elements inform the player on a physical level. These include the game disk, manuals, packaging, and paraphernalia and figurines. This was more common before digital distribution became the industry standard (Duret & Pons, 2016b).

There are limitations to Dunne’s redefined framework, which might challenge the use of it in this research. The main conflicting issue with this research, and many others, is that it does not approach the paratext of games in terms of practices outside the actual game. Online gameplay and game streaming are two major issues which act as paratext, yet they do not fall under any category. As game culture develops alongside technologies, paratextual content expands with it. Gaming trends and new decentralised practices, which are considered a threshold to gamers to access the game, are continually emerging. In addition, this framework excludes “promotional events,” which were specifically stated in Genette’s original conceptualisation and Consalvo’s expanded definition. Both the original and expanded definitions are very clear on the flexibility on typology of paratext, while it is difficult to list them under any of Dunne’s typology. In general, the issue with Dunne’s framework is the lack of flexibility to accommodate decentralised game content. This is especially a challenge as this research observes game culture in Saudi and the consequences of participatory culture within this community. Finally, as Dunne noted, there is a great deal of overlapping between the subcategories of this definition of paratext. The overlapping poses a challenge to presenting an accurate initial definition. In many games in-game paratextual content could extend to encompass in-world content (Duret & Pons, 2016b), for example, when developers break the fourth wall and associate hardware with gameplay, as done in Metal Gear Solid game’s *Psycho Mantis*’s controller. Moreover, new technologies are continuously introduced, which blurs the barriers between these subcategories. Augmented reality, Virtual reality, Nintendo’s “amiibo” character accessories, which

are part of the game and also hardware, raise a challenge for this proposed framework.

Paratext Framework	Noted Works	Key features
Original Definition (Centralised)	Gerard Genette	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Used in 30% of Game Studies academic texts published between 1997 and 2019. (Švelch, 2020) - Strict consideration to Authorship: Addresser is the original author, editor, publishing company, or someone who assumes responsibility to the text. - Two Subcategories: Peritext “Connected Paratext” (e.g., book cover, book title, notes, preface, publisher introduction, editor introduction, etc.) and Epitext “Disconnected Paratext” (e.g., Promotional Posters, Promotional events, advertisements, brochures, pamphlets, etc.) - Clear indication on variety in typology: textual, iconic (e.g., illustration), material (e.g., significant typographical choices influencing the composition of the book) or Factual (i.e., something verbal or otherwise “whose mere existence, if it is known to the public, makes some commentary on the text and bears on its reception” (p. 261)
Expanded Definition (Decentralised)	Mia Consalvo Peter Lunenfeld Jan Švelch Burwell and Miller Ben Egliston (and the majority of game study published work since 1997)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Used in 70% of Game Studies academic texts published between 1997 and 2019. (Švelch, 2020) - Does not require authorship (Genette’s addresser requirement). - It includes: Game Industry Original Production, Game Industry Peripheral Production, and User/Gamer Production/Input. - There is continuous change and influence between sectors of paratext, causing an expansion of paratextual space. - It includes: Game magazines (reviews and news), strategy guides, cheat codes/devices, Online media production (streaming, social interaction), game tournaments,
Reduced Definition (centralised)	Werner Wolf David Jara Annika Rockenberger	Limited to game introduction, menus, subtitles, game tutorials.

Ludic Definition (Mostly centralised)	Daniel Dunne (edit: Christophe Duret & Christian-Marie Pons)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Builds on the concepts of spatiality and temporality observed in Genette's work. - It is limited to three parts: In-game paratext, In-system paratext and in-world paratext. - In-game paratext: in-game menus, subtitles, in-game tutorials and the in-game instruction set that tells the gamer how to use the game "access the text." - In-system Paratext: all operating system operations that are required to run the game: copying files, installing game, modifying the system to run the game. - In-world Paratext: material elements that surround the gamer or attached to the game: game packaging: packaging, paraphernalia and figurines.
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Table 5.1: Definitions of Paratext in video games according to major works.

Game Paratextuality in Saudi Arabia

As discussed earlier, paratext and changes in game practice are a major focal point in Consalvo's proposed paratext framework (Švelch, 2020). This carries much of Genette's original definition of paratext as the term carried a conceptualisation of a middle ground between the text and the outside world (Genette & Maclean, 1991a). Consalvo called this space an "airlock" space, and discussed the ongoing practices involved in paratextual industries, and change in gaming practices in users (Consalvo, 2007). As video gaming culture was ushered into Saudi, even with the limitations of gaming at the time, video game companies managed to use paratext to market their gaming products. Furthermore, gamers' practices and paratextual engagements seemed to offer a great deal of information, where there was an opportunity to examine how Saudi gamers navigated between cultural issues on both the local and gaming side. Observing the paratext of gaming in each generation, mentioned in previous chapter, provides an insight and indicators to the nature of the gaming culture of that period. This includes three major contributors to game paratext in Saudi Arabia:

1. Gaming industry manufacturers (or their representatives and partners) in Saudi Arabia as well as governmental bodies that control media policy.
2. The gaming referral industry.
3. The paratextual interaction of Saudi gamers with these two industries.

The following section will elaborate on how paratext examination carries much importance in understanding the gaming culture in Saudi Arabia. Consalvo's conceptualisation of paratext in video games observes many principles. Firstly, game paratext is an expanding space. This expansion is a result of the involved parties: original developers, paratextual industries and the gaming communities. Secondly, this involvement includes an interaction between these parties, which does not mean that their interests are necessarily shared. Thirdly, there is an association between user/gamer pleasure and the expansion of paratextual industry. Fourthly, and most importantly, game paratext in video games adheres to Lunenfeld's (1999) observation on paratext in new media. Taking that into consideration, the framework by Consalvo shares a great deal of common ground with aspects of convergence, mainly participatory culture, and transmedia storytelling. The following examination demonstrates how paratext could be used to understand the game global acculturation period (1980s) of Saudi Arabia and how paratext is still expanding and shaping norms in the gaming community in Saudi Arabia.

Game Paratext in Saudi Arabia During the Early Stages of Gaming (1980s to Early 1990s)

During this early stage of gaming in Saudi Arabia, the international game industry, such as Nintendo, Sega and Atari, had a certain presence through direct retail with no apparent marketing strategy (*Al-Moatin* Newspaper, 2018; also see Figure 3.2 in Chapter 4). However, much of the progress in this area can be attributed to Al Alamiah and their Sakhr platform with Arabic support. As Al Alamiah started marketing their Sakhr gaming console, there was a clear message associated

with their products. The message was gaming on Sakhr devices was an opportunity for education.⁵⁰ As disclosed to the researchers by the head of the educational division of Al Alamiah at the time, Riyadh Al Sharikh, “education through game entertainment”⁵¹ was the mandate for the department. “Let them learn while they have fun” was the marketing slogan at the time. This slogan can be observed all through the company strategy. On an epitextual level, the company’s transmedia campaigns at the time demonstrated a commitment to this principle. In 1985, a Sakhr television advertisement, stated in the style of an infomercial, “... for the free times, Sakhr software, entertains and educates.” During the airing of Al Manahil, a localised version of The Electric Company educational programme, a segment is shown of a child going to an Al Alamiah computer educational centre. The segment shows the child playing an educational video game on Sakhr (Abu Shairah et al., 1987). But most importantly and more clearly is the peritextual content. The packaging of the gaming minicomputer states “Educational Computer” in bold letters on some of their products. The AX990 is one of these models. Meanwhile, religious scholars at the time were voicing strict opinions against wasting time with non-beneficial play. The condition for an activity to be accepted as permissible was it having a benefit. For example, card games, and surprisingly chess, were either forbidden or unfavoured (IbnBazz, 1992), while sports and educational games were acceptable (IbnBazz et al., 2003). However, prominent Islamic scholars voiced their strong support for computers with educational possibilities (IbnOthaimeen, 1997). Thus, there was a common paratext between the local culture and the newly introduced “media.”

Another additional benefit to studying the paratext of the period, is to appreciate the sense of identity at the time. Sakhr demonstrated an appeal to the sense of nationalism at the time. This also can be observed in both the peritext and epitext of the paratextual content. On a peritextual level, the packaging demonstrates a consistent Islamic Art decoration. In addition, there is special attention given to fonts used on the packaging. Kufi and Diwani fonts were common on packing, as they carry historical connotations. Depending on the gaming software, the cover would usually exhibit a type of illustration with 8th century styling. Identity issues become clearer in epitextual content. The company had an ongoing approach to associate their product with the Arab identity. Beyond the selection of their software titles, which were named after historical Arab scholars, the company’s advertisement campaigns continued to mention Arab and Arabic in most of their ads. During one of their television advertisements, a picture of a white Caucasian child appears and the announcement “like those of others, we need to prepare our children for the best.” The point of interest in advertisement is the word “others.” Another printed advertisement displays a Sakhr computer and the title “The Arab Family Computer.” In general, there is an indication that family and nationalism are part of the marketing strategy. This brings about the importance of examining this observation through the lens of transmedia storytelling.

⁵⁰ See Chapter 4.

⁵¹ See appendix for full interview.

Early Generation Game Paratext and Signs of Transmedia Storytelling

As examined in Chapter 4, the early generation saw large paratextual exposure through advertisements in local newspapers. The three distinguishing elements of video game advertisements in Saudi newspapers are (1) affordability (2) technical advancement and (3) a potential for learning. However, the strategy seen in game paratext was not limited to the printed press. The references to game culture in other media collected of the same era can potentially be used as supporting material for early signs of convergence. The commonality of marketing strategies between advertisements in the press and other media forms could be considered the introduction (the threshold) of video games in Saudi Arabia through transmedia storytelling. Aired on episode 30 of *Al-Manahil*, a localised Arab remake of the children's show, *The Electric Company* (1917) (Elcinema.com, 2020), was a segment on a child visiting a Sakhr centre and playing video games on a Sakhr computer. That was after Al Alamiah aired their TV advertisements showcasing their new home computing system in 1985 (Alammay, 2018). The common message associated with these platforms was "you can game and learn." However, the appeal of video games seems to surpass these games themselves. Saudi PepsiCo aired their Shani, a berry flavoured soft drink, advertisement featuring a child playing a video game which features a character searching for a treasure. The character passes various levels reaching a treasure, which was a chest full of cans of Shani (Ahmed, 2012) (see Figure 5.1).

Supporting the importance of establishing a timeline introduced in Chapter 4, the practical application of this observation is very relevant to the scholarship around Arab representation in video games. As presented by Courmont and Clément (2014a) and Clément (2019), software pricing was a primary challenge to the game industry in the region, as reported by Afkar Media's CEO. However, piracy and copyright violations were not the only challenge that many Arab developers faced. The biggest challenge during this time could be connecting with the targeted audience. As per Jenkins theory on transmedia storytelling, audiences perceive these worlds across multiple mediums. Far from cross-media franchises, transmedia storytelling explains how a story is spread across multiple mediums, which together build a world/universe that has a possibility for expansion from original authors and fans. These stories could share the same universe, yet they stand independent in their storyline (Schiller, 2018). A case in point, the success of Sakhr Al Alamiyah, in the 1980s, could be attributed to this phenomenon. Al Alamiyah was not only a game designer. The message in the television and newspaper advertisement was buying this product gives the user access to the world of computers (source: TV advertisement, and interview with [Riyadh Al Sharekh]). This was echoed by the CEO, who repeatedly stated that the message was ushering Arabs towards technology. The story was expanded through printed instructional manuals, programming books, and most importantly, through sharing non-Arab content. In other words, the company did not initiate a new Arab gamer world but extended and existed in a world already established by an international community. As post-2000 computer companies were focused on building a new world where an Arab character is central, Al Alamiah extended a technological world established by Western and Japanese companies to let Arabs share this global of a sense of belonging. This did not

come with any compromise, as the company continually published games and software for the Arab user with very strong cultural themes. Thus, another possible argument is that although copyright issues were a difficulty, Arab video game developers' major challenge during this era was not being able to connect to their audience through targeting and expanding the Arab gamer's existing game universes (see Figures 5.2 and 5.3).



Figure 5.1: Shani advertisement, late 1980s



Figure 5.2 Sakhr TV advertisement: “The daily challenges and preparing our children to be like others require they rapidly enter the age of computer. Now, this is possible with MSX Sakhr, with one touch you can change it from English to Arabic. The whole family will enjoy a great number of intellectual and educational software. Sakhr a torch above a high mountain (part of a pre-Islamic poem verse)” (Sakhr, 1985).



Figure 5.3 Al Manahil, Episode 30 (Abu Shairah et al., 1987). A child visits a computer educational centre and uses Sakhr Computer and Sakhr Software/Game Ibn Sina II.

Saudi Game Paratext in Later 1990s and Early 2000s

By the 1990s, as Saudi Arabia and GCC nations came out of the Gulf war, the isolationist mindset, common in nationalist movements of the region (Ralph & Coury, 2017), was gradually being counteracted with globalism (Hinnebusch & Hinnebusch, 2018). The social discourse on entertainment in general and video games witnessed a change. The words *leisure* and *entertainment* seemed to elicit a more lenient reaction. This is observed through the registered fatwas. Amongst Islamic scholars there seemed to be a general acceptance to relax the rules because of the “benefit” of leisure activities. As for video games, there was a noticeable addition of details in fatwas pertaining to the topic. Video game fatwas in general carried more details on game content. Violence, idols, gambling, and content of a sexual nature were considered anti-Islamic, and video games were required to be free of such material (Al-Munajjid, 1999). This was a major change in the paratextual interaction between cultural values and video games. Also, the epitextual content discussion moved away from education and knowledge to entertainment, and censorship.

However, the paratextual content witnessed a noticeable expansion. Print publication is one of the major sectors to engage with video games. As detailed in Chapter 4, game titles and game content became a matter of discussion in national newspapers. Specialised print magazines began to emerge, dedicated purely to paratextual content, with reviews, advertisement, and games news. Most importantly, is the reaction of parties engaged directly with the video game industry to this paratext. There was a selective approach where companies made strategic selections of epitextual content to engage with. This approach might have been what enabled companies to have an advantage over competitors. Al Faisaliah, Sony’s exclusive dealer in Saudi Arabia, is one example of companies that implemented this approach. Inviting foreign speakers, such as Tim Stokes, sales and marketing director of PlayStation’s division at Sony Gulf (True Gaming, 2008), as company

representative in console launch ceremonies, spoke to the sense of global entertainment that the company was trying to establish. In addition, synchronising launch dates in Saudi Arabia in proximity to the global market gave the impression that PlayStation users were a part of a global community.

In terms of paratextuality in Saudi gamers' practices during this period, mod-chips came into existence with the introduction of the first-generation PlayStation. This is most important to paratext because it is directly connected to Consalvo's example on the connection between the game peripheral industry, paratext and the gaming community. As the paratextual content is shared between the game industry leaders, the game peripheral industry, and the users, this space is constantly expanding. Consalvo noted that this expansion includes an increase of content and influence on practices by both gamers and the industries surrounding games. An example of these phenomena is what resulted from policies of "region lockout." As Consalvo elaborated, some companies might have followed a region-specific release which limited games to some regions only. In other instances, companies did not follow a sim-ship strategy (simultaneous-shipment), where American and European gamers must wait for their local regional releases. This created a demand for a workaround, which was voiced by gamers. Mod-chips created by the peripheral industry fulfil some of this demand. This fulfilment insighted a reaction and change of policy and practices in some industrial and governmental policy. This, further, created paratextual content that took a shape of its own (Consalvo, 2007). A similar instance could be observed in Saudi Arabia during the late 1990s and early 2000s, when the government was dealing with software piracy and international law. The discussion surrounding the technical specifications of devices and mod-chips were both in national newspapers and in governmental chambers of commerce (*Al Jazeera Newspaper*, 2003a). At the time, such discussion seemed to neglect the important paratextual context. The question of what drove this "need," which the peripheral industry market understood and rushed to meet, seemed to evade policy makers. Such questions could have helped combat video game and software piracy.

Print Magazines and the Paratextual Industry

Another paratextual occurrence that demonstrates the expansion of the paratextual content in Saudi Arabia at the time was the introduction of Saudi video game magazines print, strategy guides and cheat codes magazines for *Game Shark* in Saudi Arabia. Game magazines as paratext tell the user how to access the text. Through pedagogical functions, they give instructions in "what games to play," "How to play the game" and what is considered "cool" in the game world. Game magazines instruct players on an ideological level to fit an "ideal gamer" that has money to spend on gaming and that keeps up and does not "miss out" on historical landmarks of gaming (Consalvo, 2007). During this period, Saudi Game magazines (see Figures 3.4 and 3.5 in Chapter 4) regularly published cheat codes. This is another example of how these paratextual industries expand based on each other. In this case, it is the interaction between cheat devices (*Game Sharks* and *Genies*) and the print industry. As established by Consalvo, both the peripheral industry and

strategy guides are considered paratext. As the gamer reads guides on how to obtain the additional in-game achievements, it alters the game practice to share and reshare ways to obtain these achievements with other users. An association is with what Consalvo calls, “Pleasure of the experience.” The concept of game cheating using various methods is strongly associated with maximising “pleasure of the experience. This pushed the demand for game cheating devices and cheating peripherals. However, some users may not explicitly state that maximising pleasure is the reason for cheating; some players would state that the reason behind it is to “obtain everything, uncover secrets, or explore the game freely and more easily,” or doing it “for the novelty” (Consalvo, 2007, p. 99). Magazines such as *Muhatarif Alab Al Computer* (PC Gamer Pro) and others were print magazines written and published by local Saudis. The publications were monthly gaming news accompanied with indexes for separate cheat and strategy guides. The type of content is paratext for international game releases. There are two highlighted aspects in these publications that provide a strong indication of the change of paratext of games from education and learning common in the 80s to amusement and pleasure in the 90s in Saudi Arabia. The other aspect is the shift from local to global interest of video games.

Game Festivals and Paratextual Influences

Another observation on the market in this period is the attention to the importance of gaming events. Although it began as having a very corporate centralised nature, as seen in press releases, participatory culture gradually emerged as a generic theme of these events, taking the form of modern gaming conventions. Al Faisaliah’s PlayStation 2 event might have been one of the earliest conventions in Saudi Arabia (True Gaming, 2008). Consalvo emphasised that paratext and the game peripheral industries surrounding video games function in the same manner (Švelch, 2020). The game peripheral industry includes gaming magazines, walkthroughs and strategy guides, piracy mod-chip, international game exchange and other companies. In addition, and “the largest loudest, over-the-top of paratext” of the gaming world could be E3. These industries and conventions influence and help form the modern understanding of video games. However, Consalvo pointed out that these changes received some push back from the game industry leaders or from the gaming community. It could be argued that the period between late 90s and early 2000s was the early stages of gamers global acculturation in Saudi Arabia. This highlights the necessity of examining paratext in the process of global acculturation. This will be examined and discussed in a chapter of its own, “Global Acculturation.” However, the following are the most noted gaming conventions in Saudi Arabia in recent years.

Insomnia Saudi

Organized by Insomnia Global. The company organizes some of the festivals in the region. The festival is endorsed by the Saudi entertainment authority. The festival features various tournaments in various games (Koujan, 2019). The popularity of this festival and the variety of content adds to the global appeal and draws more participants with varied interests: cosplay, Saudi

gamers, Saudi anime/manga buffs, Saudi comic enthusiasts and popular movie/TV audience (Tashkent, 2019).

Gamers' Day

Sony's Gamers' Day, which debuted in 2008, is one of the oldest gaming conventions in Saudi Arabia, (True Gaming, 2008). What started as enthusiast contributions, ended up with great support and sponsorship from Saudi's biggest names in the private sector: SAFIES, PlayStation Saudi, Modern Electronics (Subsidiary of Al Faisaliah Group: Sony's Exclusive partner in Saudi Arabia), Careem (an investment venue of STC: Saudi Telecom Company) and Integrated Telecom (a part of Mawarid Holding Group of Companies) (Gamers' Day Website, 2019). During the observational field study in 2019, I noticed some female attendees and female employees at this convention. A few of them expressed openness to share while the majority asked to be excused. Some of them walked away. This observation underlines the dire need to conduct these types of studies by capable female Saudi academics.

Gamers' Con

Gamers' Con festivals have been held in various cities (Eastern Region and Jeddah), and the festival featured various activities, including game tournaments (*Tekken*, *Overwatch*, etc.). It also features various Western and Arab celebrities. The festival is organized by *TrueGaming* online computer magazine (GamersconSa, 2019). In addition, there is notable participation of international game developer companies, such as Bandai Namco (Hameed, 2018).

Post-2010 Game Paratext in Saudi Arabia

Gaming paratext after 2010 gained noticeable attention in terms of definition as well as research attention. The arrival of online gaming and social media seemed to give the topic an additional dimension in which to examine the concept. The two aspects that concern this research are (1) gameplay streaming and (2) eSport popularization. The two practices have different approaches to the same concept: competitive gaming. Video streaming exhibits decentralized media characteristics while eSport follows a centralised approach supported by organizations with governmental affiliation. This is especially important as it demonstrates the governmental efforts to centralise paratextual content through policy. The president of the Saudi Arabian Federation of Electronic and Intellectual Sports (SAFEIS), Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Sultan explained that the government was providing a chance for the private sector to engage with this activity through governmental partnership programs. The government subsidises tournaments and organizes events through governmentally sponsored public-private partnership (PPP) (Al Arabiya, 2019).

Game Streaming and Game Paratext

Video game streaming, such as Twitch and YouTube Game Streaming, is a topic approached under the scope of paratext in various research, as Švelch's review demonstrated. For example, Egliston used a quantitative methodological approach to evaluate the interface between gameplay between amateur and professional gamers and the observer media surrounding it. This documented interaction between text, players, and gameplay in both amateur and professional. The researcher found that professional play was "the most pragmatic way to index paratext" due to its broadcast on Twitch or other platforms. Thus, there is a strong association and blending between tournament game play and the idea of paratext. Considering the research findings, the researcher suggests that transtextuality in eSports and competitive video games provide evidence to move game study research towards considering video games as transmedia objects of interest. In addition, Egliston emphasised that the distinction between labour and leisure in gaming was becoming more of blurred, as well as the line between amateur and professional gaming. In other words, the transtextual systems in competitive games and eSports contributed to changing the overall experience of game and play and the understanding of the underlaying concepts (Egliston, 2016). On the linguistic and rhetorical level, Burwell and Miller address the emerging practices associated with game streaming on YouTube. In the early days of gameplay streaming, which was considered an emerging form of video games practice, known at the time as LP (let's play games), the researchers investigated the possibility of exploring this practice through paratext. Burwell and Miller defined "let's play" as a hybrid of digital gaming and video, where gameplay is accompanied by commentary recorded by the player. The players then share their commentary to "promote, review, critique or satirize a game." In this case, paratext carries an importance as having pedagogical potential. Through this approach, Burwell and Miller explored the process of meaning-making within the games (Burwell & Miller, 2016). On the media creator side, applying the concept discussed by Burwell and Miller could uncover a great deal from observing the practices of Saudi game creators on YouTube and Twitch. Firstly, this could be used in examining the process of "meaning creation" and using game as a means to establish a relevant rhetoric. This is especially essential when observing content creators navigating the issue of "critical awareness that is required to produce and circulate appropriated game content." In addition, and most important to this research, is the awareness of the following issues: copyright and fair use in reusing media to create new content, the influence of social network policy on social issues affect media creator's hybrid culture and game title selection (Burwell & Miller, 2016, p. 122).

In comparison to the singular type explored by Burwell and Miller, "let's play," other types of streams could shed more light on the relationship between stream type and behaviour of streamer. Consequently, the concept of paratext could be explored further as a means of exploring behaviour. There is a considerable amount of empirical research on gratification and various elements of the game streams. One study is especially relevant to the context of work examining Arab representation in video games: "Content structure is king: An empirical study on gratifications, game genres and content type on Twitch." (Sjöblom et al., 2017) As demonstrated in the literature review, there is an

agreement on the number of studies citing Šisler's Digital Arab. Šisler considered the game genre as the main factor in the polarisation seen in video games depicting Arabs. Šisler attributed this observation to the ludic contract seen in "the majority of action games" (especially FPS games) as you have to kill the enemy to proceed to the next task. In comparison to the strategy games, ludic contact offers more options (Šisler, 2008) (Šisler, 2009b). However, Šisler pointed out that this was only from the developer's perspective, as it was difficult to obtain user information at the time (Šisler & Annenberg School for Communication, 2013). There is an opportunity to test the genre theory through the work of Sjöblom (and others). Sjöblom (and others) examined the relationship between game genre and viewer gratification on streaming platforms. Firstly, the research distinguished between "action games" and "highly competitive games: CCG and FPS." There is a strong association between the single-player experience common in action games and tension release. The positive influence on tension is due to two reasons. First, the ability given to the users to wonder with their minds in an open environment. Secondly, the production volume and the budget associated with these games is reasonably high. This results in the investment in cinema-like plotline, resulting in a rich spectating experience. Competitive games (GCC, FPS and MOBA) on the other hand, seem to cause the most stress due to the social aspect. The research found that spectatorship has a positive association with motivation (Sjöblom et al., 2017). In other words, the paratext of a video game simultaneously affected the experience at the same time. However, there should be consideration to the purpose of the stream. The purpose of the stream has a strong impact on the media created from a certain gameplay. Sjöblom categorized game streams according to purpose, giving them a typology different to that of game genres. Stream types were categorised into: competitive, let's play, causal, speedruns, talkshows, how-to-play, and game reviews:

1. Competitive games streams: these include all competitive games and eSport events.
2. Let's play streams: usual practice to introduce at the introduction of new game to the market. The streamer simulates the average gamer experience.
3. Casual: no specific goal, "relatively explorative," might be focused on vague topic around the stream.
4. Speedrun: trying to break a record in finishing the game in the shortest time. This challenge is self-imposed.
5. Talkshows: done in live streams. Usually, a discussion between the streamer and live audience/spectators. The discussion is not necessarily limited to the video game being streams. It could be a discussion about a general topic or a computer event.
6. How-to-play: it is a live stream strategy guide/walkthrough. It has as the nature of being instructive or demonstrative. The goal is to teach the audience an in-depth game play game strategy.
7. Reviews: a concise review or analysis of the certain game. The critical nature of it usually has a formal atmosphere. The streamer usually alerts the audience that this is a review either in the title or in the beginning of video stream. (Sjöblom et al., 2017)

Paratext and Video Game Streaming in Saudi Arabia

To give an idea of the nature of game streaming paratext in Saudi, an overview of streaming in Saudi is necessary. This brief compares the nature of video game streaming on Twitch Tv in terms of top-ranking streamers in Saudi, game titles, view/follower statistics and content choice. This will be followed by a comparison between notes taken between 20th February and 15th March 2019 from the most followed Saudi streamers on Twitch, and notes taken by Sjöblom in terms of remarks on the average game genre. Fortunately, there are websites that provide tracking and statistical information that could help with choosing the sample for this study. TwitchTracker.com is a website that provides information regarding *Twitch.tv* users. The significance of this site is that search criteria can be specified to include language, which can narrow the search scope to Arabic twitch broadcasters. Other criteria can be applied, such as the total followers, total views, all-time peak, follower growth, hours watched, viewership, rating and livestreams. The information provided by *Twitchtracker.com* include the titles of the most viewed games for each broadcaster, which could help the research to determine which titles to analyse. Other information includes the average statistics of the following: hours streamed, average viewers, peak viewers, hours watched, followers gained, views gained, views per hour for any given period of time as well as the total time of each broadcaster.

TWITCH LANGUAGES STATISTICS

ALL TRACKED CHANNELS

Show 10 entries Search:

Language	Tracked Channels	Live Channels	Live Viewers
Unknown	36,101	521	9,345
Arabic	8,781	201	4,130
Czech	13,975	167	3,929
Greek	5,215	137	2,145
Japanese	41,845	295	1,862
Slovak	3,649	29	1,646
Thai	12,271	59	1,313
Hungarian	13,658	63	862
Swedish	32,802	187	843
Finnish	14,079	93	760

1 2 3 4

LIVE CHANNELS AND VIEWERSHIP VOLUMES

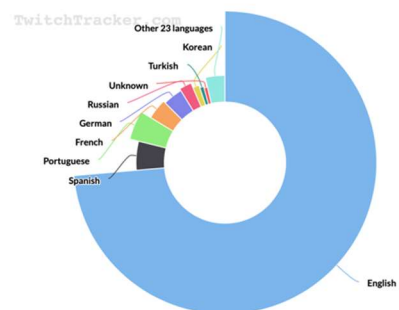


Figure 5.3: Twitch Language Statistics at sample collection time. (source: www.twitch.tv). Shows the top Twitch.tv streamers between 20th February and 15th March 2019.

No.	Streamer name	Number of Flowers	Mentions By Interview Participants
#1	RakanooLive	593K	5
#2	ixxYjYxxi	341K	
#3	BanderitaX	139K	12
#4	AbdulHD	123K	3
#5	FFearFFul	110K	
#6	DvLZStaTioN	94.0K	
#7	themythic_	84.0K	
#8	S4GAM3R	79.5K	
#9	BoDe_Gamer	76.4K	
#10	YasserM55	71.8K	

Table 5.4: The top Twitch.tv streamers between 20th February and 15th March 2019.

By average concurrent viewers for the last 7 days, on 13th March 2019 the most watched games globally were calculated, and this is shown in Table 5.5.

No	Title	Average viewers	Global share
#1	League of Legends	151K	12.168%
#2	Fortnite	136K	10.974%
#3	Apex Legends	97.8K	7.909%
#4	Just Chatting (Viewer Interaction)	77.8K	6.292%
#5	Dota 2	70.1K	5.666%
#6	Overwatch	40.8K	3.299%
#7	Grand Theft Auto V	31.0K	2.509%
#8	Devil May Cry 5	30.0K	2.424%
#9	Counter-Strike: Global Offensive	28.9K	2.335%
#10	PLAYERUNKNOWN'S BATTLEGROUNDS	28.6K	2.31%

Table 5.5: most watched games globally in the same period as table 5.4.

Comparing these titles to each from the top ten list of Arab streamers a deviation could be noticed. However, when setting parameters to arrange games by maximum views there was less deviation between Arab streamers and global trends. This most likely indicates that media generated from video games is subject to popularity within a certain region (see following Table 5.3).

Global	RAKANOLIVE	IXXYJYXXI	BANDERITAX	ABDULHD	FFEARFFUL
E3 2018	Fortnite	Fortnite	Fortnite	Arma 3	Fortnite
Fortnite	COD: BO4	COD: BO4	Beat Saber	Grand Theft Auto V	Just Chatting
CS: Global O.	Resident Evil 2	Frantics	Mario: SSB	Apex	Unknown
LoL	Unknown	Gang Beasts	Metro Exodus	PUBG	Anthem
Boxing Fight	IRL	Unknown	Unknown	IRL	Apex
Dota 2	Shadow of the Tomb Raider	FIFA 19	Bloodborne	Fortnite	Travel & Outdoors
Game Award	Just Chatting	IRL	Heavy Rain	TwitchCon 2017	IRL
Apex	PUBG	Overcooked! 2	Far Cry 5	South Park: TFBW	Super Mario Party
COD: BO4	Detroit: B H	Uno	Beyond: Two Souls	The Jackbox Party Pack 3	Red Dead Redemption2
WoW	Brawlhalla	Just Chatting	Dragon Quest Builders	The Jackbox Party Pack 2	COD: BO4
Title Abbreviations: CS: Global O. (Counter-Strike: Global Offensive) LoL (League of Legends) APEX (Apex Legends) COD: BO4 (<i>Call of Duty: Black Ops 4</i>) WoW (<i>World of Warcraft</i>) Detroit: B H (<i>Detroit: Become Human</i>) Mario: SSB (<i>Mario: Super Smash Bros. Ultimate</i>) South Park: TFBW (<i>South Park: The Fractured But Whole</i>)					

Table 5.3: Most streamed game titles on top Arab streams during the sample collection cross referenced against top game title streams globally.

In comparing the remarks made by Sjöblom et al. (2017) and the notes taken by examining the recorded gaming streams taken in the period between 20th February and 15th March 2019, the top Twitch.tv Arab streamers, some similarities regarding the genre of games streamed can be detected. However, it is important to take into consideration that the period between the two sets of data is different. Although seemingly a brief time, it is relatively considerable because streaming games as a practice is relatively new. Finally, as a disclaimer, the notes of the Saudi data set are generic and vague due to two reasons: (1) the notes were taken with the intention of casting a wide spectrum of issues in addition to paratext and (2) the amount of stream time surveyed is remarkably long, which meant that only generic notes of each clip were taken and significant incidences within these streams were taken into consideration. The typology of the Saudi set was rearranged in respect to the most relevant of Sjöblom's stream typology.

Stream Type	Sjöblom Remarks	Saudi Data Set Remarks
Competitive	“Most titles are well established, for example Hearthstone, League of Legends, Counter-Strike.”	Global relevance is sought after in both title selection and server selection. Apart of the language barrier, players seek interaction with other international gamers. Most game titles were Globally popular FPS and Strategy Games. Example: <i>Fortnite</i> , <i>Call of Duty: Black Ops 4</i> , <i>PUBG</i> , etc.
Reviews	No particular limitation on the types of games commonly streamed. Reviews often feature relatively new games	Falls into two categories: (1) New Release (2) Indie Games Title selection is influenced by global streaming trends. Games with storyline (plot) are widely used.
How to play	No particular limitation on the types of games commonly streamed.	For single player: Strategy guide. Multiplayer: Explaining how two achieve specific task (<i>GTA</i> and <i>GTA</i> -mods.
Speed runs	Speedruns are often of classic games that attained a type of cult status within the speedrun community.	** Not available No resemblance in any of the clips surveyed at the time.
Talk shows	Most commonly focus on an individual, very popular game, such as an eSports title. Alternatively, can be more of a generalist show, perhaps covering new releases.	Game title chosen by popularity not by relevance to the talk (<i>Fortnite</i>). Unplanned. Start with a long rant or a real-world anecdotal incident. Labelled as IRL (in real life) or let's Talk. Common topics: Game events, Release date expectations and pricing.
Let's Play	A very wide variety of games can be played this way, most often single player games.	Done only once per title. New release titles. Unlike walkthrough, it is only exploratory. No in-depth play. Over reaction is common: Screaming, fake laughing.

Casual	No particular limitation on the types of games commonly streamed.	Similar to “dead air” fillers: Streamers use if they have nothing specific to post. Common globally trending games: <i>Fortnite</i> , <i>PUBG</i> .
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Table 5.6: Comparison between observations notes of Sjöblom et al. (2017, p. 164) and content selected for this research.

Evidently, there are strong similarities between Sjöblom’s stream typology and notes on Saudi streams. One of the factors that might contribute to this is the appeal of carrying global recognition in Saudi streamers. Interview participants expressed that sharing games eventually leads to cultural dialogue. During the interview, participants were asked if they use social media in general. The question on the use of social media prompted 15 users (out of 20 users) to associate the platforms with gaming. Out of the 15 users, the following themes were prominent: sharing achievements, reviewing games, communication with other gamers and using game memes in a conversation. However, when asked if they had a specific target audience, some users disclosed that they engaged with non-Saudi individuals through social media for cultural engagement. [Abo Bander] explained how finding common ground was essential for cultural dialogue, “My interactions with non-Saudis in most cases is a cultural engagement. I must bring something from their own culture, so I get closer to them. So, they understand my comments. Looking for common grounds.” [Khalid] explains the process that goes into the cultural dialogue: “The message I send to a Saudi person will never be the same as the one I send to foreigners. The picture I draw for a foreign person would be a general impression. And it should be very clear. But the message I would send do a Saudi would usually be short and brief. I don’t have to put thought in it. I would usually send what I need.” Correcting the Arab image is a main topic in this dialogue. However, associating image correction through gaming content saw less agreement. Out of the 15, 12 users associated correcting Arab representation with gaming. However, some participants expressed concerns on how sharing clips of video games might have an adverse effect. [Abo Omar] drew similarities between video games depiction of conflict and video game posts: “This is to the fact that video games, nowadays, has a very active role and this. The evidence of its active role is very clear. For example, we’ve seen the heinous crime that was done in New Zealand.... Even the way he taped it looked like a video game. The way he aimed; the way he killed that person; this was done in a way that mimics video games. Even after they were dead, he kept shooting them.” Both sides of the arguments support the importance of exposure through game paratext. This further supports the importance of appreciating this content through Consalvo’s extended paratextual framework.

eSport gaming in Saudi Arabia

In addition to gaming conventions and festivals established in the late 2000s, eSports events are becoming one of the largest paratextual spectacles in the gaming community in the late post-2010 period. eSport finds a place under game paratext typology due to its informative consideration.

Genette considers paratext in its broadest definitions as a space between the text and the general public, a “threshold” (Genette & Maclean, 1991b) or “airlock” (Consalvo, 2007). In addition to the creation of spreadable media content, eSport serves the purpose of being a teaching experience. eSports are competitive in nature; thus it stands to reason that a certain set of skills are needed to overcome an opponent. While the game skill itself is not the point of investigation in this section, the spectatorship attached to eSport events is a point of interest to scholarships investigating paratext in video games. Georgen found that the participatory spectatorship in eSport events offered some type of “enculturation into informal learning communities.” The participatory spectatorship in competitive games helps spectators to “move toward more central membership in a larger gaming enterprise” (Georgen, 2015). Like paratext in other mediums, it serves as a space that introduces the public into the text. Egliston emphasises the importance of the paratext created by professional and amateurs participating in competitive eSport events. Egliston argues that spectator media created in competitive gaming could be considered a “node for cultural production” (Egliston, 2016). In addition to the cultural significance and generic introduction of a game, spectatorship of eSports and competitive gaming encourages specific skill acquisition practices by fans. Hardcore fans refer to highly competitive matches to learn specific games. Sjöblom highlights the importance of this aspect as “hardcore fans” refer to professional gaming streams when learning game strategies. This sets eSport spectatorship and regular sport spectatorship apart in this regard. In eSport, strategies demonstrated by professional gamers are fairly easy to apply in comparison to an “impressive strategic manoeuvre in soccer,” for example (Sjöblom et al., 2017). However, Švelch argues that there is a difference between paratext in the Genetteian sense and the one being accepted as video game paratext. For Švelch, paratext changed from a mere indicator of a certain text, to sharing centre stage with the original content, pointing to Jenkin’s notes on media convergence. Švelch proposes that paratext in video games is defined by the relationship between the text and socio-historical reality (Švelch, 2016). This expands the scope of paratext further to examine the practices of fan, spectatorship and the general conventions surrounding eSport game events. Thus, whether it is a mere indication/entry-point to the text or a complex relationship that is deeply nestled in the realities of convergence media, eSport holds a place within the continually expanding universe of video game paratextual industries.

While some reference to late 1990’s Saudi LAN competitive gaming could be located in some forum posts (ADSLGATE, 2019), the reference to eSport as a term is a relatively new trend in Saudi Arabia. The terminology was updated previous to the governmental adaptation in local gaming cafés (CLIX Gaming Cafe’, 2019). However, governmental bodies worked to bring the popular practice to a sense of organisation under the umbrella of the Saudi General Sport Authority (Saudi Ministry of Sport, 2020). The Saudi Arabian Federation for Electronic and Intellectual Sport was established in 2018. Starting with regional teams that include Okaz, Twaigue, Sudair, Jarsh, Yarmook, Al-Laith, Al Garah, Al Faisali, Al Faiha, Al Ra’id and Al Ta’awun (Saudi Ministry of Sport, 2020). These clubs seem to follow the same naming of local official sport clubs. Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Sultan was the appointed head of the federation, and he said the idea of the federation

was conceived in 2017. In comparison to the international eSport community, the prince commented that the male to female participants ratio in Saudi Arabia is 52/48 compared to 70/30 internationally. The prince also said they were looking towards participation of the private sector (NUGALI, 2019). In 2018, the initial tournament participation was encouraged through cash prizes (1,000,000 Riyals in total (USD266,667)). The game played was FIFA 18 World Cup on PS4. The event was held in King Abdullah Economic City (KAEC) (ALGHAMDI, 2018). Other games were introduced in following tournaments. In 2020, there was a Saudi eSport league in *Defence Of The Ancients 2* (DOTA2), and the prize money increased to US\$500,000 (Shambler, 2020). This could be interpreted as an approach to centralising the video game paratext. The apparent strategy is offering gamers an opportunity of global recognition through governmentally partially sponsored events (Alkhudair, 2019). However, the introduction mentioned here is a precursor to the discussion of data collected from the interview section, and this view was also shared by interview participants.

In terms of this governmental strategy, some interview participants expressed their approval. Gaining global recognition through sponsoring gaming events and gaming competitions sees some endorsement by some interview participants. The justification behind it is as follows: championships and awards created by Saudi Arabia or given to a Saudi participant are an opportunity for more exposure. This in turn leads to associating video games with the subculture of Saudi gamers, leading to an opportunity for a cultural dialogue. [Toobah] elaborates on this: “I don't create content usually. However, when I see an Arab or someone from Saudi doing good in championships I would probably engage with this content and help spread it. Like Musa’ad Al Dosary when he was the world champion. He participated in the FIFA gaming championship two years in a row. These things would help people to get to know our society; especially those who know nothing about it. Or maybe they know some distorted picture.” [Abo Omar] adds “That's because he (Musa’ad Al Dosary) actually proved himself in video gaming arenas. On a global scale. He won first prize in the international competition for football.... He could be considered one of those people who are trying to improve the general picture of Saudi Arabia to the international community. Frankly the guy deserves following.” On the other hand, some participants see the selection of video game in these games as less affective due to event organisation and game selection. [Nerf] explains that FIFA video games do not have the needed global recognition as much as they have in Saudi Arabia. According to [Nerf], FIFA gamers are more like Istirahah52 gamers rather than “hardcore gamer.” He explains, “I would think shooter games and PVP games, like *Legends of Leagues* and *Smite*, are more suitable for gaming championships.” He also adds that Saudi local companies are not ready yet to organise a global event. Nonetheless, both sides agree on the importance of using game events to gain more exposure.

⁵² See Chapter 4: The Progression of Saudi Video Gaming, for the more details on the concept of Istirahah and the definition of and Istirahah Gamer. In this context it means casual gamer.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter addresses the question on how Saudi government, Saudi game developers and Saudi gamers utilise various forms of paratext to initiate cultural exchange ultimately leading to exploring autonomous self-representation. In short, game paratext, as defined by Consalvo, does not only offer an opportunity to explore global practices surrounding the gaming industry (Švelch, 2020), but it also offers a chance to examine cultural issues regarding gaming. Whether it is the global gamer culture, or the hybrid cultures undergoing the game global-acculturation process, paratext offers an expanded space not confined by textual (Arsenault, 2014) and ludo analysis (Aarseth, 2014). This expanding paratextual space accepts the realities of convergence culture. While a great deal of the expansion is on the epitextual side, a great deal of this expansion is provided by the participatory culture's rich gaming community. This expansion is powered by the exchange between the three main contributors to the paratextual space: the gaming industry, the peripheral industry and the gamer community. This exchange could be negative or positive in terms of cooperation (compliance). And while previous research on Arab representation were more concerned with a conventional textual or ludic game content analysis, mostly on only the manufacture/developer side, the paratextual approach offers an opportunity to explore a more wholesome view of modern representation of Saudi Arabs, outside the confines of centralised media. Admittedly, the pursuit of this research venue was not realised at the beginning of the inquiry on Saudi-Arab representation; however, the necessity became apparent while conducting the interviews. When asked, "What do you think of Arab representation in video games?" many answered, within the lines of "We won the FIFA eWorld Cup final 2018." This chapter address this issue, thereby shedding new light on understudied aspects of the research field.

Through applying the power of paratextual analysis, the effect of content "threshold" comes to light in past and present gaming culture in Saudi Arabia. This further emphasises the importance of taking into consideration the established timeline in Chapter 4. By looking to both past and recent forms of paratext, the benefits manifest into two advantages of this current research. The benefits are (1) adding more details to the acculturation process of the Saudi hybrid gaming culture and (2) exploring strategies adopted by Saudi gamers to initiate a cultural dialogue. This chapter unveils the nature of strategies followed in the early generation by Saudi game industry corporations and game developers in adopting cultural pegs to present the new culture of gaming to Saudi Arabia. The unexpected find of this chapter was the use of paratext in later generations. It is found to be used again by the gaming community but in a reverse manner with Saudi gamers presenting their hybrid culture to the global community through a paratext. Cultural peg is used once again as a strategy, with familiarity in the global host culture mixed with elements of the local culture.

In sum, the intersection between culture and paratext in games is an understudied topic. The definitions that reassigned paratext ownership to an increasing fan base rather than the original author were best for examining local and worldwide cultural symbols. Recent game

scholarship uses this definition (Švelch, 2020). Game paratext in Saudi Arabia provided a new perspective on the gaming industry's acculturation beyond ludic and textual study. This study revealed that government, companies, and end-users used gaming paratext for cultural exchange. Saudi Arabia recently invested heavily in competitive gaming and gaming events. This is economic and cultural soft power. To reintroduce Saudi Arabia to the world, the strategy of cultural pegs in video games paratextual spaces are used as threshold to initiate cultural exchange. The early video game industry pioneers (Sakhr Al Alamiah, Al-Mithali Bawareth, and Ad-Dawlah) used game paratext. Video game firms, including creators, introduced gaming culture to Saudi Arabia in 1985 via game paratext. These corporations linked education to "play" in local newspapers, television, and advertising materials to enhance sales. They used an ethnocentric approach based on morality, similar to Pan-Arabist organizations (Chapters 4 and 6). In more recent production, game producers subsequently used game culture hybrids in paratextual contexts, as reported by Fung et al. (2016). They imitated global industrial giants and incorporated local cultural emblems. Balela and Mundy (2015, 2016) cautioned against this method without addressing paratextual material. On the end-user side, Saudi gamers used other forms of paratext (competitive gaming and game streaming) as threshold to initiate cultural exchange. Saudi gamers connected with the world via gaming trends. All three parties (government, game producers and Saudi gamers) engaged in this exchanged via game paratext. This complements past research that found the gaming industry, peripherals industry, and gaming community drove content growth (Švelch, 2020). Most significantly, some users voiced reservations regarding the state's approach in this regard. They expressed a desire to help define and utilize this space.

Most importantly is the realization by the Saudi state of the importance of video game paratext as a form of soft power. Through investment in video game conventions as well as heavy investment in both competitive gaming events and platforms, the Saudi government intended to promote culture. Since its inception, the notion of soft power has undergone significant development. Many parties have adopted it with varying effectiveness in converting the target demographic in various nations (Nye, 2021). The fact that Qatar, a neighbouring nation, will host the 2022 World Cup, proves that the Gulf Cooperation Council area is very familiar with this notion, as examined by Brannagan and Giulianotti (2018). The use of soft power was also evident in Saudi's history, as it was fundamental to the stability of the country during the Arab Spring (Gallarotti & Al-Filali, 2012). The efficacy of this strategy is yet to be evaluated as cultural exchange – probably because it is a lengthy process. However, as I have suggested above, the move to use paratext in this manner not only meets the approval of most interview participants, but it opens new doors for understanding the changing emergent nature of gaming culture in the Saudi context.

CHAPTER 8

An Attempt at the Global Market

(Exporting Local Cultural Symbols Through Cultural Hybrids)

This chapter follows the argument in Chapter 6, which looks at the global acculturation process as a two-way process (see Chapter 6 for definition of acculturation process). The chapter examines works by Saudi game developers where they mix a diversified local culture with global gaming culture in their production. It highlights elements of Saudi game creation which blends Western game design with local aesthetics and storytelling to create a hybrid culture. Arab designers use worldwide gaming trends to promote their culture via education. The chapter also elaborates as game hybrids also reconciles global market narratives with history. The chapters argues that Saudi gamers envision a shared future to unite the gaming community. They also use urban hybrid cultural symbols to demonstrate their progress. It then emphasizes how Saudi gamers and game makers use alternate methods to express historical cultural markers. The argument recalls evidence of cultural peg/link approach (see chapters 2, 4, 6 and 7 for the definition of cultural peg/link) as developers transmit cultural symbolism via games, and gamers did so by comparing their history to that of westerners. This leads the discussion to examine the historical identity variation among interviewees. It argues Saudi gamers identify with a wider “homeland” the further they go back in history, which is a more nuanced understanding of this emergent culture than previously found in other studies.

In contrast to Chapter 6, which looked at the use of global consumer symbols in Arab games, the current chapter looks at the use of local cultural symbols, values, and artifacts by Arab game developers to target global markets. There are challenges to meet requirements that are of the global required standard of cultural hybridity, good visual effects and good game design (Fung et al., 2016). According to Fung, the globalisation of video games is centred between global, which is strongly influenced by Western values, and local, which is influenced by a “frame global perspective” (Jiang & Fung, 2019). In terms of Saudi Arabia, there is a lack of a “cohesive national identity” with strong affiliations to (1) belonging to a historic land, (2) common memories and mythical heritage, (3) a shared public culture, (4) shared state rights and duties and (5) a shared economy that permits flexibility of movement (Al-Rojaie, 2016)⁵³. All these nuances play a role in creating a hybrid culture to provide the game to the global market. Other challenges and factors include that video games are infused with cultural issues specific to a region. Such issues, which also include economic, social and creative freedom have been reported in other regions such as Australia (Keogh, 2021) and the United Kingdom (Webber, 2020). Examining two Saudi

⁵³ To clarify, the absence of a cohesive national identity does not mean that individuals have a weak sense of identity. Through the interview many individuals expressed strong sense of identity, yet it was different from one individual to another, depending on their affiliation mentioned by Al-Rojaie (2016).

games, Abo Khashem, an independent game, and Badiya, a game developed by Semaphore, this chapter explores the cultural aspects as they are shaped to produce a hybridity suitable for the global market. It should be noted that Semaphore is game development company that has joint projects with some Saudi governmental bodies. I remind the reader that the objective of this research is to investigate the autonomous representation. These two video games utilise two distinct Saudi cultural archetypes. One game is set in contemporary Saudi Arabia, while the other employs a Bedouin historical narrative. The examination will focus on the appropriation of cultural elements to meet hybridity for the global market, as well as the game's aesthetics and design. Through this examination, Balela and Mundy's (2015) framework will be considered.

Video Game Localization and Globalisation

In terms of game preparation for the global market, the process includes adjustment in two major areas. The first is meeting the technical and linguistic specifications of the targeted region. The second is meeting cultural specifications that are acceptable by both cultural policy and the audience of that region. The processes involved in these two areas are explored by works on game localisation. Bernal-Merino explains that the three concepts involved in the localisation industry are: globalization (known as *G11n*), internationalization (known as *I18n*) and localization (known as *L10n*) (Bernal-Merino, 2014). Some scholars consider the international version as a localised version known as *locales* (O'Hagan, 2015), while others consider the term *domestication vs. foreignization* (Fernández Costales, 2012b). O'Hagan defined locales as a regional version of a game with a specific combination of region, language, and character encoding. Thus, preparing video games for the global market undergoes similar processes undergone in the localisation process. O'Hagan stated that in order to target specific markets, there was a distinction between three different procedures that games undergo: (1) translation, (2) localization and (3) culturalization (O'Hagan, 2015). O'Hagan suggests that the subject of game localisation could be addressed in the same manner as software localisation. *The Localization Industry Primer*, published by Localisation Industry Standards Association (LISA), defines globalisation as "The general process of worldwide economic, political, technological and social integration; The process of making all the necessary technical, financial, managerial, personnel, marketing, and other enterprise decisions necessary to facilitate localization." Anobile stated that the purpose of localisation was to serve the overall goal of globalisation (Anobile, 2003, p. 42). Thus, it is safe to acknowledge that the process of globalisation of video games is technically a localisation of the global market. However, as examined in Chapter 5, there are additional elements determined by the individual cultural policies of targeted markets.

Creating games for the global market is widely addressed as a part of localisation, as global markets are considered locales for other regions (Bernal-Merino, 2014), as will be addressed through this chapter and Chapter 9. As this chapter addresses creating a locale for global markets, examining works that address these topics through the process of localisation could prove to be beneficial. The reason behind seeking the help of other fields is to realise the cultural nuances that

are affected by creating a hybrid culture in the game. As discussed in Chapter 2, examining the cultural aspects of the game and the way they are presented on the three levels suggested by Bogost (2008) and Šisler and Annenberg School for Communication (2013): aesthetical, narrative and ludic, is the general approach to games common in the counter-construction paradigm.⁵⁴ However, research on the conventions of game localisation does not follow the three levels approach: narrative, ludic and ascetics. Instead, similar to the localisation processes, they divide certain aspects of the games into separate entities, labelling them *assets*. O'Hagan defines the term *localisation asset* as a distinct entity or component of the localisation process. To translators and localisers, game assets are specifically highlighted parts of the game that need to be amended. These include on-screen text, user manuals, voices and cut-scenes (also cinematics assets). For example, the term *cut-scenes*, also known as *game cinematic assets*, are multi-media components (non-playable) of fully rendered movies within the game (O'Hagan, 2015). The work done during the localisation process on these assets is addressed on two levels: (1) addressing technical and linguistic and (2) addressing cultural aspects. As for the first element, technical and linguistic, they are majorly defined by state policy on communication and technical specification. This includes *-bi-di* translations. The term *-bi-di* is an abbreviation for bi-directional, which is used to describe scripts such as Arabic and Hebrew that generally run from right to left, except for numbers, which run from left to right. (Anobile, 2003, p. 42). In many cases, these translations are even done without providing context (which is labelled “blind localization” (O'Hagan, 2015)). This element shares common ground with other mediums.

As for the second element, it involves the cultural aspect of the game, which is more nuanced as some are defined by cultural policy while others might be arbitrary. According to Edwards, culturalization is a step further than localisation, with “fundamental assumptions” and “content choices” being in agreement with the wide-ranging multicultural receiving market and geographical locales addressing major issues such as intercultural dissidence (Chandler et al., 2011). The process would involve adjusting cultural elements to avoid rejection by the audience or censorship by policy bodies. As for globalisation, rejection (also known as *content lacuna*) by the audience is gaining attention from game designers as it is less defined. *Content lacuna* is the rejection of some elements in certain products by an intended audience due to personal offence or the inability to form a personal connection with said product. (Uribe-Jongbloed et al., 2016). This is where the process of hybridisation is central to the process. In other words, hybridisation is important to see how cultural content is made acceptable for both the local and global market. The following examination of the two games will identify two different approaches. The first one is *Abo Khashem*, where game designers chose to make changes in two versions to avoid *content lacuna*. The second game, *Badia*, chose another approach, where it offers similar cultural contents in both versions.

⁵⁴ See Chapter 2, for the three paradigms defining the current state of research on Arab representation in video games.

Abo Khashem and Moving Dimensions



Figure 7.1 *Abo Khashem*, a Saudi game representation is a hybrid of contemporary Saudi urban life and global gaming

Abo Khashem is an indie Saudi game published by Moving Dimensions. Choosing this game was based on interview participants' feedback, as it was the most mentioned game. Most users referred to the game through a paratextual scope. The amount of Saudi cultural symbols and cultural references is the most likely reason for this choice. The participants' nature of engagement highlights many issues that are strongly linked to the topic of this research's methodology. This includes the investigation of game design aspects appealing to the local gamer in contrast to the needs of the global market (Fung et al., 2016). In addition, there is a question of creating cultural pegs and cultural relevance that could work on both levels: local and global (Tanikawa, 2017). And most importantly, was the use of cultural symbols an attempt to infuse the game with hybrid culture or was it a marketing approach as seen in other games explored by Balela and Mundy (2015)?

The Developers and Fulfilling Policy Requirements

According to their website, Moving Dimensions was established 11th of November 2014. It is listed as a licenced Saudi audio-visual media company, which means they have obtained the required Saudi governmental approval under the laws of Audi Visual Content (*Audio Visual Media Content Policy*, 2017) and the Executive Law of General Commission Audio-Visual Content (Executive Regulation on Audio-Video Content Regulations, 2018). This suggests that the licence was obtained in line with a legacy media process. The office of Moving Dimensions is located in Riyadh on Olaya street. A higher-than-average financial resource is required for the location of this company. The only listed game on the website is *Abo Khashem*, which is described by the website as an indie game (Moving Dimensions, 2018). The company seems well established as a commercial establishment. There are no other indications that this company has any other projects. On Moving Dimensions' website, the group states the following as their overall goals:

1. Addressing the gap in entertainment and filling it on all social spectrums.
2. Attempting to localise the technology.
3. Providing job opportunities with a good income, in par with "foreign countries."
4. Opening positive integration possibilities with Western gaming firms.
5. The projects undertaken by the firm have a "flexible" working condition as you can

work from home.

6. Most importantly, the firm projects are designed to address global markets.
7. The company discloses its project workflow, starting with obtaining government licencing and production permits. This was followed by finding a location for the company and settling into a production studio. That was followed by obtaining commercial licensing from Sony PlayStation store, Microsoft Xbox store and Steam for marketing purposes. The company boast that it was an “all Saudi effort” which spanned 3 years on *Abo Khashem*. The statement indicates that the game concept was conceived before the formation of the company. There are no clear statements by the company about the staff or about the company funding. (Moving Dimensions, 2017)

Avoiding the Red Tape

Moving Dimensions stated they gained licencing and optioned governmental approval before starting the project. In addition to heavy fines, unlicensed content is subject to censorship (Executive Regulation on Audio-Video Content Regulations, 2018). As established in Chapter 5, censorship relates to this investigation in a manner of what changes are applied to a video game in order to obtain access to a certain market. As observed at the beginning of this research, the areas of investigation are the narrative, audio and visual aesthetics and ludic aspects of the game, in addition to focusing on specific and common reasons for censorship. Costales affirms that a great deal of works in the field of game translation and localisation is focused on issues like violence and sexual content, as seen in the Pan European Game Information (PEGI) reaction to the *GTA* series (Costales, 2012b). O’Hagan points out that one of the constraints that face game localisers is country specific age ratings in order to avoid possible censorship. The rationale behind this is attributed to various reasons; one of which is the interactive nature making games “more purposeful.” Besides that, video games are considered a less respectable form of entertainment in comparison to literature and cinema, socially speaking. O’Hagan adds that these issues are country-specific, adding that these restrictions highlight intercultural communication issues (O’Hagan, 2015). As established in Chapter 5, state policy has gradually changed since the arrival of other forms of new media. For example, Alfahad found that the introduction of privately owned media outlets and the arrival of social networking had a major influence on the tolerance of criticising government officials. This influence included the aggressive nature of interviews adapted in interviewing such figures, even in state media outlets. Alfahad credits social media for depriving state agencies of elements of their control by rendering censorship useless in some cases (Alfahad, 2015). Nonetheless, in this specific case, a Saudi based company needs governmental approval to maintain its physical presence in Saudi Arabia.

The Narrative

The company describes the game as a humorous approach to a conspiracy plot. The protagonist Abo Khashem, which roughly translates as “nose guy,” wakes up in the middle of the desert with no recollection of anything, including his name. Shukman (literally translates to car exhaust “muffler”) is a lizard that guides Abo Khashem through his journey to unearth a dangerous plot that includes many interesting characters. Throughout his adventure, the player is given the chance to amass wealth by buying estate and investing in the real estate market. This will lead the protagonist to unveil the greatest plot by invading a “hidden mystical universe” (Moving Dimensions, 2017). The naming of characters and the use of the local lizard species, come from the local culture. However, global culture is inserted with the use of a consumer symbol. The narrative of the game starts with a direct quest. The quest uses a cultural peg to connect to a global culture reference to the game. Instead of using a narrative device, the game starts with direct instruction by a paper clip, which is very reminiscent of Microsoft’s Clippy, giving the player direct instructions about the game. As mentioned, the storyline starts with a disoriented protagonist who suffers from amnesia, then moves on to engage the player with a conspiracy plot. The cats of Jarradiyah hatch a plan to take over the city using their own currency, and by taking over the city hospital, they administer their human amnesia-inducing drug. In an attempt to create an in-game hybrid culture, the game introduces a plot familiar to the Western audience by introducing a familiar plot. Amnesia, as described by Tougaw, is one of the “most abundant precursors to the contemporary neuronovel” (Tougaw, 2021). However, with a congested plot, the games seem to struggle in providing a narrative that connects to the nuances of Saudi life. It might be considered as a reintroduction of a Western concept with a Saudi spinoff. Nonetheless, what is missing from the local narrative is substituted with an abundance of visual cultural reference. The game exhibits intensive cultural artifacts and cultural symbols, as well as an abundance of references to local consumer commodities. This does not exhibit any of the problematic issues highlighted in the cultural heritage paradigm by Balela and Mundy (2015, 2016). In terms of cultural hybridity, the game utilises a plot common in Western media production with aesthetics from the local community.



Figure 7.2 *Abo Khashem* jumps between two planes of existence (between fantasy and reality).

Game Design

In terms of the play element in *Abo Khashem*, the game introduces play elements from both the local culture and the global gaming conventions. Clément stated that Arab video game producers look for inspiration from the origin of media, “the West” (Clément, 2019). The game structure has

two worlds. One is inspired by *GTA V* (Rockstar North, 2013) with the open-world environment, cars, character interaction and elements of strategy as well as the monetary system of the game. The other world, which is a fantasy world, has great similarities with *Crash Bandicoot* (NaughtyDog, 1996). The weapon selection is relatively large, with various parameters for the character. Among these are a health gauge and a stamina gauge. There are various power-ups and weaponry with various attack combos. There are also a variety of magical items that have a different effect in two different alternating realities (worlds). The effects of fire and water are different in these alternating realities. In the contemporary reality, there is a page for buying estate that is divided into two categories: residential and commercial. Tasks are handed by phone messages such as in *GTA*, where texting with characters will add newer tasks and rewards. In terms of local culture influence, the tutorial of the game shows the different variables that determine your level. One of which is the concept of *wasta* واسطة, which in the international version was translated as “influence.” The concept of *wasta* roughly means using interpersonal relationships to interfere or deal with organizational issues with/or without following procedure. It is best compared to the Chinese *guanxi*. Luo defines *guanxi* as “the concept of drawing on connections in order to secure favors in personal relations” (Luo, 2020, p. 2). The concept is also present in other local cultures, *veze* or *štela* in Bosnian, *tutvuste kaudu* in Estonian, *blat* in Russian, and *vruzki* Bulgarian (Morris & Polese, 2015). The concept of *wasta* is widely spread amongst the general public and considered “immoral” or unethical to some extent (Aldossari & Robertson, 2016; Harbi et al., 2017). However, it depends on the influence of the social structure. Tribal values such as collectivism, power, distance and others, could give an indication to the relationships between *wasta* acceptance and the tribal moral code (see Figure 4:7, 8). Nonetheless, the way local culture reflects on a video game production is the focus of this thesis. The world created in the game is a reflection of an imperfect world with a hybrid culture between *GTA* and a nuanced local culture. In doing so, the game designers are approaching the global market with recognisable cultural elements demonstrated in the hybrid of the game.

Globalising the Local Perceptions

Translating intercultural issues to global locales involves many historical and social contexts (Kramsch & Zhu, 2019). One of the strategies to overcome translating an “untranslatable” term with avoiding over explanation is using a cultural equivalence (e.g., descriptive equivalent, paraphrase, transference, and shifts) (Sembiring & Panggabean, 2018). The developers of *Abo Khashem* went to lengths to bring the cultural divides in this game together. At the beginning of the game, the interaction with the gas station clerk reveals much of these efforts. In the international version the clerk speaks in a southern U.S. American accent, which is a trope seen in many films from the U.S. (e.g., *No Country for Old Men*). In the Arabic version, the voice actor speaks in similar deep regional vernacular usage. Moreover, there is great detail in the newspaper clippings and posters throughout the game that carry cultural elements. The titles include issues that carry a great cultural and media relevance. The newspaper *Shibh Al Jazeera* name and logo carry’s much resemblance to the *Al Jazeera* newspaper, one of the local state newspapers. Headlines read “Prices of marriage dowry

increases,” “10 signs that your wife bad-mouths you to her friends,” “Are our teachers a total failure, are our student a total failure or are your failure?” This is more of a satirical approach to the status of centralised newspapers in Saudi Arabia. For example, an advertisement shows, “Mexican housemaid recruitment agency,” which refers to the heated issue about the commercial racket of recruitment companies of Saudi Arabia of expat houseworkers. The controversial issue of housekeepers reoccurs again later in the game in a dialogue between two police officers where the maid “ran away.” The other advertisements are “Dead Granny Bakery” and “YOUR MOTHERS restaurant.” In the international version it was replaced by a more politically correct version of the advertisement reading “live in maids” instead of “Mexican,” “Bottled water” instead of “dead granny” and a “Jumurrito Burrito” advertisement instead of “yo mama’s.” The headlines seem to be more of an attempt at a global sense of humour, which is most likely not suitable in the local version. This might indicate that the process of localisation was not subject to blind translation. Blind localisation is to translate content without context due to the process of giving translators parts of the game/media that need to be translated without showing them the whole text. (O’Hagan, 2015). This supports the idea that the localisation process was not divided into separate assets, or it was reviewed after the localisation process to create a hybrid culture for the international version (see Figures 4:4).



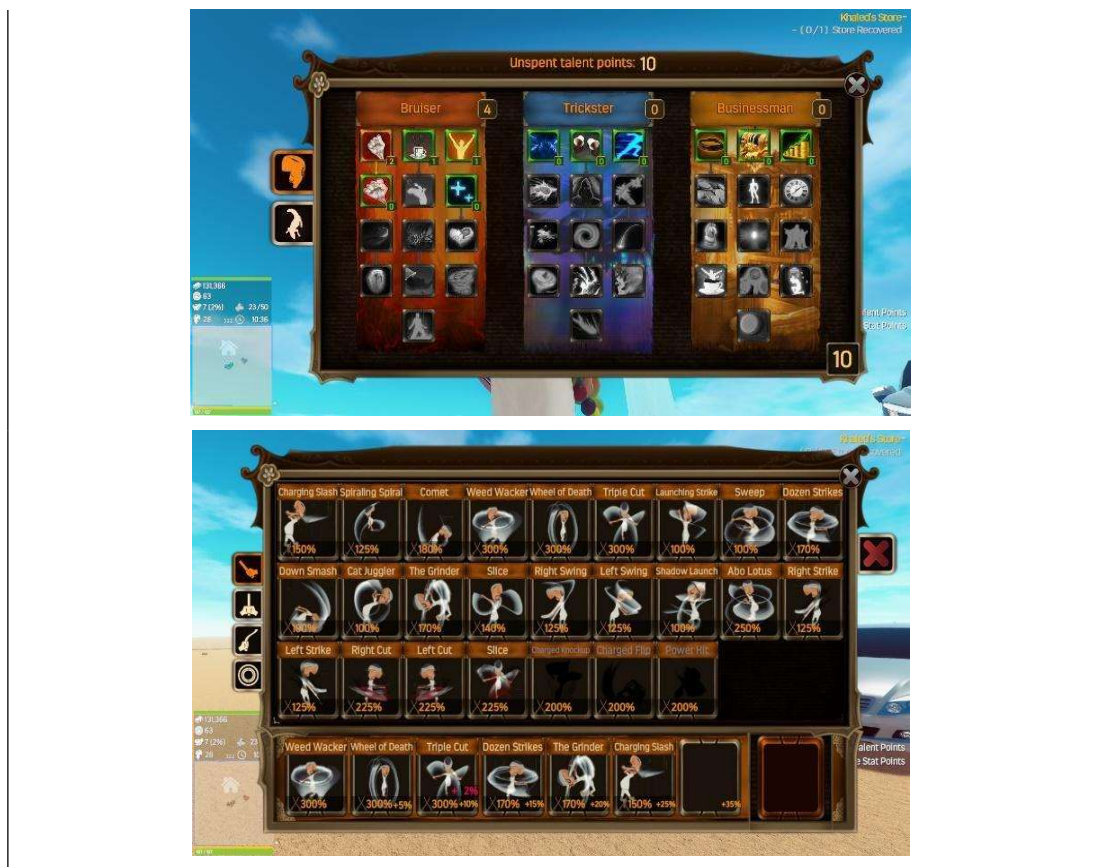


Figure 7.3 In its attempt to harness global game design trends, *Abo Khashem* was criticised of being too confusing by some interview participants.

Production

Abo Khashem was initially introduced as an indie game via the game’s social media account (Abo Khashem Facebook, 2017). The company statement on the website identifies the makers as a group of indie game developers. However, there is indication that the project gained financial funding somewhere between the conception of the idea to the release of the game. This includes the voice actors in both versions, local and international, which are a professional cast. In the Arabic version they have Ali Ibraheem and the international version has Adam Blake, Daniel Lindgren, Lauren Byrd and others (IMDB, 2018). On their website, the company does not disclose the source of its funding, nor does it have any other productions. It should be noted that the game managed to reach retailers through PlayStation Store Cards with GCAM age certification, which was approved at the time of the game’s release (Figure 4:2). *Abo Khashem* was released in both English and Arabic versions at the same time (Moving Dimensions, 2018), which makes it a *simship* model. This is contrary to the common Japanese practice, as mentioned above. According to O’Hagan in the matter of release, video game localisation carries much resemblance to business software localisation for global markets, as they carry a digital nature. However, the manner the two are applied and the aspects they cover are different. The model followed in software localisation is “simultaneous shipment,” or *simship*, which means that the localised version is published and shipped at the same time of its release. In the video game industry, Western video game publishers follow the same

model. However Japanese game publishers follow a standing convention of shipping the globalised version after a period of releasing the local version. It is most important to emphasize that many Japanese video game publishers label their English version as the “International version” (O’Hagan, 2015). This supports the evidence that the game was intended for the global market, further supporting the hybridisation culture in recent Saudi video games.

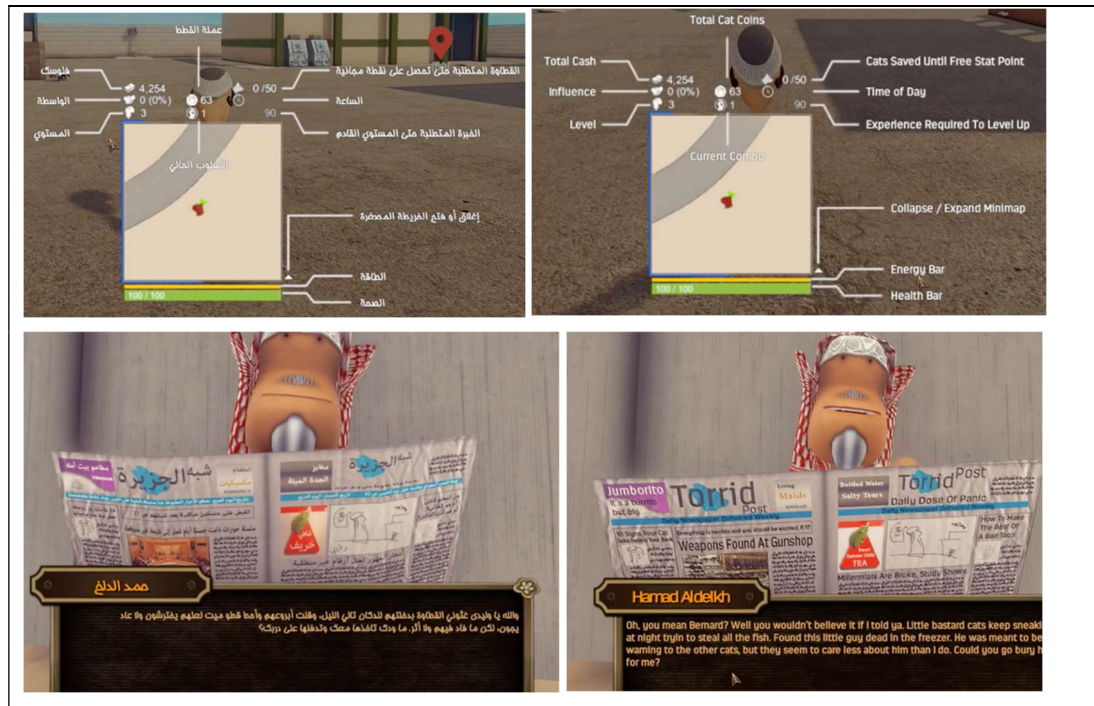


Figure 4:4: the localization process involves changing much of the cultural references to suite the global market.

Reception

As mentioned earlier, interview participants referred to *Abo Khashem* more than any other Arab game. The references were in response to being asked about Arab developers’ production of a Saudi character in video games. As established in Chapter 6, the gaming community is a hybrid community with a keen awareness of the global market. The awareness is reflected in their reaction to the games, as there is a comparative and critical undertone to their reaction. Interview participants generally criticized the game through a paratextual scope. “Paratextual scope” means that the game was judged through either advertisements or videos of someone else playing the game online, including game covers, game advertisements and online reviews. This is also one of the elements addressed in Chapter 6 and 7, and it led to a great deal of misconceptions. [Charming] said, “I once saw an advertisement for *Abu Khashem*. But it did not appeal to me. In general, I am not interested in mobile games.” However, *Abo Khashem* was not released on mobile devices. Some participant attributed their rejection of the game to its value, declaring that it was not proportionally priced to end-product. [Abo Banader] explained, “I saw some clips and I did not want to buy this product [strong statement].” He continued to criticize the value of the product, “The price of the product in relationship to the clips I saw of this product, in my opinion is relatively high.” He explained, “When

you want to evaluate the game, you can say there are many things: graphics, variation of play but mostly it's about graphics that should dazzle you. And other stuff, like what you do and what choices you have as a game player, and the entertainment you get out of it. These things come with trial. but in general, externally, the graphics.” Other users said that the game depicted a niche subculture, which was not resemblant of Saudi society. Some could not, even remember the game title. Instead, they mentioned the game by describing it. Another criticism of the game is its lack of consistency of play elements. The game seems to try to do everything at once and this causes user confusion. [AboLooloah] commented on this: “*Abo Khashem*, I did not get the point of the game frankly. All of a sudden you would buy estate then you go and kick someone and then you drive. But the graphics weren't really that good as game.” In summary, participants criticised pricing, graphics, and playability. Most importantly, there were no comments on the hybridity of culture in the game; however, being the most mentioned game is a strong indication of cultural approval.

Badiya: Desert Survival



Figure 7.5 *Badiya*, a Saudi game creating the game hybrid by mixing a local cultural symbol with global game design.

The Company

Badiya: Desert Survival is an open world game designed by Semaphore. Semaphore is a Saudi game development firm that had a market presence for longer than Moving Dimensions. Their game *Unearthed: Trail of Ibn Battuta* was released in 2013 under the publishing name Semaphore, which specialises in educational purposes software (Semaphore, 2015). *Badiya* was introduced in STEAM (online shop) in its alpha release in late 2016 and is still running as an alpha release in 2021. The local culture included in the game is mostly concerned with the Bedouin historical sub-culture. The company specifies this a single mode game after introducing *Badiya Battle Royale*. *Badiya Battle Royale* is a mobile game introduced in 2020, with the same cultural premise as the first game (Semaphore, 2020b). However, the aesthetics of *Badiya Battle Royale* seem to carry a great deal of similarity with *Battlefield 1*'s multiplayer desert map (ElectronicArts, 2016). This evaluation was done on *Badiya: Desert Survival* (release Alpha 1.9.7). The company has affiliations and clientele that include governmental and governmentally sponsored/supervised organisations. These include the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, Misk

Foundation, Riyadh International Book fair, Bader Program for Incubator Technology and Saudi Falcons and Hunting Exhibitions. They also have a presence in international exhibitions and were featured in various international e-stores (Semaphore, 2020a).

The Game

The game starts with a customisable character. The default character wears a traditional thobe with a very modern thin cut, which is a slim fit⁵⁵. The facial construction and body build is customisable. There is also an “ethnicity” option that changes the colour of the skin. The ethnicity options are African, Asian, Arab and European. There was also a starter kit in early beta releases, featuring characters that carried resemblance of cowboys and colonial soldiers, but this were removed in later alpha releases. Character’s clothing can be adjusted as they advance through the game. Dispatching adversaries through the game gives the character the chance to alter their outfit. Weaponry and attachments are also customisable. The inventory has an open layout for customising the character and weaponry as well as management of items used in trade. Semaphore has a long history of relying heavily on inspiration from globally trending video games. This strategy has put the company in a position where the games are sometimes mistaken for clones. Feedback from interview participants supported this general impression: *Unearthed: Trail of Ibn Battuta* “Rikaz” (Semaphore, 2013) was accused of being too similar to *Uncharted* (NaughtyDog, 2009), and *Badiya* (Semaphore, 2017) seems to have too much inspiration from the *Red Dead* series (RockstarGames, 2010).



Figure 7.6 Two historical subcultural context demonstrated in *Badiya*: The Bedouin historical context and the agricultural rural context

The game is an open world environment. From the title, the game is based on one environment: the desert. The game does not seem to explore other venues and settings from the local historical record. This means that there is no mention of historically large urban locations and cities, and there are no large rural areas, no mountainous terrain and no coastal areas. The approach to cultural historical setting seems to be borrowed from media recreation rather than an

⁵⁵ Thobe is the traditional clothing of Saudi males.

accurate recreation of the historical record, which will be explored later in this chapter. As the game advances, the character does not engage in a dedicated plot, nor is there any background information about the character. There are no opening cut scenes. The character is dropped in the middle of the desert near a Bedouin campsite. In walking there, the character is faced with different characters that offer separate missions or trading options. Missions are mostly travel to other locations. Travel can be done on foot or on horse/camel back. Horses/camels have stamina related to sprinting. The trip between locations reveals a vast space of desert with trees and wildlife. The depiction of sand dunes is quite accurate with variation in altitude and flat lands in between, which adds to the realism of the game. In the pursuit of realism, spaces between mission location might feel a little too far apart. With the lack of a structured narrative, the game sways away from the local style of storytelling to a form of style common to the global open world game style. This is similar to what (Jenkins et al., 2004) described in his account on game spatial analysis.

To understand the reason behind the choice of open-world in these two games (Abo Khashem and Badiya), the areas significance of these choices has to be understood. In his essay titled “Game Design as Narrative Architecture,” Jenkins addressed the need to accommodate a theory to address the narrative with video game space. His approach established its findings on the following principles: (1) not all games have stories, (2) many games do have narratives that draw upon emotions from prior narrative experiences, (3) narrative analysis should not enforce predetermined methods, (4) the experience of playing a video game is more diverse and has more variables than experiencing a story and (5) when a story is told in a video game, it is more likely to be told differently to a story in other forms of media (Jenkins et al., 2004). Upon acknowledging these observations, Jenkins continues to resolve the issues that seem to split the narratology and ludology into opposing camps. Jenkins pointed out that ludologists dismiss the value of the narrative due to one of two reasons: either they are critical of game designers for their “film envy,” or they are trying to cover the field of games that hypertext theories cannot address. He also added that the narratology vs. ludology discussion has two major problematic issues with it. First, it considers a small part of the classical narrative theory and disregards most theories outside the modernist and postmodernist conventions. The second issue is focusing on the narrator and not the comprehension, which in the case of our study is the reception. The third issue is, is the narrative one part of the game, or could the whole game be considered as a narrative? (Jenkins et al., 2004). Most relevant to the approach of this thesis, there is a consideration of the game being a part of a world expanded by transmedia storytelling. Through this scope, the choice of open world games made by Saudi developers could be understood.

Choosing open-world for a narrative could serve to increase game value. Jenkins suggested that game creators do not create narratives. Rather, they create spaces where narratives exist (Jenkins et al., 2004). Jenkins argued that much like an amusement park, video games are evocative spaces. The makers create many interactions that evoke the gamers’ need to create their

own narrative. Evacuative spaces can be applied to these games to observe how the reactions of a Saudi and non-Saudi gamer exist within this space. This could be used to understand the company's choice of open world story telling rather than the linear style common in local historical narratives. By choosing open world, *Badiya* (Semaphore, 2017) enables players to make their own narratives.

Game narrative as a criterion for game value is not a new issue to video games in Saudi. This point was highlighted by some participants, for example, [Abo Bandar]. Participants are also aware of the conventions of storytelling in other styles reject a lack of choice in a game. [OniThunder] stated, "What could affect you though, is how the story was written in the game. For example, In Telltale games, you are forced to do decisions that you have no power over. You are invested in a lot of characters, but at the end you have to choose a character that you save." This awareness comes to play in the choice made by Saudi game developers. Saudi developers are more invested in the value of a game, where many stories are possible in one universe.



Figure7.6 *Badiya*: Pointing finger at the host and asking for coffee: "Give me one".

In terms of aesthetics, *Badiya* might have successfully replicated the colour patterns common in the local cultural design (Attiah & Alawad, 2021), with patterns of gradient reds and environmentally inspired colour selection. Conversely, although attempting to introduce an autonomous depiction of a historical account of Arabs, the representation in *Badiya* seems to enforce an Oriental depiction of Arabs. As for cultural symbolism, the game seems to take much inspiration from Bedouin life soap operas, mostly created in Jordan, rather than following a historically documented account of Bedouin life in Arabia. This affirms observations by Balela and Mundy (2015, 2016) on the "problematic" use of cultural heritage symbols in video games. The aspects that occur most as regards the present thesis's issues are cultural appropriation and Hollywoodization/beautification. In support of this observation, some cultural nuances could be flagged as "only acceptable in soap operas." For example, in first camp, the player asks for the coffee from a man standing next to a tent by pointing his finger and saying, "Give me one," to which the man pours him a cup. Although paying homage to a cultural aspect of "qahwa" (Arabic

coffee) in Saudi Arabia in past and present (Alfawaz et al., 2020), some aspects of Hollywoodization (cinematic liberty) could be detected. In Bedouin culture, coffee is offered sitting down, and standing means the rejection of the host's hospitality (Sarhan, 2014). Another issue is the use of clay pottery as a water container, while Bedouin are used to transfer their "qirba" water in leatherskin container as it is easier to transfer, and the concept of "qirba" has a deeper cultural context in Bedouin language and Bedouin culture (Larsen, 2019). These small nuances, though they may not bear much significance to the global community, could be considered a result of the hybridisation process. However, both games, *Abo Khashem* and *Badiya*, share two common observations. First, game designs are heavily influenced by trending global games over the period of the releases. Secondly, the distribution of cultural elements sees hybrid global elements in the narrative, while the local culture is heavily used in the aesthetics of the game.

User Experience with Saudi Developers' Attempts of Global Representation

The major themes that resurface while examining this contrasting representation of Arabs in video games are (1) the amount of inspiration and infusion of the global game in the game hybrid, (2) period of local culture reorientation (3) the local sub-culture used in the representation and, most significantly, (4) the linguistic local/global game hybrids. As for the reception of the game hybrid, there seems to be a consensus among interview participants on the state of global community interest in Arab games. The overall perception of participants is somewhere between no global interest in Arab games at all and very little interest. However, more important is the reasons behind the lack of interest in Arab games. [Carboon] highlighted the importance of investing in creating a hybrid culture in the game to follow the industry standards because it influences gaming trends. He stated, "There is not much interest on their side because the gaming trend started from them. When it comes to games, they have more quantity and more diversity. Their games are well populated. Even the old ones. You would log in an old game (6-year-old games) on Sony, and you would find packed servers. These are their games. I would not think that they would be interested in our games." Other users attribute the lack of interest to lower production quality in Arab games. [Abo Omar] suggested, "If they were to have great graphics and the game services are exceptional, I think they would care." Some users attributed this to a lack of media exposure through paratextual means. One of the examples given by [Oni Thunder] was, "There is a YouTuber I follow, Jim Sterling. He is a British critic. He played *Unearthed*. He did not commend the game. This makes a lot of sense. I have the general feeling that foreigners have no interest in Arabs. Unless this Arab game got great media exposure. Really huge exposure. I wish I would see an Arab game that has great exposure in a good way." Some users attach the lack of global interest in Arab games to the slow development of the gaming industry in Saudi Arabia. [Wiseman] explained, "The problem with the Saudi game industry is that it is very young." [Toobah] elaborated on this observation, "It is possible but very difficult. Take *Call of Duty* for example, they've been making it for over 15 years. We're talking about development; it's not an easy task." In summary, participants addressed culture hybridity, graphics and not following

global gaming trends in terms of game design.

On the other hand, a reoccurring observation of participants was the constant comparisons between Arab and Western titles. This led some participants to criticise Arab game production for the lack of originality. Some users were addressing “play” aspects of games and other were addressing aesthetics, while some were giving a general example of the narrative and storytelling. [Ososo] mentioned *Al-Lika*’ (“Reunion”), which was developed into *SOS: Shout of Survival* (Konash, 2016) as an example of a new play concept: “If games have a good idea behind them, I think it would generate for an interest. As I’ve mentioned before, *Al Liqaa*’ generated some foreign interest because of the idea behind it. I believe that a gamer, no matter where he comes from, would have interest in any good game, provided that this game brings something new. I don’t think there would be a rejection of a game just because the developer is Saudi.” [OniThunder] provided another example, that of *Unearthed* (Semaphore, 2013). [MoonGuy] who is an indie game developers agreed with this view, holding video game companies to a higher standard than indie developers. [MoonGuy] explained,

I could say there is one game I recall. There were a couple of reviews from Westerns. What most of the reviews say is that it’s a rip off from another game. *Ibn Batootah*. They said that it was a rip off uncharted. The game was an okay job. Was less than perfect. Which is understandable because it was an indie game. it wasn’t a company game. The graphics and performance were OK. But most of the reviews criticised it of being a rip off. Rip-offs are usually bad. Getting inspiration from another game is okay and good. But don’t copy everything.

[Nerf] offered an anecdotal testament of the difference in standards between indie developers and companies. Through his interaction with Western gamers, more interest was generated by Arab mods to *GTA* (Rockstar North, 2013) than by *Badiya* (Semaphore, 2017). The reason behind this is an increased interest by western gamers in the reality of Saudi life, according to [Nerf]. [AboOmar] seemed to agree with the observation. He criticised Arab game developers for mimicking the depiction of Arabs in Western games: “If it were to depict society as it should there might be an interest for that. However, if it were a copy of the previous depiction of Western games, I don’t think this would be attractive.” This shows that the line between following global game trends and maintaining originality is a fine line. This begs the question on how Arab game developers could set themselves apart from global competitors and, at the same time, create a hybrid culture for their products.

Historical Subcultural-Context

Historical representation is a major theme in Arab games as seen in *Badiya*. One of the questions directed to participants was regarding what subculture in Saudis’ past would they rather see depicted in a video game. As for user experience, interview participants favoured different depictions of how Saudi historical cultural context should be presented in a video game. The

Bedouin desert life was mentioned by five participants. The participants did not detail or justify their choice. However, three of these participants clarified that this was in an evolutionary context. This context was to be presented as a “then and now” presentation. On the other hand, there were two participants that rejected the idea of Bedouin representation because they considered it was an exaggerated historical subculture. [Abo Omar] explained,

I am against the Bedouin depiction because it is not true. To my understanding, the locals of Saudi Arabia were never Bedouin in the last 200 years. I think the best historical depiction of them would be the farming villages of the past. Najd, and Sdair region, and Qassim were the biggest regions in the middle of Saudi Arabia. They relied heavily on farming. Also, the northern region. I agree that they have a little nomadic tendency. However, they also relied on farming. The southern region also relied on farming. I believe the best historical depiction in YouTube Saudi Arabia would be the agricultural culture of the past.

As for rural and agricultural context, two of the 20 participants detailed and explained their choice of this depiction, while one out of the 20 was against it. The historical urban dwelling and historical cities had three out of 20 participants, choosing Makkah (Mecca) as their example. Coastal life was mentioned by two participants, and religious social structure by two participants. Coastal history was mentioned by two out of the 20 participants. Three out of the 20 participants suggested the formation of the Saudi state as a historical point, while two out of the 20 specified a depiction of a pre-Saudi state era. Finally, a multi-historical-cultural-context was supported by six out of the 20 participants, using terms like multi-culturalism, subculture, and cultural exchange. After mentioning different region names and farming and fishing historical heritage [Ahmad] gave an example of his family heritage:

My people, who came from Jizan, were farmers. 20 kilometres from their village, are coastal people, who made a living out of fishing and maintained a whole different culture set. If any foreign game developer would just come here and see these two as an example, they would know that this country is rich with cultural diversity. Add to that the different beliefs. From the very south of Saudi up to the very north there is a different thing to be learned. This would be really beautiful.

In general, the majority of participants agreed on the importance of the narrative and story to the depiction: “This all depends on the story,” stated [Yazeed]. Thus, users had a broader definition of the historical past than exhibited in Arab video games. This is connected to the issue addressed in the literature review regarding Saudi’s lack of a coherent national identity, where an intersection of various affiliations with tribe, region, social, political group and the pattern of historical migration from the nearest neighbouring country all shape a variation of multicultural identity (Al-Rojaie, 2016), and Saudi gamers are strongly influenced by these factors, shaping their own perspective on the local culture.

Period of Representation

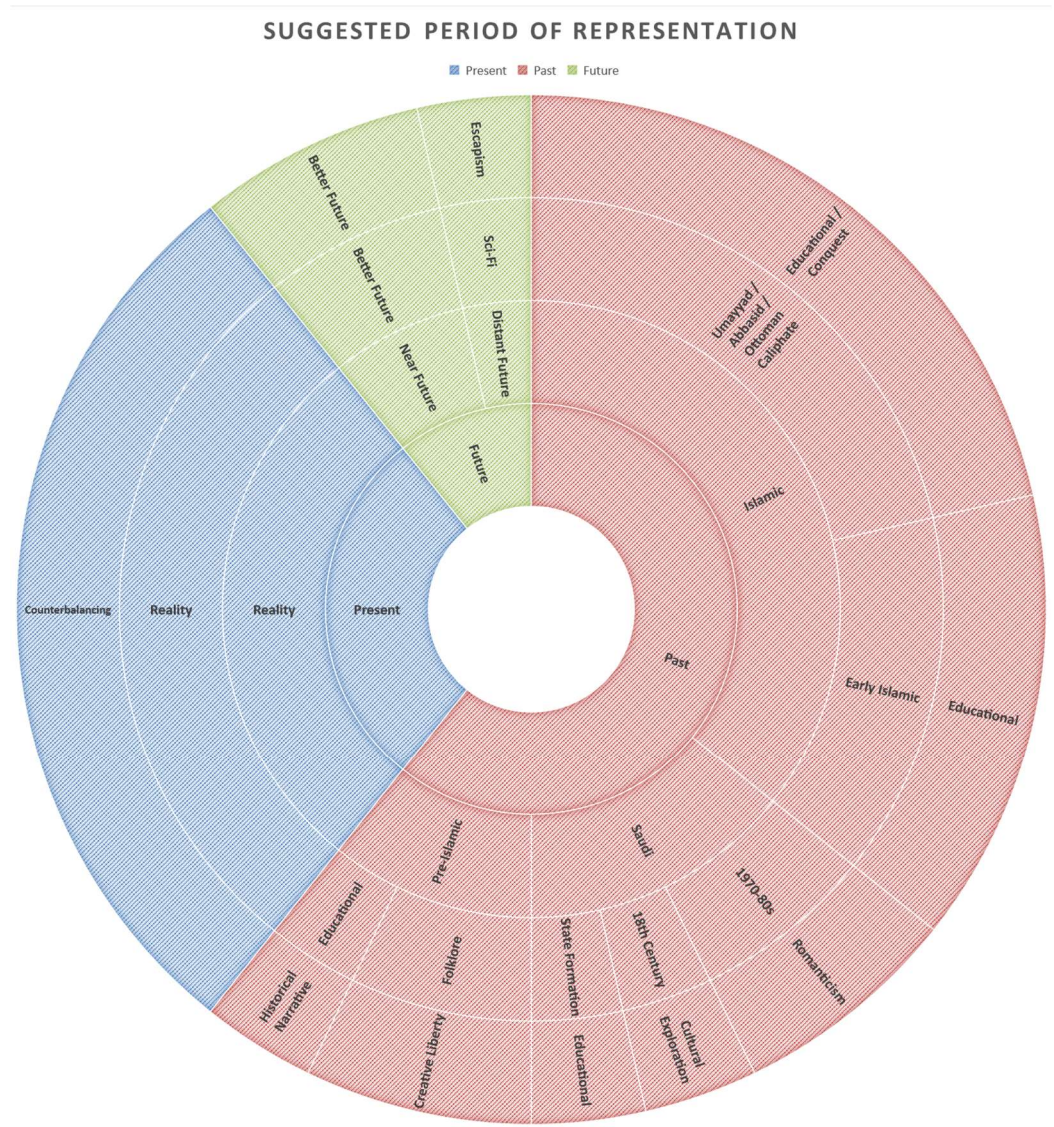


Figure 7.7 Analysis of interview participants' references (in Nvivo) to the best period for representation in the video game global market

As one of the games examined in this research is based in contemporary present-day Saudi and the other is a historical recreation of Saudi past, the issue of historical context of Arab representation is vital to the research. When asked about which time period that they would prefer to see depicted in video games, participants answers varied between past, present and future depictions. The most noticeable finding of the interview was the correlation of a narrow scope limited to Saudi when talking about the future or the present, while the scope expanded to other lands and nations than the Arabian Peninsula when talking about the past. A majority of participants (14 out of 20) chose different past historical periods, with different justification for their choice. An overwhelming majority of participants (19 out of 20) chose periods that superseded the modern Saudi state. The 1970's period was chosen by two participants. [Abo Omar] called this period "the good ol' days." [Toobah] said that he chose this period because it was, "Before we got a lot of foreign invasive aspects in our culture." Due to the participants age,

this seems, more or less, like a form of romanticism masquerading as a popular feeling of nostalgia. Both participants were most certainly born after 1985, and they attributed their knowledge to accounts recorded by others. As an extension of modern history, one other participant chose the formation of Saudi Arabia, while another chose the 18th century, which correlate with the first Saudi reign. Furthermore, three out of the 20 participants chose depictions from the Arab pre-Islamic era, with some justifying that it would be more suitable for an international audience with a political stance against Islam. The biggest portion (seven out of 20) elected the early Islamic and Islamic Caliphate eras: Umayyad Caliphate, Abbasid Caliphate and, strangely, Ottoman Caliphate (which was not an Arab caliphate). There were various justifications for this. Some disclosed that it would be an educational opportunity, while others said that it would fit with the Western genre of medieval European depictions. Most importantly, some participants exhibited an awareness of the importance of the historical narrative and the risk in disturbing the literary heritage. [Wiseman] suggested that a game should be situated in the gap where there is little historical record, where creators could be afforded some creative liberties:

We have a historical gap between the year 700 Hijri (1300 AD) until the year 1000Hijri (1292 AD). It is cold, dark or black period. There is not much written about it. And a lot of the Arab tribe names changed during that period. There was mass migration to the land of Shaam (Syria, Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon) and Iraq. There was a lot of prosperity in the city of Al-Zubair. Also, the northern region of the Kingdom which we know now by Tabuk. To be accurate, it is in the south of the fertile Crescent. A lot of concepts changed during this time. This was due to their interaction with the rest of the Arab world. Even during the Abbasid period there was not much known about the peninsula except Qatri ibn Al fuja'a (historical figure) and Al-Khawarij, who waged wars against the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates. Only Mecca mattered back then. So, a lot of us takes pride in the pre-Islamic era, because it was recorded and has a lot of literary heritage. These periods are out of the record. Thus, you can create an interest and have creative Liberty in them.

Finally, some participants (three out of 20) suggested that the best historical period for depiction should be in the future. Some of them attributed this choice to development. [Ericsson] explained, "I have to say that foreigners do not care about Arabs. They do not follow Arabs. Because they are more developed than us." [OniThunder] explained the relationship and how in terms of Arab progression, fantasy should be placed in the future: "A game would describe how people were here, how they are right now, and how the possible outcome would be. We should be realistic though. Unless we wanted to go full speed fantasy. There's so much exaggerated fantasy works when it comes to the future." This demonstrated that Saudi gamers are invested in re-representing themselves to the global market. Some prefer depicting a reality of contemporary present-day Saudi Arabia, while the majority preferred rebranding the past in a modern package. The representation of the past has a great importance to the participants as many of them chose a period that preceded their designation as nationals of Saudi Arabia. This "partially" correlated with findings on *Quraish* (AfkarMedia, 2005) (Courmont & Clément, 2014b; Šisler, 2017; Maheswara

& Fatwa, 2021), where games were designed to offer an educational opportunity. Revisiting Chapter 6, where participants find a common future with the global community, they find that there is an opportunity to share their significant past and their hybrid present through video games.

Multiculturalism

One of the main points explored by this research is the question on how Saudi gamers utilises content to promote cultural exchange. A very clear point raised by participants is their desire to showcase multiculturalism of Arabia to the wider global community. In terms of showcasing subcultures in Saudi Arabia and demonstrating regional multiculturalism, interview participants were divided into three groups: (1) supporting addressing multiculturalism of Saudi Arabia, (2) demonstrating one dominant Saudi culture, and (3) a group that advised addressing the matter in terms of the targeted audience. Participants who supported showcasing multiculturalism (13 out of 20) mainly interacted with the following themes: strong dialectal diversity, the strong diversity of customs and traditions in these regions, and geographical diversity. There was a strong connection between the first two themes occurring within the same context. There is an association of tradition and dialectal diversity. However, there was an emphasis on the diversity of traditions, including the variation and different clothing that was exhibited regionally. [Abo Omar] clarified,

This will also include things, for example, how the southern region has a different dialect and different clothing. And the Hijaz, the way the talk is different and the way they dress is even more different. Najd and the eastern region are almost similar in the matter of attire. The northern region is different with their customs and the way they talk. This will give the game a very distinctive flavour. But depicting a Saudi in one stereotype with Shmagh and thobe, I don't think so. I think it's a huge mistake frankly.

Some participants demonstrated their objection to being represented in a unified internationally recognised stereotypical Saudi culture. [Toobah] said,

I think this excludes the rest of Saudis. This is something that sets us apart. One of the things that I like about Saudi is multiculturalism. I would like to see this reflected in video games. It's well known that the eastern region people are laidback. Jeddah people have their own thing. The northern region people have their hospitality. Due to this cultural variation, I do not agree with a single unified cultural model. Saying that this is a typical Saudi and that's it.

Most of this group referred to the international community, declaring that multiculturalism would generally make a better impression for the global community.

As for participants that were supporting a unified cultural model in video games, some demonstrated a sense of othering and prejudice to regions and cultures different to their own.

Some reactions were stronger than others. The following statement by [Abo Bandar] gives an idea of this:

For example, a person who has external appearance, in a specific time, there's a term called *darbawi* (derogatory term for a Bedouin man), This indicates a man who wears a thobe and Shmagh in a very specific way. And he is driving a Datsun pickup truck. And the most important thing: that he drinks Himdhiyat (Mirinda Citrus). For example, you see in social media they consider a person from Al-Qassim (a region in Saudi Arabia) to be a person who is homosexual. Homosexual in a way that he indulges in same sex sexual activities and that he is sexually attractive. like as we say he is very attractive so there's a great possibility that he is a homosexual. So, you give stereotype that this guy is Khikri ("poofy"). He talks in a certain way. He dresses up in a certain way. I mean different stereotypes of different scales of society. I don't know about people from the south: I don't think you can understand what they say. But if we add it as a stereotype. I'll give you an example. if you considered the Western society, I would say over there they have neighbourhoods for Blacks (also offensive in Arabic). Do you have a lot of gangs and so on? There is no common ground between cultures here. Like we have Black people gangs and they're having fight with police. And they sell drugs. There is no such thing here. It's very difficult. Where are you going to put their neighbourhood in Riyadh? Or in another region? For example, if you put it in Riyadh where are you going to put it eastern Riyadh? This would not fit, because they are mostly Badu. I wish there is some transparency. No sugar coating to reality. You must display reality as is. And the choice is mine to accept it or not. But most importantly you must display it as is. Others only indicated specific regions which they associate with, such as Najd (the middle region) or Mecca and the Western region. And finally, ones that chose that it depends on the targeted audience, specified concerns on how the depiction and reception generalisations and cultural misinterpretations.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has presented new research materials and ideas that help us to understand some of the efforts to deliver localised games for the global market. In short, game designers in Saudi Arabia infuse local culture in their products in an attempt to create hybridity in their games. *Abo Khashem* and *Badiyh* are two examples of this. In both games the hybridity took shape through using game trends in global game designs and seeded aesthetics of cultural artifacts and symbols, as well as narrative from the local culture. This contrasts to what the research examined in Chapter 6, where designers did not utilise cultural symbols in their creation for a product with narratives of a Western nature. The difference between the two is education. Arab designers attempt to create an educational interaction so as to export their culture by mixing it with elements of global gaming trends. This finding has the approval of participants as they expressed various tiers to introducing their cultural heritage, constantly referring to the issue of sparking the interest of gamers from global markets. However, as participants noted, through trying to utilise global

gaming trends, Saudi game developer might have exaggerated the task of diversifying the play elements in their games. This led participants to occasionally describe Arab games as “confusing.” This helps to explain the quality issues within both games, as they try to include a great deal of elements, compromising the quality of the game. As my research shows, these include adding strategy elements, crafting and improvement of weaponry and items, as well as a full-scale customisable wardrobe. While this might be practiced in bigger productions, it could be a challenge for small ones – which is a critical point warranting further study.

As for resolving the historical confliction with the global community, hybridity brings cultures together, opposing the counter-construction paradigm. While trying to create a hybrid culture, gamers in Saudi attempt to find similarity with the global gaming community by perceiving a shared common future. They also try to express their progress through sharing and emphasising hybrid cultural symbols from their urban life. On the other hand, Saudi gamers and game designers both developed different strategies to share historical cultural symbols. While developers do so through utilising the game as a mediator to transfer cultural symbols, interview participants share their historic symbols through comparing/contrasting their historical heritage to the historical heritage of their counterpart (Western counterpart), which is an indication of using cultural peg as a strategy. As discussed in the literature review, cultural peg as a journalistic strategy is “a topical or content choice in a foreign story that provides readers with elements they can easily identify as something arising from that culture and is an approach to engage the reader who may otherwise not be interested or knowledgeable about that culture” (Tanikawa, 2017). It could also be linked to Karim’s observation on journalistic reporting and proximity to a “common serotype” (Naji & Iwar, 2013b). With relevance of the geographical dimension quite accessible to the global community, this leaves a question of the historic dimension of accessibility to the global user. Interestingly, in terms of historical reference and self-identification, interview participants expressed a more inclusive attitude toward other nations the further they were from the present. In other words, they identified with a wider geographical homeland as they went back further into history. On the other hand, when Saudi gamers speak about the near history, they refer to the modern state of Saudi Arabia. When they go back further into history, they identify with an older and wider geographical area (the Omayyad, Abbasid and Early Islamic empires). This approach is associated with historical Arabian or Islamic accounts. An indication of identifying with prevalent nationalist narratives could be detected. However, there is no conclusive evidence to determine the exact reason for this attitude.

While chapter 6 has defined global acculturation as a two-way process, this chapter continues the same idea but from a different viewpoint. It shows how Saudi game creators blend local culture with global gaming culture in previously unknown ways. Saudi game design integrates Western game design with local aesthetics and narrative to create a hybrid culture. Arab designers educate via gaming trends. Game hybrids connect global market narratives with history, the chapter adds. Saudi gamers want a united gaming community, the chapter claims. Urban

hybrid cultural emblems show their growth. It then underlines how Saudi gamers and game designers employ other techniques to represent historical cultural markers. Developers use games to impart cultural symbols, and gamers do so by comparing their past to that of Westerners. (See chapters 2, 4, 6, and 7 for the concept of cultural peg/link.) According to my research, interviewees' historical identities are examined, thereby showing how Saudi gamers identify with a larger "homeland" as time passes. While examining this contrasting representation of Arabs in video games, four main themes emerge: (1) the amount of global game inspiration and infusion in the game hybrid, (2) local culture reorientation, (3) local sub-culture used in the representation, and (4) linguistic local/global game hybrids. Interviewees agreed on the worldwide community's interest in Arab games and the hybrid's reception. Unbeknownst to many Western scholars, participants think Arab games have little worldwide appeal. Yet, the reasons Arab games are unpopular are more crucial. My findings reveal that users stress the need of investing in a hybrid culture in popular games to match industry norms. This direct impact on gaming trends draws important linkages between local and global gaming cultures in new ways.

CHAPTER 9

Localisation by Other Means

This chapter investigates the appropriation of the medium (video games) for cultural preservation by the gaming community in Saudi Arabia. The chapter elaborates on how Saudi gamers have adopted new techniques due to their dissatisfaction with localized Western games. These include cloning and game modification. The chapter argues that this is due to the centralised content and transnational corporations' approach to meet local market demands. Through interview findings, the chapter highlights areas where the industry standard does not contain local market user demand. Some of these practices include reassigning local dialects, using broken written and spoken Arabic and in some instances using non-Arab speaking actors to speak Arabic. The chapter's main argument is that Saudi-Arab gamers consider Arabic as a cultural symbol. With many of the participants considering misusing Arabic in that manner offensive along other cultural symbols, they express admiration of local practices such as game modification and game cloning. The chapter then highlights, how local Saudi developers navigate the many legal issues as part of the emerging Saudiness.

Chapter 6 examined the possible four outcomes of acculturation (assimilation, separation, integration and deculturation/marginalization) based on Berry's (2008) discussion of globalisation. This was further explored in Chapter 8, expanding on the concept by examining assimilation and integration. Chapter 5 revealed that cultural preservation is a concern amongst a cohort of Saudi gamers. The current chapter (Chapter 9) examines two strategies/practices that have emerged as a reaction to what was described by a cohort of interview participants as a lack of professionalism in localising Western games. As a result of what they call "bad localisation practices," the gaming community in Saudi Arabia adopted the strategies of (1) cloning games and (2) game modification. First, the chapter examines if cultural preservation in localised games is a form of Berry's (2008) separation or is a form of integration. Second, the chapter makes use of the influence of the expanded definition of game paratext detailed in Chapter 7. The current chapter argues that Saudi Arabs consider language as a cultural symbol. It also argues that the misuse and misrepresentation of this cultural symbol has a similar effect to that of using other significant cultural symbols, such as items of clothing or local customs, as noted by Balela and Mundy (2015, 2016). Although examined previously in Chapters 7 and 8, and in other works by Costales (2012), Bernal-Merino (2014), O'Hagan (2015) and others, in the analysis of the 20 interview participants the following themes were found to be the most reoccurring in their own experience:

- 1- The use of English in video game with availability of Arabic translation.
- 2- Attitude towards the constant use of other local Arab (Egyptian and Lebanese) dialect in Saudi locale.
- 3- Influence of localisation trends of other forms of media on game localisation.
- 4- Localisation and the conflict of game immersion.

Localisation by Game Modifications (Mods)

In addition to the obvious localisation approaches explored in previous scholarship, such as that discussed by Costales (2012), Bernal-Merino (2014), O'Hagan (2015), there are other strategies and practices developed by the local gaming community to produce gaming content (games and game paratext) that corresponds with what could be perceived as autonomy of created content. The lack of the focus on autonomy in the research of Arab games was emphasised by Shaw (2010) and remains largely unfulfilled. This chapter will focus on strategies/practices by examining the primary data of the participant interviews. The two strategies/practices that resurface through this examination are (1) game modification and (2) game cloning. Although there are other strategies, such as story retelling through paratext (see Chapter 7) and gaming jamming (see Chapter 4), these two strategies are mentioned more than others within a representational cultural context. For example, a reoccurring term that was used during the interview is “العاب الحياة الواقعية” (Al'aab Al Hayat Al Waiq'iah). The term loosely translates to “games of real-life simulation.” The term was not used to refer to simulation games such as *The Sims*. The term was exclusively used to refer to game mods, most commonly of *GTA*, that simulate modern urban life in Saudi Arabia. Using the term on search engines between 2014-2018 returned results for this game. This led the research to explore the concept of Saudi urban simulation through modifying Western games with a similar theme.

Arab Game Mods in Previous Works

Due to the limited number of Arab game modes examined by previous work, hobbyist game mods were considered mainly a form of the counter-construction paradigm. Counterbalancing the Western representation of Arabs in video games is most noticeable on two plains: (1) production, game design and game design modification, and (2) game-play sharing. Special consideration should be given to the latter as it associates two aspects of the narrative. The first is the narrative itself, as gamers play games “acting” and “reacting” to form a narrative of their own, as will be seen in game mod example. The second aspect is shared media and commentary. One of the gamers would record his game, adding commentary to act as a narrator in a video game. This approach to simulating urban life came as an answer to the common representation of Arabs in Western video games. As addressed in Chapter 2, the representation of Arabs and Muslims in Western video games in general can be summed up in the following statement: an Orientalist image with a quasi-historical manner and/or conflictual framework (Reichmuth & Werning, 2006; Šisler, 2008). In addition, there is a general pattern of schematization through ignoring the ethnic and cultural diversity and providing a flattened monolithic image of all Muslims and Arabs (Šisler, 2008). Since the early 2000s, Arab developers and hobbyist were trying to either counteract this image or provide their side of the narrative. The early approaches were mostly limited to reversing polarities: a political conflictual framework

with the Arab as the hero and the Westerners as the evil invaders, with no real portrayal of “other” culture (Naji & Iwar, 2013b). However, most observations on counter-gaming lack regional specificity. This would not meet the expectations of demonstrating nuance of cultural-diversity or observing cultural symbols outside the general umbrella of Said’s Orientalism (Said, 2003). Since the publication of these studies, the game market has grown exponentially in the GCC countries (Clément, 2019). In addition to addressing Arab video games pre-2000, the majority of works on Arab production are seen through the lens of centralised game production (see Chapter 2). Thus, the examination of armature non-centralised works was largely examined through Galloway’s (2006) initial account on game-mods because it agrees with the counter-construction paradigm.

Mods as a Form of Counter-gaming

Galloway defined a game “mod” as “a video game that has been modified or otherwise hacked by a user or group of users.” He categorised the changes made to games into three levels: (1) visuals design, which includes the surrounding game environment, both mapping and ascetical design as well as character design; (2) game rules level, which is a set of rules which confine the gamer to the rules of the virtual realm; and (3) software level, where the code of the game is changed to influence character interaction, the physics of the environment and lightening techniques. During the mid-2000s, Galloway suggests that most artist made modifications were limited to the visual design and software level with very little modification of game rules (Galloway, 2006). However, this categorisation, although being accurate, tends to be on a more technical level. This means that this is modification from a modder point of view. And while it might be accurate in 2006, there has been a noticeable development in modding technology, which requires a more detailed approach. For example, the game narrative and media produced through game streaming do not fit under these categories. Under counter-gaming, Galloway did not use narrative as a principal element to evaluate counter-gaming by comparing counter-gaming with counter cinema: “Conventional gamic form relies on a notion of purposeful interactivity based on a coherent set of game rules. Narrative and form are smoothly joined. But counter-gaming often has no interactive narrative at all, and little gameplay supported by few game rules, if any” (Galloway, 2006, p. 115). Galloway’s levels of modification, at the time, entwine the term *counter-gaming* to the avant-garde, which is not the case in later years. Schrank and Bolter (2014) note that Galloway used the term to describe the avant-garde in the video games fields. However, Schrank and Bolter criticised Galloway for “his evaluative method” which was “grounded in formal analysis.” Such limitations of a formal approach indicate that there is a great need to derive new theories to accommodate the diversity of breakthroughs in video games (Schrank & Bolter, 2014). As seen in recent years, with much production and modification, this class of games expanded to form a genre of its own. It is suggested the term *counter-gaming* is intended to accommodate games that provide an alternative to an idea given by the original creator or mainstream gaming production, as well as other forms of media produced by these games.

Game Modes in Earlier Works

In early examination of game modification, the focus of the scholarship was on finding the link between this practice and fandom. At the time, the relevance of determining game mod positions in game study sprung from the need to explain the relationship between the game producer and gamers. Works such as Wirman (2009) and Galloway's (2006) investigated the possibility of it being a form of fandom, with fans taking artistic liberty to explore the realm of a game avant-garde. However, mods seem to have a more utilitarian nature to them. Writing a game program from scratch is a time-consuming process, let alone adding aesthetics, such as graphic rendering and sound effects. Modifying and adjustment seems to be the fastest and easiest path to produce a game with limited resources. In addition, the familiarity of a fan base with the original game would generally ensure a wide reception for the game mod. On the other hand, it carries benefits for the original game as well. Corliss (2011) reported that there was a consensus regarding the relationship between mods and original products, in which it is very common to find mods boosting the value of certain games. This is specifically done to contribute to branding, extend the shelf life of certain games and, most importantly, increase customer loyalty. The generation of more modified content created by the prolific game-mod community sustains a demand for the game long after the original shelf life is reached. In addition, modded content provides the gaming industry with experimentation and innovation material at low risk. And most importantly, the modding community provides a concentrated recruitment pool, where people with specific skill sets are most likely to be found (Corliss, 2011). This could be easily demonstrated by the beginnings of this practice through examining the relationship between Valve and the modding community. *Half Life*, by Valve Corporation, is a first-shooter-game released in 1998 that serves as a great example of the power of modification because the game has one of the highest counts of mods across game history. In most cases, the contribution of fans was not presented as a form of counter-gaming but as a means of extending the narration. This could be seen in Valve's reaction to the mods of extending the narrative of the first episode with a series of mods. *Blue Shift* and *Opposing Force*, use the same setting as the first episode and same character design to follow the story of other characters in the same world. *Counter-Strike* and *Team Fortress* are also extensions that were released later. This example elaborates how narrative can be a major part of game mods. Modifications, large or small, allow both the modder and the gamer to explore a new narrative. *Counter-Strike* was successful to the level that Valve corporation employed the hobbyist that created the *Counter-Strike* mod and thus acquired the rights to the game. Galloway described this as "outsourcing development to its fan base" (Galloway, 2006). However, at its core, the approach was finding a relationship between producer and fans.

Game Modification in Recent Works

In a more recent examination of game mods, the scholarship has moved from Galloway's (2006) conceptualisation to a wider and more inclusive typology of understanding of the concept. While Galloway's approach is predominately seen from a developer perspective, the scholarship has moved to observe the effect of user base research. This is due to the notion that

game-mod trends are mostly driven by user experience and community support (Dey et al., 2016, Lee et al., 2020). However, there are works that balance the investigation to include both users and developer. Kretzschmar and Stanfill categorised game mods into four major types in terms of benefit. The first type is when game mods are (1) mutually beneficial for both companies and gamers. In an ideal scenario, this type of arrangement includes allowing modification with strict rules. In return, the company provides the game-modding community with software development kits, APIs and sometimes part of the source code. The benefit of such practice is that it enables more content and expansion of story content for the gamers. In return, there is an increase in both sales and development for the companies, as in the case of *Half Life*. This category is highlighted by Lee et al. (2020) as a way to increase the longevity of the game. The second type is a (2) modification without benefit. This is where the mod was introduced with no perceived benefit for either gamer or company. An example for that is a “Difficulty Patch” modification made for Blizzards’s *World of Warcraft*, and the “unlimited money” patch for *GTA* online. These mods are usually not used in a wide range of games and lack user support, as they might give some users an advantage over others, in addition to damaging the brand image of the company. The third type is modification (3) beneficial only for the industry. This could occur due to the lack of protection for fan work and the strong legal standing of the production company. The fourth, and most important of this typology, is a modification (4) beneficial to gamers and not to the company. It is most important because most Arab game-mods fall into this category. Kretzschmar and Stanfill emphasised that this type of modification was usually illegal, yet subjectively beneficial to the users. In this case, users modify games to change the narrative of the game or to improve the content of the game from a fan perspective (Kretzschmar & Stanfill, 2019). Deng and Li (2021) noted that there is a potential social harm that could occur from such practices.

Overlooking the Red Tape

As for the legality of the of game modifications, Li and Deng concluded that the legislative regime addressing copyrights in games does not give the game-mod community an advantage under most terms of service agreements (TOS). This results in a conflict between game developers and the modding community, with demands for legislative reform to relive this tension (Deng & Li, 2021). In order not to be side-tracked by a quandary of “end-justifies-the-means” arguments, this thesis does not argue justification for this practice, it only observes the phenomenon. This means whether game-mods are legal or not, the research will move forward to analyse the content of the game-mod, and designer issues and motivations. However, what should be noted is that much of the provided material in this research precedes specific copyrights ruling on many gaming issues in Saudi Arabia (see Chapter 5).

As for the game material presented from paratextual content (Game play streams and video clips), it was unclear if mod-creators obtained the licencing needed for their content. Internationally, the laws pertaining to game mods vary and are a place of legal conflict. Burk (2019) noted that modding games or recording them is an area where the clear distinction between author and reader is blurred. According to Burk, a game user and author, when executing a game code, they engage

with the game. This engagement is not “cooperative interpretation” of the text of the video game. It is mostly making the user an author in themselves by choosing the direction of the route of the narrative. To add to the complexity of the matter, some games incorporate classical narrative elements. Burk emphasised the inadequacy of paradigms and moreover the inadequacy of underlying premises regarding new types of media, adding “Copyright tends toward a textual paradigm. I have noted previously that copyright suffers from a lack of a theory of visual semiotics” (Burk, 2019, p. 8).

Examples Examined by Previous Studies

ISIS Mods

There was little international interest in game-modding in Arabia until the emerging of the so called *Salil al-Sawareem* post 2012. The game is a modification of *GTA* and translates as “sound of clashing swords.” Networks called it “virtual Jihad” and ISIS propaganda. The gaming environment is a barren land with rubble and wreckage. The gaming character is an ISIS insurgent that intercepts patrols, police and army convoys (news.com.au, 2014). According to *Al Arabia*, the ISIS media branch was created to “raise the morale of the mujahedin and to train children and youth how to battle the West and to strike terror into the hearts of those who oppose the Islamic State” (Crompton, 2014, para. 8). *Al Arabia* and other networks refer to a game trailer clip that was released on YouTube, not the actual game. However, *Salil al-Sawareem*, wherever it was made, and by whom, is not the only mod of that type. *AMRA 4* was also modified to reverse roles where a gamer can play an ISIS insurgent killing American soldiers. Franco (2015) reports an ISIS supporter on an “official ISIS forum” writing “There are mods in which a user can play as an ISIS militant, especially against the Peshmerga and Syrian army.” Another supporter added, “I will, with the help of Allah, make dozens of copies for this game and distribute it for free to all the brothers that use the name of the Islamic Caliphate” (Fresco, 2015, para. 1). In most cases, mention of analysis of these two games on media are limited to trailers of the game online not the actual game. This probably resulted in the lack of regular game analysis. In most specialized gaming articles, the matter of “playability” and “gamer experience” is a prominent aspect of the game review. There was a lack of ludological aspects that allows players to progress through the narrative to understand to what point this game was made. To sum up, the vast majority of these media reports can be simplified into the following statement: a trailer of a video game was released on YouTube, which ISIS claims to have and to distribute. With so little-known features of these games, we can only identify that they are game-mods and that they feature Jihadists activities. Under “Recruitment and Radicalization: The Role of Social Media and New Technology,” Alarid (2016) stated that radical groups and terrorists have been utilizing video games to recruit members since the early 2000s. Alarid suspected that ISIL (terrorists) have taken this strategy from the American military. The U.S. Army published the video game *America's Army* (2002) for recruitment. Alarid added that if it is possible for the U.S. army to recruit through video games and train soldiers, it is “indeed” established by their enemies (Hughes & Miklaucic,

2016).

Radicalization through video games seems to be the main theory of general media outlets and some military related publication. Al-Rawi (2018) approached the topic of *Salil Al-Sawarim* and emphasised that the analysis was strictly related to the trailer video released online and the comments on that video. He clarified that there was no clear evidence that this game was released. The developer of this mod (if it existed) is unknown, since there were many links that led to malicious websites or broken links. Al-Rawi emphasised that it was unlikely to be ISIS's release in comparison to the usual centralised media releases from centres such as *Al-Furqan*, *Al-Hayat*, and *Al-Ethar*. The group has a long-held stance against entertainment like music, playing video games or anything that might divert from practicing faith. It is most likely to be produced by a follower or a group sympathiser(s) outside the ISIS controlled territories (Al-Rawi, 2018). Regardless of the validity of either theory, the focus should be more concerned with the method and process rather than concentrating on a limited outcome. According to Jahn-Sudmann and Stockmann (2008), research on games has moved from the negative effect of video game and what is called "problematic implications" to the systematic analytical approach of aesthetics, the narrative, economic and technical aspects (Jahn-Sudmann & Stockmann, 2008).

Difficulties Surrounding Examining Saudi Game Mods

There are various factors and practices surrounding Arab video game mods which contribute to the difficulty of tracking and citing games. Firstly, and most importantly, the size of the modification. Game-mods might not necessarily be full releases. Contrary to the convention used in previous works on Arab game mods, there is no evidence to prove that mods were established through the modification of the original title. The possibility of a modification being an accumulation of features and aesthetics added to other modifications is a very acceptable line of thought and could be supported through examining the similarities between various game mods. Secondly, is the difficulty in identifying the contributor's presence. In terms of copyrights, game-mods fall into a grey area in Saudi law. In addition to the lack of a clear definition of some legal issues pertaining to digital content, the term *ownership* and the freedom of property modification is often not given. Thus, modified content creators seem to avoid many issues by remaining obscure. The digital footprint of a modified game is commonly as follows: (1) a post on a forum on updates and previews of elements of the game during development and after release; (2) a dedicated Discord channel with Discord chat; (3) using a server IP address, rather than a domain name, which is usually posted on a temporary webpage with modification instructions; and, most importantly, (4) a video review of the game on YouTube or Twitch. Thus, the digital footprint of a modified game is short-lived, with the exception of a reference to it on YouTube or shorter clips on other social media platforms. This makes probing social media for game-mod references a more compelling methodology.

Another associated practice is questioning authority through game/paly. Many Arab modified games replace Western security personnel with characters using Saudi security personnel uniforms. Although game-modders and server admins urge gamers to maintain certain rules, including not killing and attacking police/army personnel, it is often only a matter of time until someone breaks that law. These occurrences require server admins to maintain a great deal of supervision to avoid any security liability. Finally, the most important issue is funding. Game-mod monetisation is quite a challenge, especially when working in a non-official capacity. Methods of monetisation may include personal online interviews as a requirement of online play or an online transaction to obtain game currency. All these practices contribute to the challenge of documenting games, especially for non-Arabic speakers.

GTA Modification

This section will address a game mod mentioned by interview participants. It was elected for the Saudi cultural symbols infused in the content of the game. Most importantly, this section will not address the infamous *Saleel Al-Sawarim*, ISIS modification of the game as it has been rigorously cited by a great deal of academic works. In addition, the ISIS-mod seems to be an oddity among a plethora of Arabic *GTA*-mods (see Figures 8.1, 8.2 and 8.3). However, *Saleel Al-Sawarim* shares common technical traits with other Arab mods, in the sense of it occurring and disappearing in a short period. Most importantly, there is a discrepancy regarding *Saleel Al-Sawarim* being a separate release. The discrepancy arises from the clip itself, as the music (jihadist chant) kept on playing, while the character is out of the car, while music is usually played on the car radio in the original game *GTA V*. This led to two possible suggestions. The first possibility is the game had been altered to accept this feature. However, none of the modified *GTAs* that were included in this investigation have this feature. The second possibility is that it is a video mode of an existing Arab *GTA*-mod with the jihadist chant added to it.



Figure 8.1 The *Mhajibwil Majnoon GTA V* mod was available by the end of 2016 (Fshfsh, 2016).

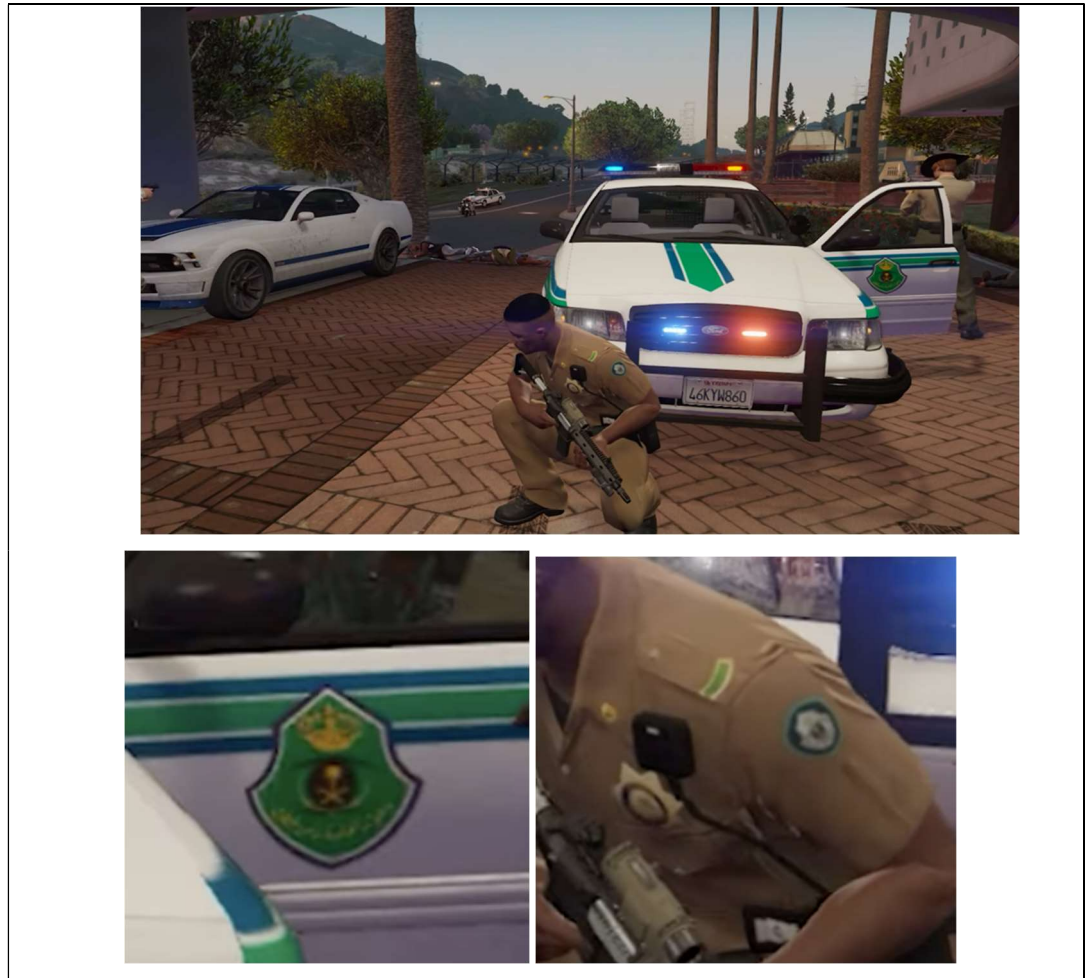


Figure 8.2 *Saudi Road Highway Patrol Police GTA V* Mod by Code 3 Community. The Saudi police logo and car design are used in the mod with a Ford Crown Victoria patrol car (MJM-Gamer, 2020).

Code 3 GTA V Mod: A Role-Playing Simulation: By Code 3

One of the rich resources that resembles a temporary reference work on the nature of modding is the C3RP website (Website: <https://code3.enjin.com>). The website is run by a group called Code 3, with a tagline of “Real Life Servers.” The group states that the purpose of the mod community is to elevate the experience of the gamer to reach a higher level of simulation of reality. One of the goals of the community is to avoid FairRP, which is failing to meet role playing requirements. The simulation aims to find the essence of Arab life in Arab countries. The group encourages the culture of role paying, “So we can exceed Western communities and become the best” (C3RP, 2021). Being a citizen on the server is the first requirement for a role in this simulation. The application is done through a process of registration on the website. There are requirements to ensure players do not break out of character. After obtaining citizenship, the player can apply to be a member of other services, also through the website. The services include ambulance and rescue, the fire department, the General Directorate of Public Security, traffic police department and the National Centre for Security Operations (NCSO). All of these are

simulations of Saudi governmental sectors. The NCSO sector works as response centre, much like 911, to follow security issues in the virtual city and send to them accordingly. The General Directorate of Public Security in the game has the exact logo of the Saudi General Directorate of Public Security. This sector oversees the police department, the traffic police department and the fire department. All departments in the game have *GTA V* modified vehicles that match the ones provided by real Saudi departments. However, there is also emphasis to add updates to the vehicle selections to meet the latest design of model and make. And, finally, there is a recruitment and training centre for players who wish to join the “fight against crime” (C3RP, 2021). This example brings about a framework long suggested by Jenkins’ examination of games. Jenkins suggested that video games were to be considered as amusement parks, universes where players act out their narrative through play (Jenkins et al., 2004). On the aesthetic level, the game brings the local culture to *GTA*. One of the most noticeable elements of the game is the vehicles. The car selection in the *GTA* Arab mods, have the benefits of the addition of cars from the local market, with local specification and familiar makes and models. In addition, some servers offer Saudi plates as well. On some servers, various enforcement vehicles and personnel uniforms were modified to match that of the various Saudi enforcement sectors (i.e., police, Saudi SWAT units, Saudi Army, etc.) (see Figure 8.3). There are some modifications that are added to the ludic aspects of the game as well. This means that the players are expected to follow certain sets of rules that adhere to the game’s social norms. For example, when the player signs up, they are assigned an occupation and a salary, and they are expected to attend to their given occupation. Some servers would expect the gamer to “make a living” through renting a car and working as “cab driver.” As for illegal activities, some servers seem to have strict policies in booting users that attack law enforcement personnel. Other servers require a player to move out of urban areas to indulge in criminal activities.

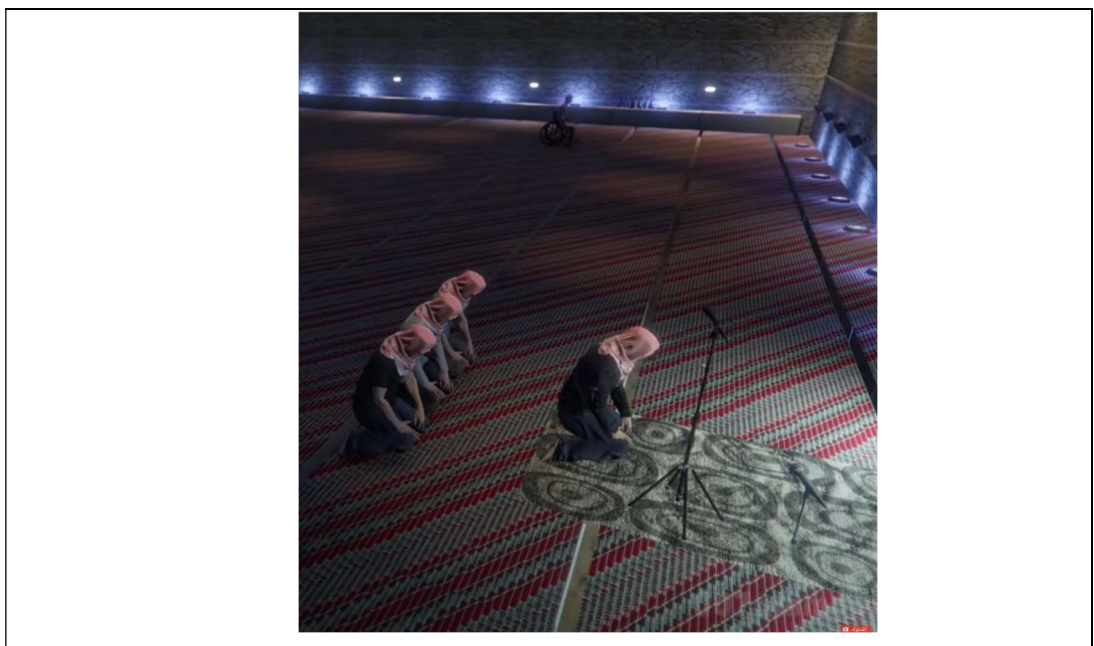


Figure 8.3: A *GTA V* modification with of praying in mosque. (Mod by Hammudi (2018).)

ARAB Game Cloning

With consideration to previously discussed hybridity practices in Chapter 8, where elements from local and global games are infused to create a cultural hybrid, game developers manage to offer a product with cultural significance to the global market. Finding inspiration from global games is a strategy that borders a known practice in the video game industry, labelled as *game cloning*. The practice is also referred to as “ripping off” someone else’s work (Katzenbach et al., 2016). The line between inspiration and cloning is very often blurred and difficult to define. In a study involving 20 game developers in Germany, the issue was labelled as a grey area. According to Katzenbach and van Roessel (2020), game developers were against “wholesale copying” of other games’ main components, yet they were also against strict intellectual property protection. Furthermore, developers clearly did not have a specific definition of where the lines between inspiration and imitations were drawn. The rule-based system seems to be a pivotal element in the issue, as it is not protected by copyright laws. As the development of games is an accumulation of already established solutions and graphical styles, inspiration is a commonly acceptable practice (van Roessel & Katzenbach, 2020). Some game developers define cloning by the creation process, not by legal terms, as new designs require a great deal of “iteration and understanding of gaming design” (Pascarella et al., 2018), which is a very vague definition. Since cloning games is difficult to define and to prosecute, Sudirman and Suparta label the practice as “legal plagiarism.” In Indonesia, the practice of cloning other games is widely acceptable amongst game developers (Sudirman & Suparta, 2021). According to Corbett, those who indulged in the practice of cloning other games usually avoided elements that were protected by copyrights, such as “frames, sounds and computer codes.” Instead, they imitated the “play” elements of the games, which are not protected by copyright laws (Corbett, 2016). Sithigh (2014) clarified that the problem was most likely attributed to the intellectual property laws, as they are not equipped to deal with video games. Sithigh adds that game cloning is very common, especially in smartphone online markets, where there is very little resistance to this high-profile practice (Sithigh, 2014). In some cases, some developers seek informal regulatory tactics, where publicly shaming developers who indulge in this practice is amongst the few choices they have (Phillips, 2015). With little legal resources offered to the original game developers, and the appeal of a product that requires “little iteration and game design knowledge,” some Saudi game developers might have found an opportunity to offer a product with significant cultural representation to the local market.

If it Quacks Like a Clone

Lamba (sometimes goes by the name Lumba) is a development firm that was based in San Francisco and managed by Saudi staff. The company was founded in 2012 and ceased to exist in 2020. The digital footprint of the company has disappeared, including both websites. The company’s products included what could be described as game clones of other games. The significance of this company is that it was mentioned by interview participants. Two of the games

produced by Lumba are *Bedouin Rivals*, a *Clash of Clans* clone and *Tribal Mania*, a clone of Supercell's *Clash Royale*. As discussed earlier, it is difficult to draw the line between inspiration and cloning. The rules of the game are identical. The graphics are similar yet swapped for cultural equivalents. In his review of post 2000s game production, "Not Waiting for Other Players Anymore," Clément affirmed the notion of game cloning in Arab games: "Imitation is the main trait of the Middle Eastern gaming scene" (Clément, 2019, p. 123). The following is an examination of both games and a discussion of the significance of cultural localisation. This will shed light on how local developers have the "cultural know-how" of international firms (Noujaim, 2017).

Bedouin Rivals فزعة

The importance of studying *Bedouin Rivals* springs from the opportunity that it provides, in terms of testing the Arab counter-gaming approaches. In previous studies, the comparison of counter-gaming examples (games and counter games) yielded that the FPS genre is the reason for the polarised rhetoric of games (see Chapter 2). Comparing single cases may lead to the belief that FPS games are ludologically bound to result in conflict and hostility towards the other ("kill or be killed"). This may have led Šisler (2008) and others to use the few examples of strategic genre games to prove the theory of counter-construction in Arab video games. This is why games made by Arab developers that fall into the genre of FPS are considered counter-games with polarised rhetoric. On the other hand, *Quraish* (2005) a strategy video game, does not exhibit this form of rhetoric (Šisler, 2008; Šisler, 2009; Courmont & Lément, 2014; Clément, 2019). However, when testing this theory against *Bedouin Rivals*, a strategy game, this theory does not seem to hold ground as it demonstrates levels of polarisation, nativism, and dehumanisation of "the other." Comparing *Bedouin Rivals* to its Western counterpart, *Clash of Clans*, reveals some questionable ethical issues in marketing strategies used by some Arab game developers. Unlike the undefined fantasy world of *Clash of Clans*, *Bedouin Rivals* seems to introduce a historical narrative. However, *Bedouin Rivals* exhibits noticeable forms of polarised rhetoric through dehumanising the other, reconstructing a historical narrative and promoting tribal racism. The analysis of this game will analyse three aspects: (1) the narrative aspect, (2) the game-rule aspect and (3) the aesthetical and visual design aspects. The narrative aspect will examine the games narrative and the contextual implications of the narrative. The game-rule aspect will examine the interaction between players. As for the aesthetical analysis, the study will examine the conversion of visual design from one to the other.

The game presents its historical narrative in the opening of the video game. Set in the early 20th century Arabian Peninsula, it tells a story about a little boy named Faris. Faris is the only child of Tribe leader, "a small but happy tribe treated by respect by other tribes." The other character is Abo Saqir, a veteran warrior who saw potential in little Faris, the tribe leader's son. Abo Saqir decided he would teach little Faris the matters of "manhood," telling the child that his father did not get to be tribe master by only bravery and strength but with his intellect and

wisdom. Pointing at the people of the tribe, Abo Saqir adds, “these people are not warriors, and they only know how to take care of their camels and families, and they respect your father because he protects them.” While they are having this conversation, the dark army attacks the tribe, killing people of the tribe. Faris and Abo Saqir escape. The narration explains that the dark army is an army from a city on the Black Sea. This army is led by the Butcher, who is illustrated as a Turkish person, and they tour the lands and steals and destroys in the name of their empire. The two escape to a coastal village and start their journey. Abo Saqir provides tips to the playable character, Faris. The story behind this game is very familiar, with attributes of the Saudi Bedouin subculture, in terms of social hierarchy. The tribe leader holds the highest of honours in both power and intellect. Thus, the rest of the tribe must submit to the fact that he gains favours and appreciation by occupying this position. The word *Sheikh*, which means elder in the Arabic language, is used to describe the tribe-leader. And this master is a reference for both advice and knowledge in all matters. This might not apply to the non-Bedouin sub-culture of town dwellers and villagers. Another observation is the patriarchal society that is emphasised in Bedouin society. “The matters of men” in the story is associated with leadership, facing adversity and controlling the collective. It may be referred to as “masculinity/femininity” in cross-cultural terms. A masculine society is ego oriented, puts great value on wealth and social position, and emphasises a great sense of duty. Since the game is mostly about conquest, there are very limited roles for female characters. As for the playing rules, the game is very similar to *Clash of Clans*. It is a multiplayer game in a persistent world, which is a virtual world that continuously develops and grows without human interaction (Bartle, 2004). The game supports elements of colonial expansionism, much like the one seen in *Clash of Clans* (Euteneuer, 2018). Exactly like *Clash of Clans*, the main target of the game is to cultivate resources by gathering or conquest of other players. For human resources, training various force members requires different resources. The player could launch attacks against other players and computer-based pseudo-players (NPC). The pseudo-players are represented as Turks, while in *Clash of Clans* they are mostly goblins and mythical creatures. However, launching an attack on other players is shown as an attack on other Arab villages. What sets *Bedouin Rivals* apart is associating race with other adversaries (Turks and English), as well as attaching the concept of revenge to the game (See Figure 8.5). This questions the theory of the influence of genre on counter-construction theory adopted by Courmont and Clément (2014), Šisler (2017) and others.

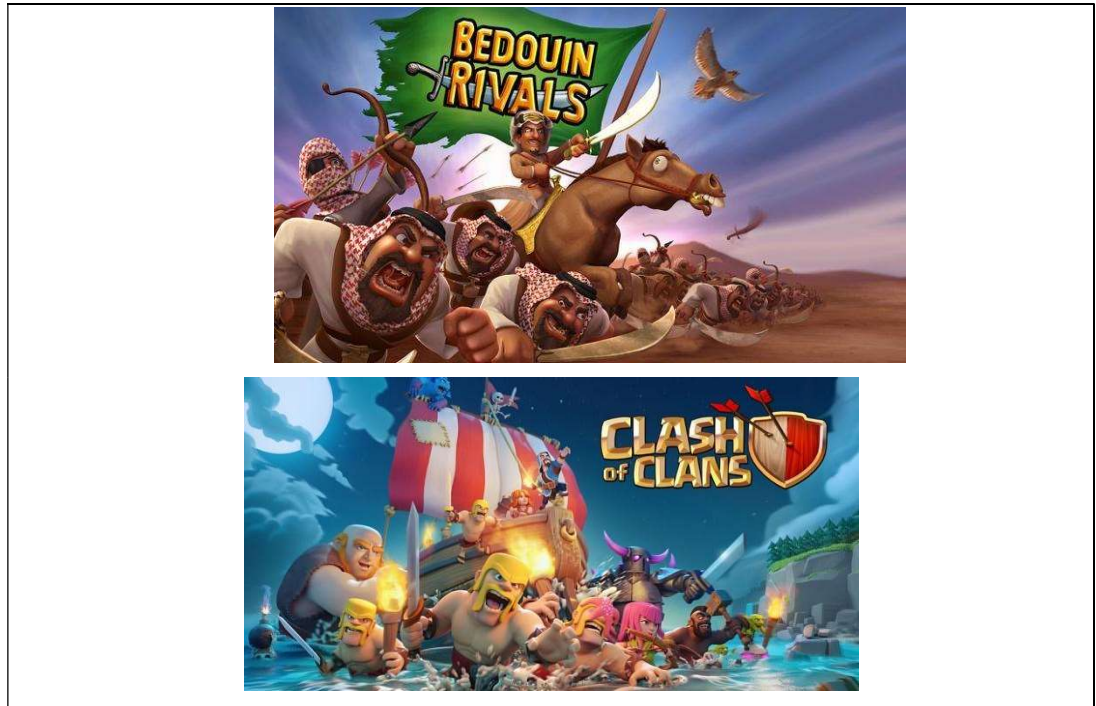


Figure 8.4 The splash screen of the clone game and that of the original game

Cultural Preservation and Legal Requirements

There have been some aesthetic adjustments to the original game to make it more in line with GCAM's regulations (GCAM, 2016). As discussed in Chapter 5, the issue of cultural preservation is a shared aspect between policy and users. Most of the modification was done regarding the environment. The lush green landscape is replaced by empty desert. The euro-centric and Norse building style is replaced with an Orientalist historical view of the peninsula: tents and solitary mud huts. As for inanimate elements that carry magical and mystical property, they were taken out of the game and replaced with more religiously and culturally compliant elements. Water as a main resource replaces elixir as a main resource, while gold remains the same in both games. Magicians are replaced by scorpion throwers and rifle-wielding men. Playable fictional creatures are mostly replaced by local desert animals. This could be interpreted in two ways. First, it could be a case of cultural preservation, as discussed in Chapter 5. Studies show that the terminology of *Clash of Clans* was transferred and instead used real life terminology from Muslim countries (Putra et al., 2020), which led the company to adjust the characters to be culturally acceptable. The second possibility is it was to get approval for GCAM certification.

Bedouin Rivalry	Clash of clans
Fidaaii (Suicidal Warrior)	Barbarian
Rami Siham (Male Archer)	Archer (female)
Saluki (dog)	Goblin
Jerboa (rodent)	Wall Breaker (skeleton with bomb)
Sakkar (falconer) female	(Baloons) Skeleton in Air Balloon
Shooter (man with rifle)	Wizard
Healing Pigeons	Healer (spirit)
Giant Falcon	Dragon
Al Jamal Al Haayij (berserk camel)	P.E.K.K.A. (demon like creature also not an abbreviation)

Table 8.1 Magical creatures are changed to be more culturally acceptable for the local market.

While the original game does not specify the era of its fictional world, *Bedouin Rivals* situates the environment in a very specific near history, the early 20th century. The developer draws story elements from specific historical narratives. However, there are indications that the historical elements used in this game come from an oral narrative tradition supporting a specific political stance. While the company specifies the events of the story to be within the early 20th century, the events seem to gain inspiration from the Ottoman-Saudi conflict, placed in the early 19th century (Sirriyeh, 1989). However, it should be noted that the game does not reflect the actual cultural heritage of the era. On the contrary, it seems to follow the same resource collection matter from the original game. The original game, *Clash of Clans*, takes a chapter from history where gathering and pillaging were very common. However, in 20th century Arabia, resources could be divided into two categories: (1) agriculture and (2) livestock (camels and sheep). These two elements are absent, although the importance of the water is emphasised, which plays a major role in these two resources. As for raids and wars over resources, they were not uncommon between nomadic tribes. However, these tribes did not form villages and settle in down. In most cases, they had reserved areas where they roamed and did not trespass into other tribes' grounds. The most common raids that Bedouin tribes made were raids on caravans and solitary travellers. Finally, mining is one of the very unfamiliar practices in the Arabian Peninsula. The currency, how little there was, and valuable gold was mostly traded through and brought from Iraq and Syria. The tribal trade route, known as Al-Oqailat, was a known trade route from Qassim and Hail with similar trade routes from Makkah and Medina (Alwhaibi & Alfraih, 2016).

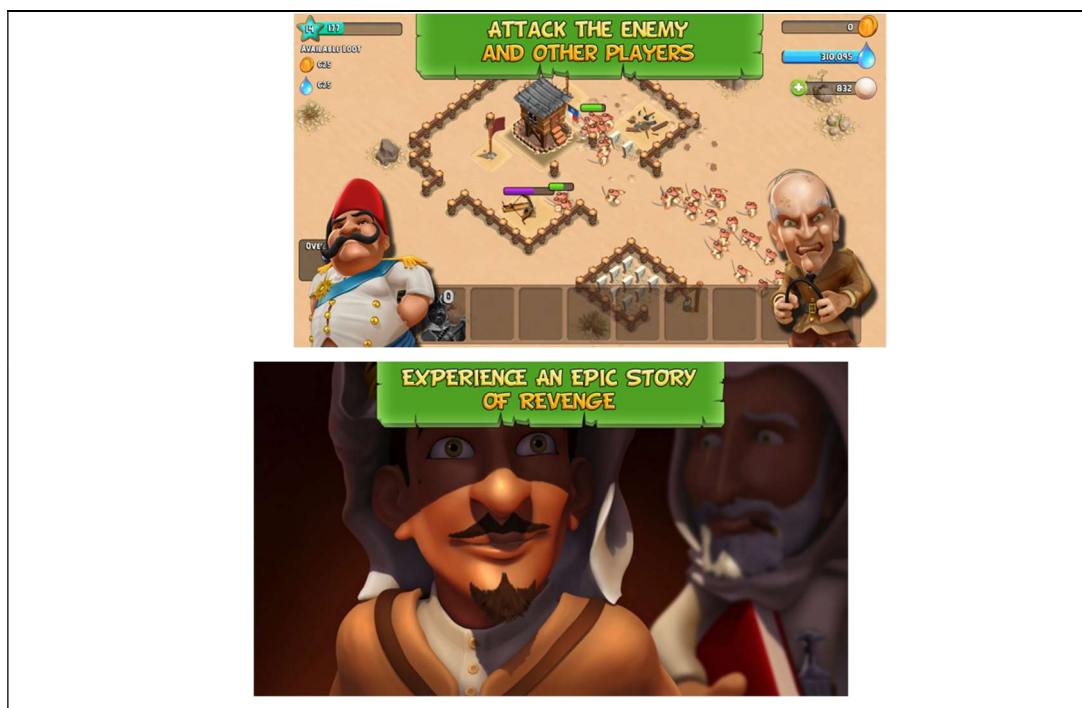


Figure 8.5 Polarisation is an apparent theme in this game. Enemies are depicted as Turks and English, with revenge as a central motivator.

The End of *Bedouin Rivals*

As of 23 of February 2019, the *Bedouin Rivals* apps were disconnected from the servers. There was no official announcement. However, upon visiting the game's official Twitter account, a user had sent an enquiry about a server error. The company replied that the management decided to discontinue the game. No additional information was provided. It is possible that the game did not find popularity within the targeted market. It is also possible that the original game was its competition since it was also available in the Saudi app markets. Most importantly, it is quite difficult to verify the reaction and reception of the game and its elements through gamer feedback since the game could not be operated locally. As for Lumba, the development firm, they seem to be going through difficulties as they are exhibiting a lower digital fingerprint. The website www.lum.ba displays a blank page at the time of writing this report, and the social media presence of the company is minimal. This is not so unusual for Arab video game development firms as they have a tendency to fade away within 5 years of their establishment. According to Ghmaishil, there is a great demand in the Saudi gaming market with sales income of USD614,000,000 in 2017. However, the investment in this venue is very limited. In addition, the lack of organization seems to be a common dilemma with Saudi game development firms, and in most cases, they would be on par with indie games (Ghmaishil, 2018). It is most likely that the game targeted a specific subculture of Saudi Arabia. Appealing to the tribal Bedouin sub-culture, the game designer attempted to create an appeal to a sub-cultural demography of gamers.



Figure 8.6 The company deactivated the game servers without sending notice nor explanation. Users had to enquire from the company. The company’s answer was, “Management decided to stop the game.”

بيرق Tribal Mania

Similar to *Bedouin Rivals*, *Tribal Mania* is a clone of another Supercell game. In most aspects, *Tribal Mania* and *Clash Royale* are the same game. Ludologically, they have identical rhetoric, which is described as a mix of TCG (trading card game) and MOBA (multiplayer online battle arena). The narrative seems to be discarded in this game. There is no reference to any storyline or historical frame. The modifications were limited to the aesthetics of the game, where there was an attempt to introduce culturally relevant aspects. By mid-February 2019, most of Lumba’s game were inaccessible, leaving their clients with no clear answer. Whether these two games’ modifications are an attempt to localise or counter game, the audience are also left with the question on the reason behind the company’s dropping the game from the market.

Tribal Mania بيرق	Clash Royale
Water Wells	Elixir Pump
Arbaji (untidy social outcast)	Goblins
Wiraan (children in Bedouin dialect) with slingshots (migla)	Spear Goblins
Scorpions	Skeltons
Bats	Minions
Hmarat Al Gaylah (oversize mythical creature)	Giant Skeleton
Ghoul Saghir (small ghoul)	B.E.K.K.A
Sheep Rider	Hog rider
Bin Agroop (Scorpion thrower)	Witch
Tar Sprayer	Ice wizard

Table 8.2 Game characters are changed to meet cultural acceptance.



Figure 8.7 Users appropriated *Clash of Clans* to a Saudi subculture by using their actual Arab tribe names such as Qahtan, Al-Dowsar, Mutair, etc.

Interview Findings and User Experience

When localisation strategies were mentioned, the following themes arose problems with localisation of Western games, the cultural connotations of linguistic variations and the significance of Standard Arabic in localisation. The participants shared their impression of how and why there was a place for the strategies of game modification and game cloning.

Western Developer's Knowledge in Multi-Cultural Nature of Saudi

As for the general impressions on the extent of Western developer's knowledge of the cultural diversity of the Arab region, interview participants were split into two groups. The first group (10 out of 20) expressed their concern about Western developers' limited understanding of the cultural diversity in the Arab region, yet they recognized some improvement in recent productions. However, the group seemed to suggest that there is a problem with professionalism and production values. The phrase "bad practice" and "lack of professionalism" was a reoccurring expression in this group. The other group (10 out of 20) thought that there was no knowledge of a multicultural-Saudi in Western developers. The latter group found that schematization and extending stereotypes of other Arab nations to Saudi Arabs seemed to be a common practice among Western game developers. Statements were strongly worded and expressed annoyance of this practice. The words "zero" and "they don't care" were repeated. Throughout the interview, the issue of assuming a unified national identity by western developers was considered generally offensive to a great percentage of participants. As seen in Chapter 8, the historical and contemporary aspects were a matter of divide amongst interview participants (see Figure 7.7). This is one of many aspects that influence culture (i.e., ideological, linguistic, educational, tribal, etc).

Reaction to Using Other Arab Nationality Dialects (Egyptian and Lebanese) in Saudi Locales

In terms of using the dialects of other nations (Lebanese and Egyptian) in Saudi locales, opinions were split, with a majority supporting using Standard Arabic instead. From the 20 participants, 14 expressed various levels of dislike of the use of other dialects in Saudi locales. Participants specifically mentioned Lebanese and Egyptian dialects in these statements. This group expressed a conflict with immersion when using these dialects. Some connected this inability to obtain a full immersion with other nation's dialects to a general impression carried over from other forms of media. There was an association between Egyptian dialects and comedy, as well as the Lebanese dialect and drama. For example, *Days Gone* (Bend-Studio, 2019) chose to go with Egyptian dialect in localisation. "I remember a game, *Days Gone*, it was in the Egyptian dialect" [Majeed79] commented on this game, "Honestly, I was laughing about it. It turned out to have a comedic sense to it. The game wasn't really comedic." Some interview participants specified the Egyptian dialect used in the majority of Disney's locales and the use of Lebanese dialect in Turkish soap opera localisations as a point of influence for this reaction. "I have noticed that a lot of people would prefer the Egyptian dialect because of Disney's localization (*Lion King*)," explained [Wiseman]. [Oni Thunder] elaborated on this, "We got used to Egyptian dialect in Disney's translations. Egyptian dialects are okay when you're trying to establish a comedic effect. However, if the game has a more serious setting and you put an Egyptian dialect, I don't mean to insult the Egyptian nation, but we got used to linking between the Egyptian dialect and comedic settings. When it comes to Lebanese and Turkish dialects, I think they are too melodramatic." On the other hand, six out of 20 users, who do not mind using other Arabic nation's dialects in video

games, seemed to agree on these points. According to them, when used correctly the Egyptian dialect could help add a comic atmosphere to the game. [Al Taeeb], who expressed his support for using other Arab nation's dialects in Saudi locale, explained, "I have no problem with this. Well, it really depends. Like for comedy I think the Egyptian dialect is the best. Because Egyptians are funny. But in serious situations, it's okay to have Lebanese." Other participants expressed further concern that the use of other Arab nation's dialects had a deeper connotation: "The problem is that they think we are the same Arabs" [Yazeed], "This is deforming our language" [Errecsion] and "I agree with you that the Egyptian nation is a great nation. And they are so many. But that doesn't mean that all Arabs speak in that language. So, any movie, any movie at all, that has been sound dubbed with an Egyptian dialect I do not watch. Not at all" [Abo Omar], amongst other comments of dissatisfaction.

Influence of the Cultural Elements of Language/Dialect

When asked on the extent of influence that the cultural elements of the language/dialect used on the localised game, the following elements reoccurred: interference with immersion, Arab stereotypes of the used locale transferring to the storyline, transference elements and localised tropes of other mass media. Some game titles were specifically mentioned by interview participants: *Just Cause* was the most mentioned game on this topic as well as *Days Gone*. Some participants attributed the choice to economic reasons rather than artistic, [Oni Thunder] commented on this choice: "You mean *Just Cause*, for example? I didn't play the game, but I've seen something about it. They said the game had a Lebanese accent and did not have a good reception. I don't know why they chose the dialect. I notice something, *Just Cause* was made by Square Enix. They did the same with choosing the Lebanese dialect in their game *Raider*. I think they had a contract going on with a company or actors. I think it was a bad choice." The most discussed issue on this question was immersion. Out of 20 participants, 10 answered that this practice interfered with their immersion or at least needed a certain level of acclimation. The same group affirmed that they preferred to play the game using the original language, English. Some participants added that they even preferred to watch Japanese media production in its original sound dubbing and to read the English subtitles.

Using Saudi Dialects

Inquiry into the dialectal variation and the use of various dialects of Saudi in localisation raised another topic for the interview participants. While the question was merely about the linguistic aspect of dialect, a great deal of participants perceived it as through a cultural scope. While this was expected as common knowledge of Saudi locals, it is important to emphasise this finding, which could be taken into consideration in future research: "Questions with dialectal variation could be interchangeable with multiculturalism in Saudi Arabia." When asked if they would like to see various Saudi dialects in video games, answers were distributed into four categories: five participants agreed with it, six participants preferred using Standard Arabic, seven participants chose to use the main white dialect of Saudi (Najdi), and the rest explained that it

depended on the intended audience.

One Saudi Dialect

The Saudi predominant dialect, which is sometimes called the white dialect, is a mixture of middle Saudi region local dialects (Najdi). As sociolinguists have approached this topic in detail, discussing the cultural and linguistic connotations of dialectal variation, this research is only concerned with the matter of using Saudi dialects in the localisation processes. Interview subjects preferred using a unified dialect, rather than using a collection of dialects from other regions, attributing their choice to simplicity. [CJ], who is originally from the south explained, “I would choose the Najdi dialect specifically. It’s the easiest dialect to speak and the easiest to listen to. This is something agreed upon by all regions of the Kingdom. I am originally from the southern region. But I speak the Najdi dialect ... Southern dialect or Gassimi are too heavy to listen to.” Some participants compared dialectal variation to Western productions. “I would suggest one white dialect. This is similar to a Western production. Accents are mostly with villains,” said [Wiseman]. [Yazeed] suggested that dialects enforced local stereotypes: “Every character when you give it a dialect it would give you a stereotype to some extent.”

Multiple-Dialects

On the other hand, some users saw the dialectal stereotypes as an opportunity to demonstrate the multicultural variations of Saudi Arabia: “When the dialect is known amongst some people, we can add that as a stereotype. So, I agree on mixing all societies in one mixed multicultural city,” said [Abo Bandar]. However, some of the participants factored in the intended audience of the video games. The users indicated that it was difficult to understand the cultural significance of a given Saudi dialect, even if the audience was some neighbouring Arab country. “It depends on the intended audience. If the intended audience are Saudis, you can use Saudi accents. However, if your intended audience is the Arab world, you should use one accent,” said [Moath]. [Majeed79] added, “But if the game was directed to a foreign audience, I think developers should have another version in Standard Arabic or other languages. So that they can understand it. But locally I prefer Saudi dialects because everybody understands each other here.” [Abo Omar] commented on the notion of using dialectal variation, that using dialects is in a way expressing cultural significance: “If the game is targeting all Arab nations, I suggest using Standard Arabic. If the game is directed to a certain market, I suggest using the different dialect of that market. So, you can expand on the culture of that country.” Other users expressed that using dialectal variation would probably hinder the intended goal of translation. [Nerf] explained the difficulty in communicating in Arabic with some Arab nations: “I would suggest that they would use Standard Arabic. If you use dialects not all people would understand. Especially from other Arab nations. An Egyptian who lived in Saudi for a couple of years might understand you. But nations like Moroccans, they would not understand. I have a hard time communicating with most Moroccans.” In summary, although having the benefit of utilising cultural references associated with dialectal variation, interview participants questioned the practicality of this practice outside a

Saudi Arabian audience.

Broken Language

The general reaction to the use of broken Arabic language in Western game localisations varied across interview participants. In the most part it ranged from simple annoyance to extreme indignant displeasure. The main critique by participants of these works was that it is “bad practice” and demonstrated a “lack of professionalism,” which could have been avoided through very little effort. Out of 20 participants, 12 associated the use of broken Arabic with “bad practice,” “lack of professionalism” or a “quality issue.” These statements were associated with strong emotions of indignation. Some participants highlighted the rule of participatory culture in avoiding these “offensive” practices.

[Abo Loolwah] expressed his frustration though asking if the developers could “book a flight to Saudi and observed how people are and looked for a better translation.” He explained that most Western games were mostly concerned with depicting the idea of “Arab.” [Abdullah] added, “I’m sure I’m gonna laugh about it. But I wish I would meet the game developer and settle this with them,” and suggesting that Western developers made use of participatory culture within the gaming community, he added, “I am going to get you a translator. You don’t have to even look, just give us something good.” [Ahmad] clarified, “This would leave a bad impression about the game. It is easy to tell if the Arabic elements were done by a foreign person, or Arabs with Arabic as a second language.” [Carbon] suggested the use of professional Arab translators.

However, some users, like [Ososo], understood the demand of game development: “I would understand that they have a lot to do, and this does not resemble much.” Yet, he attributed the issue to a lack of professionalism: “Either way, this is held against the professionalism of the developer. Especially in this time and age. Arabs and Arab game developers are in abundance. There are a lot of them that hold high powered positions and development companies. It’s really shameful that a game would be released with these things while it’s manageable to fix these issues.” On the other side of the spectrum, some interview participants’ reactions took the matter further, indicating that this could be considered racism. [MoonGuy], who is also a game developer, commented on this practice: “I consider this as an insult.” A person who develops this game did not respect a whole race. You did not respect the Arab gamer. You did not respect them at all. And you did not consider their (shock). When they see this, they are most likely to be insulted.” Most importantly, both sides agreed that the use of broken Arabic in localisation affects immersion, causing a distraction from the game context.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated some nuanced findings regarding the general unease with common characteristics in localised Western games. It highlights a call among the public for new practices that can expand opportunities to and contributions among the Saudi gaming community. Amongst these practices are cloning and game modification. The study of game localisation, as

examined by other scholars, including works by Bernal-Merino (2014) and O'Hagan (2015), seems to concentrate on the centralised content with international companies addressing local market needs. While this might be an industry standard, the general scope does not include content and strategies adopted by users in local markets. There is very little on local Arab consumer behaviour. In addition, localisation and translation research generally addresses cultural symbols, yet does not consider the language itself as a cultural symbol. In these works, language is mostly addressed under a technical and a linguistic capacity. Through the examination of the interview sample, misusing the Arabic language had a similar effect as misusing other cultural symbols, which is linked to the second paradigm addressing Arab representation in Video games by Balela and Mundy (2016). Misusing Arabic language includes the use of other Arab nations' dialects to represent another, the use of broken Arabic to represent Arabs in sound dubs, and other issues. The issues were connected to a long history of schematisation practices by Western and Japanese game developers. It is also important to point that a certain level of transference of stereotypes associated with these Arab dialects can be detected. This means that the use of an Arab nation's dialect changes the mode of the narrative in accordance with the prevalent media production associated with this dialect. This association is in line with users' experiences with media created with these dialects (i.e., Lebanese drama and Egyptian comedies). Many interview participants suggested the use of Standard Arabic as a solution to this issue.

In short, this chapter affirms criticism of standing academic works that focus on a minority of Arab game mods, which exhibit polarity and terrorism, while neglecting a greater number of modified games that engage with the global community as well as encourage simulated urban life. On the other hand game modifications could be observed as an attempt to add other perspectives and experiences to the game. This is in line with findings of (Loban & Apperley, 2019), where game modification was used to "to create a more detailed and balanced experience for both indigenous and non-indigenous players." (p.87) The Saudi communities engaged with game modification offer an abundance of practices and cultural related material for further investigation on the topic. A possible reason for the popularity of this practice (game modification) is avoiding the legal process all together. In terms of copyrights, game-mods lie in a grey area under Saudi law (see Chapter 5). In Saudi law, neither the term ownership nor the right to modify one's own property are defined precisely. Consequently, developers of updated content bypass the issue by keeping a minimal level of obscurity. Except for YouTube mentions or brief excerpts on other social media sites, the digital footprint of a customised game is short-lived. Numerous Arab-modified video games replace Western security forces with characters dressed in Saudi security garb. This eventually leads to breaching the law and defying authority as a consequence. As described in Chapter 5, server administrators must pay a great deal of attention to these occurrences to avoid violating any regulations. Lastly, in terms of some new policy considerations, monetizing game mods is a huge challenge, especially when operating in an unofficial capacity. Methods of monetisation may include personal online interviews as a requirement for online play or an online purchase to obtain game currency, which is a new step in the emergent Saudi gaming

arena.

The examination of game cloning as a trend that occurred with the introduction to a new medium (Video Game), reveals the processes involved in appropriating Western video games to address representation issues. Unlike the decartelized practice of game modification, the process of cloning is centralised and created by local companies. The term centralised refers to the creation process and distribution, where decentralised game content involves contributions of various sources. Centralised game content offers a more unified gaming experience, while decentralised game content (Game Mods) differs according to the amount of audience contribution. Both strategies utilize the use of cultural symbols to gain cultural relevance through something similar to cultural pegs. And while most interview respondents disapproved of the practice of cloning, game modification has an opposite effect. As examined in this chapter, local game developers that clone Western games insert elements of local historical narratives. Contrary to the findings of Courmont & Clément (2014b) and Šisler (2017), the genre of the game does not affect “othering” in these games. The observation brings into question findings of genre influence in Arab video games as cited by previous studies included in the counter-construction paradigm addressing the topic (see Chapter 2). This also leads the research to question the motivation behind the use of cultural symbols and prejudicial historical narratives. There are two possibilities: (1) seeking cultural relevance, or (2) as a monetisation strategy. Furthermore, the evidence suggests that cloned games like *Bedouin Rivalry* and *Tribal Mania* could not compete locally with the original cloned product developed by SuperCell, as they have a shorter life span than the original game. Most surprisingly, the evidence demonstrates that users developed their own strategies to infuse the original games with their cultural symbols (Arabian tribe names) in the original SuperCell game. This leads the research to question the viability of game cloning as a localisation strategy.

Because Saudi gamers are dissatisfied with the way Western games have been localised, they have begun experimenting with alternative strategies. These include the modification of games as well as cloning. The chapter contends that this is as a result of the centralized content and the strategy used by multinational firms to cater to the requirements of local markets. As a result of the results of the interviews, this chapter emphasizes areas in which the industry standard does not include the user demand of the local market. Among these tactics are the reassignment of local dialects, the use of broken written and spoken Arabic, and, in certain cases, the casting of actors who do not speak Arabic in roles that need them to speak Arabic. The most important point made in this chapter is that Saudi-Arab gamers see Arabic as a representation of their culture. A significant number of the participants find the objectionable misuse of Arabic in that way, in addition to other cultural symbols, and as a result, they show enthusiasm for regional traditions such as game modification and game cloning. The next section of the chapter focuses on how local Saudi developers deal with the plethora of legal challenges that are a part of growing Saudiness.

Conclusion

This study examined the autonomous representation of Saudi Arabs in video games and can be viewed as a continuation of research on the broader topic of Arabs' representation in video games. The thesis addresses video games as a form of expression, in which Saudi gamers present themselves to the global gaming community in the form of a hybrid culture, departing from the traditional comparative approach based on assumptions of national identity and cultural archetypes. This research investigates, at its core, the introduction of a new medium to the culturally diverse Saudi locale. There is an emphasis here on the term "culturally diverse". In a country with the cultural significance of Saudi Arabia, both the government and the gaming community have been observed embracing, rejecting, reacting, or adapting to this medium. Despite the serious endeavour to decipher the profound complexity of this colourful culture, the research only begins to scratch the surface of this extremely nuanced world, where a number of issues converge to form what is known as the milieu of the Saudi gaming community. This thesis's research questions investigate the conditions that shape the gaming experience in Saudi Arabia and question the methodologies in previous research. It illustrates how this experience ultimately influences Saudi Arabia's gaming community's autonomous self-representation:

1. What are the most prominent cultural conditions of Saudi gaming experiences?
2. How do these experiences shape autonomous self-representation?
3. What specific aspects of game content and game paratext are utilised by the Saudi government, Saudi game developers, and Saudi gamers to promote autonomous self-representation?
4. What are the strategies used, by these three groups, to initiate cultural exchange via the medium of video game?

Charting new areas of investigation, this thesis has suggested a methodology for the scholarship of investigating the topic of representation of localities in an emerging media form. It highlighted the importance of the process of cultural exchange in the paratextual content, examining cultural peg in this process and the major reaction to the acculturation process. In the pursuit of that goal, much of the primary resources and themes unearthed during the research were intentionally disregarded in order to stay on topic. These resources and themes are also vital to continue the research on the topic, which could lead to new venues. This work could be expanded in various areas such as gender, age, ideological, subcultural significance, which are all issues that could be explored in terms of acculturation of global culture. However, the findings of this research support that the nature of the hybridity examined was particular to Saudi Arabia. It also supports that there is a duality in terms of identity, where the Saudi gaming community identifies with both state and global game cultures.

The review of previous works on the topic of Arab representation in video games provides three modes of study that compromise the academic body addressing the topic, which are the counter-construction, the cultural heritage and the global south comparison schools of thought. By large, lack of access and linguistic barriers were the most common challenges that scholars have in addressing this topic, as highlighted by Clément, (2019). This resulted in some issues. First, the focus was mostly limited to depictions of Arabs in Western games and Arab developers' reactions to this representation. The second issue was an overall generalization of Arab identity, where national, geographical, ideological (religious and sectarian), linguistic and historical cultural variations were vaguely addressed under the term *Arab*. The third issue is a lack of sampling of Arab video games, as all selected video games, produced by Arab/Muslim developers are post-2000 production. There is no mention of the (culturally rich) Arab game development of the 1980's and 1990's. This further defines the framework, the gap in the research, which this research addresses. Selecting Saudi Arabia as a case study minimized the generalisation seen in another research. Although Saudi Arabia lacks the cohesive national identity, the population falls under the national definers national identity: (1) a history of belonging to a homeland or territorial ground, (2) shared memories and myths (3) a commonality in mass culture, (4) legal rights that are shared equally by all members, and (5) an economy that is common between members with territorial mobility (Al-Rojaie, 2016). This became clarified by both interview participants and game analysis. As the matter of identity was expressed in various dimensions accumulating in: (1) the connection with the historical narratives, which connects to a nuanced (2) regional and (3) tribal affiliation. These dimensions were also apparent in choosing the dialectal variation expressing the historical narrative (i.e., Standard Arabic for older historical identification, specific Bedouin and regional dialects for regional and tribal association), as was addressed Chapters 8 and 9. Another advantage in selecting Saudi was being able to expand the area of research to include audience and issues specifically related to the Saudi Arab gaming community. The variation exhibited was due to (1) a lack of a unified coherent national identity to being with, and the (2) individual different outcomes of the acculturation process as examined in Chapter 6. This brings into question the methodology followed in many works on the topic, where over-generalization in sampling includes individuals from various Arab countries without examining the effect of historical, regional and religious affiliation. This was addressed in detail in in Chapter 2, 7, 8 and 9.

Another advantage of limiting the research area has been the ability to examine the narrative through the view of the national press, which hitherto had yet to be done as thoroughly as in this thesis. The Saudi press proved to be a valuable source of information on the topic, yet it is limited to Arabic speaking researchers. The examination resulted in discovering three conventional periods of video game culture in Saudi Arabia: (1) the early consoles generation (1984-1992), (2) the software piracy generation and the adaptation of copyright norms and the first online gaming generation (1993-2010), and (3) the normalized social gaming and the progression to the mobile gamer generation. (2011-present). The analysis shows that video game culture in

Saudi Arabia was supported by the local press and that the reaction to video games in Saudi Arabian was generally favourable through all three periods, although the tone of the writing was heavily influenced by the prevalent nationalism of the periods. Through these three periods, the Saudi gaming community demonstrated various strategies and practices to appropriate the medium (video gaming) to fit in with the local culture. These included cultural and technological practices. As examined in Chapter 4, the cultural practices included practices particular to Saudi gamers, such as Mulhag gaming, Hajwalah games and specific cultural structures in gaming cafes. The technological strategies are addressed in Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9, which include game jamming (zanga games), game modification, game cloning, utilizing game paratext through video streaming and competitive gaming, bypassing state content control, participating in addressing misrepresentation over social media and most importantly connecting with international game producers to address issues. As for the private sector, examination of advertisements and journalistic coverage of events showed a strong presence as early as 1985, with game production and industry localisation. In all periods, related industry parties used cultural peg as a localisation strategy to connect the local consumer with the global market.

As for game paratext, it remains an understudied field in game studies. The definitions that reassign authorship of paratext to an expanding fan base, and not confine it to the original author, were most suited for exploring the exchange of local and global cultural symbols. This definition was also used in most recent works of game scholarship (Švelch, 2020). Examining game paratext in Saudi Arabia offered an extended domain to observe the acculturation process of the Saudi gaming sector, which surpasses the conventional ludic and textual analysis of video games. This research found that government, corporations and end-users had utilized gaming paratext to participate in a form of cultural exchange. As for the government of Saudi Arabia, this participation is most recent, with bold investment in the competitive gaming and gaming conventions. This is used as a form of soft power with economic and cultural dimensions. Using video games as a “threshold,” which is the essence of paratextual content, to re-introduce Saudi Arabia to the global community falls with the strategy of cultural peg. As for corporations, the earliest use of game paratext could be associated with the early video game industry leaders (Sakhr Al Alamiah, Al-Mithali Bawareth, and Ad-Dawliah). As early as 1985, video game companies, including video game developers, used game paratext to introduce the gaming culture to the local Saudi market. Through the review of advertisements in both local press and local television as well as promotional printed material, the companies used a strategy of associating education to “play” to boost sales. In the early stages, some companies followed an ethnocentric strategy utilizing what could be perceived as a sense of moral obligation, much seen in Pan-Arabist movements (Chapters 4 and 6). As for later production, game manufacturers shifted to a different strategy, that included utilizing game culture hybrids, as described by Fung et al. (2016), in a paratextual context. In other words, they mimicked global industry leaders while they added symbols of local cultural heritage. Although not specifically addressing the paratextual content, Balela and Mundy (2015, 2016) noted that this practice could be problematic. As for Saudi

gamers, an observable use of competitive gaming and streaming were the most common uses in this venue. Saudi gamers used game trends as a form of associating themselves with the global community. Thus, all three parties used gaming paratext as an exchange space. This supports previous studies, which indicated that the growth of content was driven by the interchange between the three major contributors to the paratextual space: the gaming industry, the peripherals business and the gaming community (Švelch, 2020). Most importantly, some users expressed concerns in terms of state strategy in this regard. They expressed their desire to be associated in defining and utilizing this space. Similar concerns were raised in relation to the policies pertaining to video games.

As for policy, there has been significant development in Saudi policy in regard to video games. The examination of governmental documentation of cultural and media policy adds to the body of work addressing video games and cultural policy around the world. In a first, this thesis recorded the analysis of the legislative documentation of video games of governmental bodies in Saudi Arabia from 1982 to 2020. These bodies are the Saudi General Commission of Audio-Visual Media (GCAM), the Bureau of Experts at the Saudi Council of Ministers, The Saudi Ministry of Media, Saudi General Customs Authority, The Saudi Arabian Federation for Electronic Sports, The Council for Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and the Ministry of Commerce. Although originally established to deal with legacy media, chronological development in policy could be observed. This included consideration of new forms of media, new modes of distribution and sharing. Video games have been a later addition to media policy. This much is also clear from Vision 2030, which the government used to announce diversifying national income to include the entertainment sector. In light of this, one of the primary goals of this project has been to document a sample of norms and cultural symbols pertaining to a cohort of gamers in Saudi Arabia and to develop a greater understanding of the nation's shift towards this new cultural policy system and its cultural policy archetypes. The present study's findings shed light on some of the most important issues and nuances that make Saudi Arabia's national cultural policy system a unique case.

As a discipline, cultural policy has undergone significant change and been re-examined from several perspectives since the 1920s. It holds several places at once because of the diverse scopes of the studies that address it (economic, political, and social), its historical influences, and even its language and historical effects. The question of cultural policy in Saudi Arabia as a whole has some bearing on the current state of affairs. As seen, Saudi culture was evaluated from both the inside and the outside. From the inside, Saudis view and have a preference on how their cultural policy should appear, while from the outside, research of cultural policy and UNESCO policy prioritises some components of cultural policy over others. The Saudi lawmakers and policymakers serve as mediators with duties, responsibilities, and strategies for both sides. The research finds that Saudi gamers and the Saudi Arabian gaming community considered both local and foreign cultural policies. Interview participants of this research considered foreign culture via

the lens of the creative arts, while they realized their own through the lenses of history, religion and language. This means that when Saudi gamers engaged in conversation about foreign countries (mostly Western and Japanese) they engaged with it in the context of art and media production. On the other hand, when they referred to their own perception of local culture, they expressed it in the context of understanding of local culture in relation to historical narratives, religion and language. As expressed by the majority of these participants, they understood the reason and meaning of the internal policies, while also having a deep link with a worldwide culture of creative arts. As a result, many of them had accepted and adapted to the regulations, finding ways to circumvent them when necessary. This form of hybridization is not new to global gaming communities. It is comparable to Webber's description of British innovators discovered a new sort of Britishness (Webber, 2020) and the *gēmu* culture of Japan (Roth et al., 2021). Similarly, the Saudi gaming community discovered a new, both open and restrained kind of Saudiness, where they had to navigate a sense of identity between local and global cultures.

Unlike the *gēmu* culture, which was a subject of study and many scholarly elaborations, the Saudiness of the gaming culture as a scope of research is still in its infancy. For now, this Saudiness could be defined as an attribute given to the emerging culture of video gaming in Saudi Arabia, where reaction to state policy, the broad diversity of local subcultures, historical and religious affiliations, and economical factors differently affect and shape individuals and content creators within the Kingdom. This Saudiness includes a wide range of characteristics and practices. This research unearthed many understudied aspects of this emerging culture, with much space for expansion. However, studies on global acculturation could help predict the possible behavioural outcomes. This approach proved to be instrumental in the examination of video gaming as an emerging culture. Through examining these aspects through the lens of global acculturation, where the local culture is gradually engulfed by a larger dominant culture, this research found that the outcomes in the case of video gaming in Saudi are in line with boarder works of acculturation. Significantly, the findings of this research support Berry's (2008) outcomes of acculturation: (1) assimilation (2) separation (3) integration and (4) deculturation or marginalization. Saudi gamers and Saudi game developers demonstrate these outcomes in various degrees on different issues. As a general attitude towards globalism as defined by Mir (2019) in his work on globalization and Arab culture, most interviewees identified as global consumers. Importantly, the majority of these participants reported an overall displeasure (or anger) at being excluded from the global society with which they identified. This is most evident in their reaction to the misappropriation of Saudi Arab cultural symbols by Western/Japanese game developers and the lack of Saudi representation as a modern consumer in Western/Japanese production. For Saudi game developers, there was a distinction between older generation Saudi Arab games (1985-1995) and new Saudi Arab games (2015-present) in terms of the use of global media symbols. The games produced between 1985 and 1995, in addition to inspiration from the local historical record, were limited to borrowing cultural symbols from localised media production. In contrast, in Saudi Arab games produced after 2015 there was a widespread acceptance of global culture, as shown by

global mass media. Other elements of global consumer acculturation, as outlined by Cleveland and Laroche (2007), could be observed. These elements included cosmopolitanism, exposure to marketing activities of multinational corporations, the use of and exposure to English language, examining social interactions and contacts with foreigners, global/foreign mass media exposure and the openness to emulate global consumer culture. This also translated to a fading strategy of ethnocentric marketing strategies, as examined in newspaper advertisement, paratextual content and the use of cultural symbols within video games.

This new Saudiness is also seen as embracing an idea of hybridity between a diverse local culture and the global gaming culture. The strategy followed by recent Saudi game production creates a hybrid culture in games through using Western game design and local aesthetics and narratives in various degrees. Arab designers seek to build an educational interaction to promote their culture by combining global gaming trends with their culture. Interview participants expressed their support for introducing their cultural heritage to gamers in the worldwide market, indicating that they agreed with this strategy. Participants observed, however, that by attempting to include worldwide gaming trends, Saudi game developers may have exaggerated the complexity of broadening their games' play components. Participants sometimes described Arab games as confusing as a result. Another theme of this hybridity is resolving the historical conflict with the historical narratives of global markets. Saudi gamers strive to create common ground with the global gaming community by visualising a shared future. In addition, they attempt to convey their advancement by sharing and highlighting hybrid cultural emblems from their own urban existence. On the other hand, Saudi gamers and game creators created alternative techniques to communicate historical cultural symbols. While developers do so by using games as a conduit for the transmission of cultural symbols, interviewees conveyed their historic symbols by comparing and contrasting their historical background to that of their Western counterparts. This demonstrated the use of cultural peg as a tactic. It should be noted that interview participants expressed various degrees of historical identity. As they went farther back in time, Saudi gamers connected with a larger geographical motherland. When Saudi gamers discussed recent history, they referred to the contemporary history of Saudi Arabia. In contrast, when they observed the distant past, they identified with a larger and older geographical region (the Omayyad, Abbasid and Early Islamic empires). There is no conclusive evidence that this was influenced by narratives exhibited in nationalists' movements (e.g., Pan-Arabist, Pan-Islamist, etc.).

This new Saudiness is also reserved as much as it is open to the global market. Concerns surrounding cultural preservation were both directly expressed by interview participants and could be inferred from practices by the gaming community in Saudi Arabia. Apart from directly interacting with game producers online and participating in online activism to correct cultural misconceptions, there were three strategies that were emerging within the gaming community in Saudi Arabia: (1) recreating an alternative narrative through game play over streaming services, (2) game modification and (3) game cloning. In addition to being in line with state policy in Saudi

Arabia, the gaming community opted to select internationally acceptable practices. This indicated a feature of the nuanced hybridity of the Saudi gaming community that sought to find harmony between both local and global laws. All three practices were directed inwards as Arabic language is prioritized as a medium of communication. This is well-connected to concerns expressed by interview participants over the misuse of Arabic in localised Western/Japanese production. As highlighted by interview participants, the misuse of Arabic involved the usage of dialects from other Arab countries in Arabic locales and the use of broken Arabic to portray Arabs in dubs, among other issues. The term *misuse* in this context is well defined in Balela and Mundy's (2015, 2016) account of the problematic usage of other cultural symbols in video games. The problems stemmed from a lengthy history of schematisation methods among Western and Japanese game creators. Furthermore, it is crucial to note that there seemed to be some transference of preconceptions connected with certain Arab dialects. This relationship stems from consumers' exposure to media produced using these accents (i.e., Lebanese drama and Egyptian comedies). The usage of Standard Arabic seemed to be the most often proposed remedy for this practice.

The research examined game modification and game cloning as methods recently adopted by Saudi game enthusiasts. Similar to cultural pegs, both tactics utilise cultural symbols to achieve local relevance (in this case, through using Saudi cultural symbols). And although the majority of interviewees disapproved of cloning, game modification seemed to receive the opposite reaction. The discontinuation of games like *Bedouin Rivalry* and *Tribal Mania* suggested that these games could not compete locally with the original product. This finding was supported by further evidence, such as Saudi players incorporating local cultural markers (Arabian tribe names) into the Western game rather than playing the clone. In addition, this study's findings shed insight on the monetisation tactics used by local game developers that clone multinational titles. Some of these firms included local historical narrative elements which included "othering" into their strategy games. This brings into question the findings of previous research conclusions that suggested that bias and "othering" in Arab video games was a result of using the FPS genre (Kemel, 2014; Naji & Iwar, 2013a; Šisler, 2008, 2009a). It also supports research on the topic of misuse and displacement of cultural symbols (Balela & Mundy, 2015, 2016). As for game modification, the research upheld criticism of established academic works that concentrated on a handful of Arab game modifications that display polarisation and terrorism, while ignoring a bigger number of modified games that connect with the global community and promote simulated urban life. Documentation of these modified games is essential as they are a renewed source of autonomous identity expression. Saudi game modification games work closely with their audience, catering and fulfilling a cultural gap in the international product. More work is needed to explore this venue as it offers insight into a trove of cultural significance.

Further investigation

From 2006 to 2019, the majority of works addressing Arab representation in video games saw little advancement outside comparative cases. In the most part, the discussion was how Arabs reacted to their depiction in video games. This thesis sought to break out of this grid lock through opening new venues of investigation. With many benefits that came with comparative examination, the approach followed in this research demonstrated the benefits of a 'full picture' view of emerging culture. Supported by primary sources, the thesis unearthed issues of Arab representation, which were less likely to emerge by building upon secondary sources. These issues included, yet were not limited to, representation in video game paratext, the effect of acculturation on representation, state laws and archetypal cultural policy models, armature, indie strategies in reaction to problematic localisation practices, exporting culture through hybrid game culture, ethnocentricity and marketing strategies between 1985 and 2020 and, most significantly, the lack of a unified national identity and its effects on emergent hybrid culture. Each of these venues is an untapped trove of information. And with the new strategy Saudi Arabia is adopting, there is much promise in beneficial outcomes for both the academic and private sectors.

Since the conception of this project, the approach of investigation took into consideration that further research is needed in these new unearthed venues. Therefore, the frameworks chosen to identify strong sources of information on this topic were selected because (1) they offer much expansion via quantitative research and (2) because they can be utilised by the video game industry. One of the main frameworks used in this research is AGCC (Acculturation of Global Consumer Culture), which has seen much attention since 2012. There is great protentional in qualitative research on the dimensions of this framework: cosmopolitanism, exposure to marketing activities of multinational companies, English language user and exposure, global social international, global mass media exposure, openness and desire to emulate global consumer culture, and self-identification with global consumer culture. Works by Carpenter et al. (2013) and Cleveland and Laroche (2007) were very instrumental in more recent work to understand the reaction and behaviour of consumers and the effect that these dimensions have over national identities in various countries (Cleveland et al., 2015), reaction to paratextual engagement of games through advertisements (Czarnecka & Schivinski, 2019) and consumer behaviour (Czarnecka et al., 2020). This will offer game developers an insight on creating hybrid cultures, which Fung et al. (2016) stated as a requirement for addressing global markets.

Another issue that has been discussed earlier in the research is the representation sample. As pointed out in the methodology section of this thesis and various times throughout the work, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, lacks a unified coherent national identity. This was one of the driving motives, as this gap in the research was observed in the scholarship addressing the topic of Arab representation in video games in general. In many cases, Arabs were addressed as one

unified identity, despite their nationality, religious background (Muslim, Christian, Jewish in Yemen), sectarian affiliation (Muslim: Sunni, Shia, Zaidi, Sufi), church denomination, and other factors that define how identity is viewed. The use of word *religious*, as seen as a criteria as used by Al-Faraj (Alfaraj, 2019), carries an arbitrary meaning in this context. The steps followed in identifying a representative sample for this research included consideration of region, age, educational, income and gaming experience. Another countermeasure taken into consideration was sampling from within the borders of Saudi Arabia. Nonetheless, there was some compromises in this thesis. Although a fairly acceptable practice, sampling from a pool of Saudi students on a governmental scholarship should be handled with consideration of the privileges enjoyed by this group. Also, the main compromise is the lack of female participants in the sample of this thesis. After careful consideration in terms to concerns highlighted by Le Renard (2014) and Mustafa and Troudi (2019), Saudi female gamers were excluded from the sample. There is much room for expansion on the findings of this research by capable Saudi female researchers. Female researchers would have an advantage to both progressive and conservative female Saudi gamers. Finally, even with the substantial amount of information that was unearthed by interview participants, 20 interviewees is a low number. A bigger sample is more likely to reveal more issues and insight. Thus, it is strongly recommended to consider bigger financial and human resources.

Another recommendation is one that should be highlighted in researching Arab identity in general. Nationalist movements and political dispositions have a great influence on shaping identities and self-perception in the Arab world. The research highlighted some of these influences such as Pan-Arabist and Pan-Islamist movements. The research also highlighted how the perception of homeland is a nuanced topic. Thus, the research recommends that game production should also be considered through the light of nationalism and political disposition. Much effort and focus were placed on games produced between 1999 and 2010, specifically ones that expressed some political stance. Examining the cultural aspect of games produced between 1985-1995, as well as games produced after 2013 is minimal. *Minimal* in this context means that it is only a footnote or a casual mention. In other words, video game production in the Arab world could be motivated by political and nationalist motivations. However, as this thesis details, a big portion of games are produced as a form of expression or a form of communication with a wider global community.

Additionally, the research affirmed the importance of using local researchers as they are instrumental in research of this nature. Beyond the linguistic factors of being able to communicate and access local press and legal documentation, local researchers are more capable of understanding cultural cues and the limitation of expressions in local interview participants. There is a certain level of trust that needs to be established with participants as many are not willing to be open about many cultural, policy and financial issues. In other instances, some participants disclosed that the lack of understanding of foreign people made them less expressive. Most

importantly, the importance of using a local researcher lays in the ability to distinguish the nuances of cultural issues and the ability to avoid stereotyping and generalisation. This was a major difficulty in building on previous literature. This work is an attempt to rectify misconceptions and open a new chapter in the study of this emergent culture.

A final suggestion I would like to make, especially for research institutions outside the borders of Arab countries, is to avoid a limited perspective in cultural research. Saudi cultures are complex and difficult to comprehend in their entirety. As a result of our sampling efforts, I have noticed that individuals are reluctant to share their opinions on numerous cultural issues. In addition, participants had their own opinions regarding what constitutes "local culture." Thus, it is crucial to avoid making assumptions based on the influence of personal perspective, regardless of whether the researchers are local or international. To be clear, the discussion here is on the classification of other cultures using a scale and method devised in the global north. Among these practises is the search for archetypes for comparison. A common occurrence in similar research is to select cultural archetypes (which are only examples of culture) and look for similarities and differences between the two cultures. It is one an approach followed by the cross-cultural school which was discussed throughout the thesis. In doing so, however, the research tends to avoid a large portion of the "other" culture. In the case of Saudi Arabia, I conclude that searching for a cultural archetype captures only a limited snapshot of a consistently changing, multi-layered, diverse cultural nexus. Therefore, I recommend focusing on current practises (of assimilation, separation, integration and deculturation or marginalization) rather than searching for cultural archetypes. Archetypes could be used to explore cultural elements in a certain population. However, it should be emphasised that cultural archetypes are essentially examples of culture.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

1. Game Vs. Content Rating in Saudi Arabia (Chapter 5)



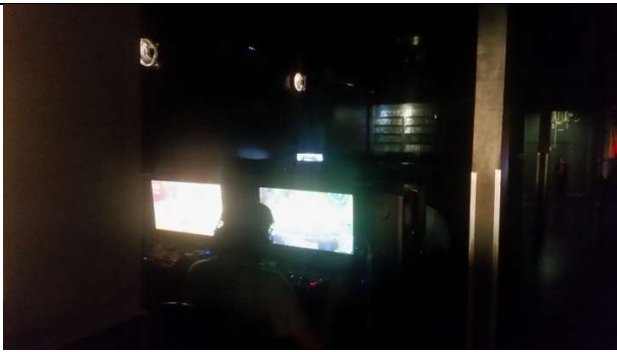

GCAM Game Classification vs. Film Classification:

Film Classification		Game Classification	
Symbol	Details	Symbol	Details
	(G): The film is suitable for all ages. content is overall positive and void of violence and threats. Mostly Cartoons.		
			Games Suitable for 3 Years of Age and Above: The game is suitable for all ages (Sport Games). Some games may contain some violence but in a cartoons context that is suitable for children.
			Games Suitable for 7 Years of Age and Above: The game may contain some scary sound and scenes. For example implied violent scenes, or interaction with violence in a realistic way (disappearance of characters after they die)
	(PG): Advised company of adults for viewers under 12 years. The content is generally safe. However, discretion is advised as it may contain disturbing images for children. For example: some violence, some sad scenes, and some fantasy.		Games Suitable for 12 Years of Age and Above: May contain scary sounds or effects. Such as showing details of injury.
	“(PG12): Mandatory company of adults for viewers under 12 years of age. The content is generally safe. It may contain some scenes that are not suitable for viewers under the age of 12. Adults are to evaluate the suitability of content. Content may contain science fiction, superheroes, films inspired by comic books”. It should be noted that the Arabic wording used was written “comic book”. However, it is safe to assume that the meaning was lost in translation.		


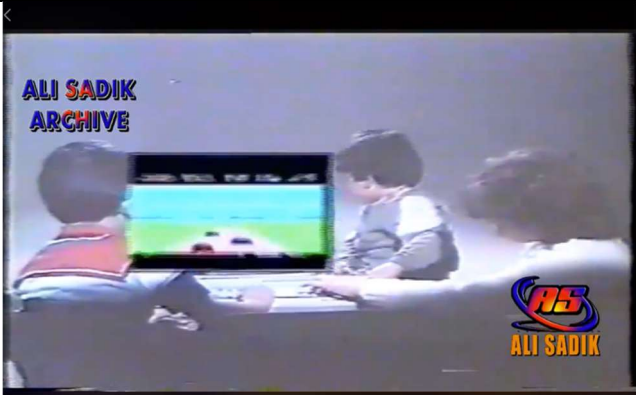
	<p>(R12): Prohibited to Viewers younger than 12 years of age. Includes adult content. It could be addressed with discursion for viewers of this age and o For example: thrillers, suspense, war, c and criminal organisation, since fiction natural disasters, simple romantic plots</p>		
	<p>(R15): Prohibited for viewers less than 15 years of age. Includes adult content. It could be addressed with discursion for viewers by age of 15 and above. Exam wars, crimes and criminal organisation, romance, horror, and violence.</p>		<p>Games Suitable for 16 Years of Age and Above: May contain simulated violence projected against humans or humanlike characters or animals. It may also contain criminal acti in a positive or non-negative way. It may contain unsuitable language.</p>
	<p>(R18): Prohibited to viewers under the age of 18. Includes more mature adult content. May contain very violent scenes and domestic violence. It could also co political topics.</p>		<p>Games Suitable for 18 Years of Age and Above: may contain very graphic violent scenes. example, torture or body dismemberment with graphic detailed injury. It may also contain use of drugs, cigarettes, or alcohol beverages in any form.</p>

Appendix 2

2. Game Paratext (Chapter 7)

	<p>Pictures from Initial Observational Research Trip in 2018</p> <p>Researcher At a dedicated gaming café in Riyadh. (Researchers own collection)</p>
	<p>Pictures from Initial Observational Research Trip in 2018:</p> <p>Gaming Cafés Subscription Prices. (Researchers own collection)</p>
	<p>Pictures from Initial Observational Research Trip in 2018:</p> <p>Dark Smokey gaming room. (Researchers own collection)</p>
	<p>Pictures from Initial Observational Research Trip in 2018:</p> <p>(Researchers own collection)</p>



	<p>Cosplay at GomesrCon in Jeddah 2018.</p> <p>Photo By Huda Bashatah, Arab News Newspaper (Hameed, 2018)</p>
	<p>Television Advertisement:</p> <p>Late 1980s: Children playing on Sakhr. Announcement “for free time, Sakhr software entertains and educates.”</p> <p>Source: Ali Sadik archives. (Sadik, 1985)</p> <p>Note: The Game Played in the Advertainment is Hyper Rally (1985) by Konami (RetroGamerTeam, 2009)</p>

Appendix 3

Interviews with Representatives of Al Alamiah and Bawareth (Arab game developers 1985-1995). (For further research: video game dispute and ruling on copyrights in the early 1995 in Saudi Arabia)

(1) Riyadh Al Sharekh (Ex- Head of Publishing in Sakhr's Educational Division)

Good evening Mr. Omar.

Down below I will answer these questions sent to Mr. Muhammad Al Sharekh.

Best,

Riyadh Al Sharekh

HARDWARE:

1- Sales Numbers of Units and Users:

We are talking about statistical and financial data that spans over 30 years of Sakhr's educational/entertainment devices. It is quite obvious that it is currently difficult to sum up this amount of financial data. However, as a rough estimate, we can say that the figure of sold unites is between 1/2 million units of different models during 5 years of distribution around the Arab world/global market. Unit cost was between 180 to 200 USD per unit.

2- Localising MSX:

Goals and motivations:

1. Providing computer technologies to Arab users in the Arabic language.
2. Getting a computer in every Arab home.
3. Breaking the fear barrier between computer and non-tech-oriented people.
4. Using computers as an educational tool in schools.
5. Innovation of a palatable and attractive Arabic brand name.
6. Providing an inexpensive to all users.
7. Supplying users with Arabic educational systems.

Challenges:

1. Finding Arab staff that has the technical understanding of the concept of Arabization/localisation and the requirements and tools of the process.
2. Finding international manufacturers which are prepared to invest in the Arabic computer project. Most technology back then was exclusively in English.
3. A price/type feasibility study of product.
4. Arab user/market attitude towards a technology/computer that has been developed by an Arab gulf country.
5. Finding the right price point that guaranties marketing in an Arab/global market.
- 6 finding a marketing network both locally and internationally.
7. Continuous product development and improvement on both the specs and quality sides in order to gain the Arab user's trust and loyalty.

3- Piracy and Copyright:

In regard to piracy, we are including the OS and software developed by the company over 5 years. That is approximately 100 programs. At the time there was no copyright laws back then. There was a lack of legal staff that understood the technology as well as understand the concept of piracy. There was a lack of laws that particularly protect intellectual property of software, which was the actual investment of Sakhr. For this reason, Sakhr chose the more difficult choice of protecting its intellectual properties, which was selling software in cartridge form. The common form of marketing software was Diskette. Cartridge technology of the time provided an advanced technology that made piracy difficult due to the secure chips used at the time.

4- Position of the Company towards other competitors:

When marketing started in mid-1985, Sakhr was the first company in the region. The company had no competitors nor rivals. Furthermore, Sakhr was the only company that generally invested in its products. This meant that if a company wanted to supersede Sakhr, it would embark on a risky, long a very expensive investment. This was the case with technology investment at the time. We did not see a true competition though the five years of this project.

SOFTWARE:

1. Sales:

What we mentioned about hardware, applies to software to old sales data. It is very difficult to give an exact figure at this point of time. An estimated 2 million pieces of Sakhr

educational/entertainment software was sold during the 5 years of the project with an average of 50 USD per piece.

I do not have the complete list of Sakhr's educational software and released dates. I will try to obtain the list with no specific release date. However, it was most certainly between 1985 and 1990.

2. The General Policy of Arabic Software:

In the beginning, Sakhr's software was focused on educational software in an academic capacity for primary and secondary education. This includes educational stages from kindergarten to secondary/high school:

- 1) Educational and skill improvement software for children (Ex: Test Your Intellect, Test Your Memory).
- 2) General Knowledge (Ex: Test Your Knowledge).
- 3) Society/Culture (Ex: Arab World, Arab History)
- 4) Science (Ex: Periodical Table, Power, Projectiles, Ibn Sina "Avicenna" 1&2).
- 5) Mathematics (Ex: Equations).
- 6) Religious (Ex: A Trip to Makkah, Quran).
- 7) Arabic Arts (Ex: Balatah "Tile")
- 8) Arabic Programming Languages (Ex: Sakhr Basic, Sakhr logo).

With the introduction of Sakhr-PC OS. in the early 90's, Sakhr developed software that made use of early personal computers capabilities. Examples:

1. Al-Monassiq Al Aali (Automated word processor)
2. Arabic Fonts.
3. Al Nashir Al Maktabi (Office Publisher).
4. Mawsoo'at Al-Hadith (Hadith Encyclopedia).
5. Quarn (in 7 Languages)
6. Ibsar System for visually impaired users.
7. Al-Qari' Al Aali (OCR).
8. Free Search Tools in Arabic.
9. Al-Tashkeel Al Aali (Arabic Automated Diacritics).
10. Arabic Archive System (Arab Docs).
11. Integrated Educational Secondary Curriculum.
12. Arabic Windows.

In the year 2000, Sakhr introduced the first automated Arabic translation system under the name Ajeeb. It was the first Arabic technology to fully translate from English to Arabic in very advanced precision.

3. The Reason Behind English/Arabic Language Selection in Sakhr's Software:

It was a limited option in a limited number of Programs which were meant to be used in a bilingual capacity (Ex: Educational and Word Processing software).

4. The Reason of Cultural Content in Games:

In reality, they were not entertainment games. They were educational software we intended with a game or more which was related to the educational material. Sakhr adopted a marketing slogan as a general strategy "Let them learn as they play". The goal was to appeal to make the educational material appealing to young students in Sakhr's various software.

FRANCHISE:

1. What is ALALAMIAH Co. and the relationship between Sakhr and Saudi Market?

The Global Electronics Company (ALALAMIAH) is originally a Kuwait company established in 1970. The company's initial focus was marketing and sale of electronics and home appliances (Televisions, VCR's, Musical Instruments, Video/Photographic camera's, audio playback systems, heating solutions). The company held many franchise rights for various manufacturers: JVC, Siemens, Orion, Benetone, Casio, Richo. In 1975, the Saudi branch was established under the same trade name. The activity in Saudi Arabia was similar to that of the Kuwaiti mother company. In the early 80's the company entered the video game business by representing ATARI in Saudi Arabia and in Kuwait.

In the year 1983, ALALAMIAH started investing in Sakhr's educational computer. We started marketing the first version in 1985. The sales of all Sakhr's products through ALALAMIAH branch showrooms in Saudi Arabia.

2. What is the company's policy towards competitors such as: Barq and Al Mithali?

As I mentioned previously in detail, our early lead gave us an advantage over other companies and products that came after. The technology market, at the time, was costly in terms of financial and strategic operation. Most of these companies did not manage to survive and succeed for a long period. They eventually stopped. This meant that they were not competition on the long term.

3. Similarities in terms of content and product names in Sakhr's and competing companies' software.

Of course, many of these companies tried to cut corners in building their success. In other words, They did not try to create a trade/product identity nor create their own content. This led these companies to copy some of Sakhr's ideas while selling them under their brand names. As I said, they did not survive long in the market.

(2) Interview with Muhammad Ahamad Bawareth

Son of founder of Bawareth Trading and Industries (Ahmad Bawareth) and one of the managing directors of the computer division. (Via WhatsApp).

Asslamu Alyakum Wa Rahmatu Allah Wabarakatuh (Greeting)

I will start with a brief introduction about the company. Bawareth Trading and Industries was established 1972. Before that the tradename was Bawareth Stores, located in Qabil Street, Jeddah. The showroom was in Kaskiyah, parallel to Qabil Street. The partners were, My father, Ahmad, his brothers Saleh and Saeed as well as his brother in law Abdulaziz, may they all rest in peace. Their business ran for more than 50 years before 1972. Before that their business was focused on manufacturing aluminium for home use as they imported their raw materials from Lebanon. They also had import business in import of LP cookers, torches and clothing presses. It dates back to the ones that worked with coal and they were mostly importing from Russia and Europe.

The new company, Bawareth Trading and Industries, was established by my brother, the late Abdulrahman Bawareth, in 1972. The main location was Ibn Zagr Street, Jedaah, for Home Appliances. Later, the company expanded and the main branch was relocated to Al-Janoobiyyah Souq. The late Eng. Ali Bawareth, my brother, started working around then. Being recent graduate of King Fahad University, he later took over the company as CEO. The company then shifted its focus to computers. The company started importing PC computer from the US. They were Corona Data Systems, which were renamed Cordata later on. At the time were were working with Egyptian software companies to provide accounting and storage solutions in Arabic. After that, the company shifted to importing and localising (Arabising) Korean computers in large quantities.

At the time, there was a growing trend of smaller computer systems, such as Sakhr, in the Arab World. Daewoo, a Korean company, was manufacturing the same systems with English/Korean language. During that period, there was a software company own by an Egyptian doctor (academic) that was working on software development and localisation (to Arabic). The companies had a meeting and they took samples of the Korean devices. They developed a

localised version of the device, and we chose the name Perfect System (Al Mithali). This device had and competitive advantage through price and technical specifications. The device was exported to Iraq, Lybia, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Yemen, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and UAE.

1- How long was the period of production?

Approximately 10 years. This period includes importing the vices from Korea, localising them and up to the end of marketing period.

2- What is the approximate sales value of the company's production.

Al Mithali MSX1 and MSX2 systems were sold around 300USD for the former and 450 USD for the later (approximately). As for software, it included games and educational software. The sale price for these was 15 to 25 USD. The approximate sales value was 50 computers and 100 software cartridges per month. The sale value was at its peak in the earlier years of production.

3- What was the marketing strategy locally (in Saudi Arabia) and internationally?

Due to our long experience in the retail business, marketing these computers was very different to other competitors. We would set up a point of interest corner at shops, with cardboard cut outs and stacking sections at stores at retailers. We would do a weekly inventory check and the vendor pays for the sold units (no down payment required). The retail businesses we worked with were mostly electronics shops, toy stores and some sections in department stores. We also participated in seasonal sales expeditions in various cities and small towns. As for international sales, it was done through appointed distributors and bank transfers.

4- What was the reason for stopping the project?

When we first started Al-Mithali 1&2 project, personal computers were very expensive. The retail price for a personal desktop with monitor was somewhere around 10000 Saudi Riyal (2666 USD). However, at later years of the project, personal computers became more affordable and was close to MSX1 and MSX2 devices. It was more reasonable for users to pay the extra and get the full capabilities of PCs. The second reason was the manufactures of these devices. There was no noticeable improvement to the systems in a period of rapid technological improvements.

5- Was there any challenges regarding copyright violations and pricy?

Most certainly there were great challenges. The first was the continuous legal battle with AL-ALAMIAH. ALALAMIAH, distributor of Sakhr accused us of violating their localisation rights

and stealing their Arabisation of MSX OS. The law suite was presented to the Ministry of Trade and Commerce. It was transferred then to The Ministry of Media. It was then revised by King AbdulAziz University. The dispute was ended by King AbdulAziz City of Science and Technology (KACST). We managed to prove that the Arabic localisation used in our system was exclusively ours. ALALAMIAH's did try to stop us in different ways but they could not.

Appendix 4

3. Codebook for topics for further investigation.

Nodes

Name	Description
AGCC	Acculturation of Global Consumer Culture
COS	Cosmopolitanism
ELU	Exposure to/use of the English language
EXM	Exposure to marketing activities of MNC
GMM	Global/foreign mass media exposure
IDT	Self-identification with global consumer culture
OPE	Openness to and desire to emulate global consumer
SIN	Social interactions with foreigners: including travel, migration, and contacts
Globalism	
Interviews	
Arab Developers	
Q1 Arab Developer Names	
Q2 Games Depicting Arabs	
Q3 Best Saudi Period	
Different Audience	
Future	
Better Future	
Sci-Fi	
Past	
Islamic	
Umayyad / Abbasid / Othman	

Name	Description
Early Islamic	
Pre-Islamic	
Educational	
Folklore	
Saudi	
18th Century	
1970-80s	
State Formation	
Present	
Progress	
Q4 Multiculturalism	
Against It	
Audience dependant	
Supports the demonstration of Multiculturalism	
Customary & Traditional Diversity	
Dialectal Diversity	
Geographical Diversity	
Q5 Historical Context	
Bedouin	
Costal	
Historical Urban	
Multi-Historical Context	
Pre-Saudi Era	
Present	
Religious	
Rural	

Name	Description
The Formation of Saudi	
Q6 Foreign Players interest in Arab Games	
Cultural Markers	
Q1 Collectivism vs Individuality	
Q2 Feminine vs Masculine	
Q3 Power Distance	
GCAM	
Q1 Reaction to the Blacklist	
Agrees	
Disagrees	
Partially Agrees	
Q2 Game Names on Blacklist	
Perceptions of Blacklisting Justification	
Q3 Review of GCAM policy	
Age Rating	
Blacklist and Banning Content	
Championships	
Involvement with Gaming Community	
Nothing	
Spreading Awareness	
Stricter Regulations	
Supporting the Industry	
Q4 Ways of Bypassing the Ban	
Local Vendors	
Online Stores	
Pirating	

Name	Description
Q5 Reasons of Looking for other Markets (outside of Saudi)	
Benefits of Local Market	
Prices	
Release Dates	
Restricted Content	
Uncensored Parts Unredacted	
Variety	
Q6 Parents-Vendors Compliance with Age Restriction	
Reasons For No Compliance with Age Rating	
Governmental	
Parents	
No	
People Very	
Yes	
Participant does not know about system	
Vendors	
Lack of Enforcement	
Lack or responsibility	
Unreliable System	
Q7 Communication with GCAM	
Focused Communication	
Never Heard of Them	
No Communication	
They Are Doing a Good Job	

Name	Description
Sisler's Parameters	
Q1 Arabs representation in western video games	
Q2 Arab representation by Arab Developers	
Q3 Arab Dev vs Western Dev	
Q4 Schematisation	
Q5 The Other and Genre	
Q6 Traditional Media vs Games	
Social Media	
Q1 Social Networks Used	
Q2 Type of Content	
Gaming	
No Gaming	
Q3 Targeting Specific Audience	
Arabs	
Non Arab	
Q4 Specifying Network With Content	
Q5 Engagement with Misrepresentation	
Passive	
Supports	
Q6 Social Media Celebrities	
Translation And Localization	
Q1 Western Developers Knowledge of Cultural Diversity	
Limited Knowledge in Cultural Diversity	
No Knowledge In Cultural Diversity	

Name	Description
Q2 Reaction to using Different Other Arabs Dialects	
Against Using Arabic All Together	
Against Using Local Dialects	
Has No Knowledge of Dialectal Usage in Games	
Supports Using Local Dialects	
Q3 Cultural Transference with Dialects	
(Mentioned)Immersion	
Direct Stereotypes of other Arab Cultures	
Express Dialectal Use with No specific Reason	
Mass Media Localisation Affect (Genre) (Comedy vs. Drama)	
No Transference	
Q4 Using Saudi Various Dialects in Saudi Games	
Using Dialects in Different Locales	
Using Saudi White Dialect	
Using Standard Arabic	
Using Various Dialects	
Q5 Use of Broken Language	
Bad Professionalism	
Effects Immersion	
Racism	
Redaction Word Censorship	
Trouble Understanding	

Name	Description
Q6 Using English or Arabic in localized games	
Arabic As support for localisation efforts	
Arabic Only With Someone Who Does not Speak English	
English Is Game Language	
Improving English	
Only Good Arabic Localisation	
Poor Translation	
Interviews Findings	
Arab Game Developers	
Arab Game Events	
Arab Game Titles	
Rikaz	
Bad Practice	
Disrespecting Language (as Heritage)	
Participants Perception of Culture	Perception
Architecture and Clothing	
Emerging Culture	
Historical	
Linguistic & Dialectal & Geographical Variation	
Music and Creative Arts	
Religious Context	
Societal Context and Social Norms	
Western Misrepresentation of Arab Culture	
Problems With Arab Games	

Name	Description
Racist	
Western Game Developers	
Western Game Titles	
Literature Review	
Arab Video Game Development	
Arab Games Are New	
Counter Gaming	
Classical Media Representation	
Conflict	
De-Humanizing	
Economics	
Game Titles	
Arab Game Titles	
English Game Titles	
Indie	
Ludology	
Choice	
Procedural Forms	
Methodology	
Military Use of Games	
Modding	
Neglected Media	
New Media-Old Media Video Game interaction	
Orientalism	
Clothing	
Historical Building Style	
Islamic Concepts	

Name	Description
Polarization	
Paratextual Vs Intertextual	
Intertextual	
Paratextual	
Realism Vs Fantasy	
Fantasy and Imaginary	
Realism and Reality	
Schematization	
self-representation	
Sisler Findings	
Arab Developers	
Genre Association	
Machine Limitations	
Schematization	
Serious Games	
Stereotyping and Generalization	
Terms	
The Other	
Tolerance	
Todor Findings	
Find about coping mechanism with Arab Misrepresentation	Clemet concludes that imitation of popular western games is a result of the successful marketing methods used by western game developers. Arab gamers developed a coping technique as a consequence of their conflict between emotional enjoyment and cerebral pain.
Assuming Responsibility (Apologetic and Self-deprecation)	
Avoiding Games	
Blaming Lack of Professionalism	
Fait Accompli (no other Choice but to accept)	From French Accomplished Fact: Meaning its already done and we have no choice but to accept)
Humour	

Name	Description
Ignorance (On Unintentional)	
Looking for slight improvements (silver lining)	
Malice (Intentional)	
Taking the Higher moral ground (turning the other cheek)	

Appendix 5

4. Arab Gaming Manufacturers and Developers between (1985-1995) (For further investigation on copyright, cloning, localisation and game production in GCC region)

Shakr Al Alamia and Sakhr was a well-known Kuwaiti and Saudi manufacturer of MSX Sakhr machines. Throughout the 1980s, additional firms produced home computer systems based on the MSX architecture (Penix-Tadsen, 2019). This computer was a collaboration between Yamaha, who donated the hardware, and Sakha, who is recognised for localising Microsoft's MSX operating system. In 1982, Muhammad Abulhasan Al Sharikh founded the organisation. The organisation used Dr. Nabil Ali's efforts in adopting Arabic as a system language to great effect. The machine was designed for Arab users in an effort to increase computer literacy in Arab countries. The business offered both hardware and software. The legendary Sakhr AX-170 was among the most widely distributed Arabic computer systems. The goods listed below are hardware products.

Generation	Model	Year	Region	Model	Year	Region
MSX1	Sakhr AH-200	1985	Middle East	Sakhr AX-230	1986	Middle East
	Sakhr AX-100	1985	Middle East	Sakhr AX-330	1992	Middle East
	Sakhr AX-150	1986	Middle East	Sakhr AX-660	1992	Middle East
	Sakhr AX-170	1986	Middle East	Sakhr AX-990	1992	Middle East
	Sakhr AX-200	1986	Middle East			
Generation	Model	Year	Region	Model	Year	Region
MSX2	Sakhr AX-350	1987	Middle East	Sakhr AX-370	1988	Middle East
	Sakhr AX-350II	1987	Middle East	Sakhr AX-500	1988	Middle East

Controllers:

Product	Description
Sakhr GT-01A	Graphic Tablet
Sakhr MU-01	Mouse
Sakhr SM-02	Mouse

Printers:

Product	Description
Sakhr AD-500	Printer
Sakhr AD-P1	Printer
Sakhr AP-120	Printer

Storage:

Product	Description
Sakhr AFD-01	External 3.5" 360kB FDD with interface

Sakhr DM-6402	Data Recorder
Sakhr FD-05	External 3.5" 720kB FDD
Sakhr FD720	External 3.5" 720kB FDD as cartridge
Sakhr QDM-001	Quick Diskdrive (QD) with Interface
Sakhr QDM-002	Quick Diskdrive (QD) with Interface

Miscellaneous:

Product	Description
Sakhr 3010GLA-WP2	Monochrome monitor
Sakhr 8020-ME	RGB/composite color monitor
Sakhr CM-314	Composite color monitor

After the success of Sakhr, many Arab companies followed suite. In Jeddah, Saudi Arabia Bawareth Enterprises produced a similar device Al-Mithali (I) Which was based on (Daewoo CPC-300) and Al Mithali (II) which was based on (Daewoo CPC-200). Bawareth also sold Perfect CPF-350 which is a single sided 360kB 3.5" floppy disk drive interface (MSX Wiki, 2019).

Software:

During that period, Arab Video Game production was limited to the MSX platform. This could be attributed to three factors: After Sakhr's success in providing an affordable home computing system, the MSX was the most popular platform for home computing in the Arab region. Another factor is the Arabic language. The availability of the Arabic language on computing system was very limited at the time. Micro computers such as the Xerox Star 8010 Interfaces offered Arabic but were mostly geared towards professional use (Digibarn Computer Museum, n.d.). When Skahr came to the scene it offered seamless Arabic interface. This allowed Developers to offer games to a market that seemed request a certain language demand to justify the purchase of this machine. This brings us to the third factor, which is the nature of the games developed. It seemed at that moment in time, there was a need to justify obtaining an entertainment machine. This led to a certain trop among all Arab developed games at that time. They were all educational games in one way or another.

Main Arab Video Game Developers in the 80's:

1. Sakhr Al-Alamiah



Al Alamia, a Kuwaiti company, seemed to have been driven by the need to fulfil a certain market demand in the GCC countries. Parents who held certain issues with gaming consoles as being “non-useful” entertainment appliance. This seems to stem from a specific Islamic utilitarian approach. This means any type of entertainment is acceptable if it holds a general benefit. Thus a great deal of companies incorporated education into their games. Sakhr games seem to hold two generic tropes: incorporating education and advancing the Arab computer user. Although, Sakhr provided various peripherals for the use of other data mediums, cartridge seems to be the most preferred medium for Sakhr. The reliability and ease of use seemed to weigh in the matter. The other trope of Sakhr is incorporating Arab historical and literary reference in both naming products and overall content.

2. Barq:



Barq seems to be the branch name of Al Aqsa software company. Al Aqsa means the Holy mosque of Jerusalem.

(the location and backing of this company is needed)

The company seems to follow suite in Sakhr's foot steps. This means incorporating education into with play element. Furthermore, the company seems to make use of Arab Historical and Literary culture in naming and making content. However, there seems to be a slight political tone to some games. It is not quite visible at the time, but seems worth the discussion retrospectively. The game

developer seemed to have an edge over Al Alamiah in regards to playful and graphical elements. It also should be noted that after examining the playful content of these games, a tendency to clone or copy famous games of the OSX platform. In addition to that, the packaging seemed to have a less formal artwork on the packaging than what Al Alamiah uses.

3. Bawareth's Mithali Games:



In some instances, It could be an overreach to describe Bawareth's production as games. Bawarth's approach to the market was fully educational. Based in Saudi, it seems that the company targeted the Saudi market specifically. Some game content show a certain compliance with the Saudi curricular system. In addition to that, the company seem to rely heavily on textual game interface. Filling the blank and multiple-choice games. Another noticeable reoccurring feature in Bawareth's Mithali Games, is the use Tom and Jerry in several games. The company even has a game called Tom & Jerry I and Tom & Jerry II. The company follows the same cultural relevance in naming their production. Ibn Hayan, Al Hasan Ibn Haytham are educational games named after Arab scholars.

Indie Developers:

A surprising find the research came across was Arab indie game in 1980's. Against the odds of manufacturing difficulties, the floppy disk interface was the medium preferred by this group. It could be very difficult to locate Ahmad Esa, in this point of time. However, the research is left with two interface programs attributed to him. One of these is include a localised list of games. Unfortunately there is nothing much to be added except the content of this software. In another occurrence, not necessarily game related, there is a software written by a computer shop owner. Al Jazeerah Computers, is the name of the shop that developed a school software. The address of the shop is provided and has a potential to led to more discoveries. This is a perfect opportunity to explore the potential of Archaeogaming field's potential (Reinhard, 2018).

Game Titles Unmentioned in Previous Research:

Company Name	Game Title	Info
ALALAMIAH	123	Counting, Math and Number
	ABC	English Alphabet
	Add and Subtract	Simple Math

	Multiply and Divide	Math game.
	Alif Ba	Arabic Alphabet
	AliBaba	A clone of ASCII Corporation's "The Castel" with an educational spin
	Amthal Wa Aqual	A literary introduction to local cultures with an exploration of idioms and local folklore.
	Arab History	An introduction to Arab history since the 6 th century. Playable quiz games.
	Arab Poetry	An introduction of Arab poetry. And Exploration and metering section. An advanced automated metering and evaluating machine. With playable quiz section.
	Arab World	Geographical and Informative interactive game. With quiz section.
	Around The Clock	Interactive educational game for teaching English Grammar.
	Al Balatah	Interactive visual matching game.
	Believe it or Not	A trivia interactive game. Two gaming interfaces available. One that looks like Ludo table game. Advancing would be through answering general knowledge question.
	Crosswords	E-Crosswords
	Discover Computers	Interactive introductions to computers.
	Doubleface	Educational game. Teaching English vocabulary through game.
	DoubleJaw	Teaching Arabic synonyms/antonyms and word association through game.
	Electromatic	Teaching electronic circuitry through interactive game play.
	Math Problems (Equation)	Teaching maths + Interactive gaming.
	Express	Teaching English through play.
	Faces	Face compiler game.
	Islam Pillars	An interactive interface for teaching children about the five pillars of Islam. It includes a playable section.

	Fractions I & II	A two-part game about math and fractions.
	Head and Tail	Teaching vocabulary through a gaming interface.
	Ibn Malik	Named after the famous grammarian who wrote Mandhumah in 7 th century. A playable game with Arabic grammar aspects
	Ibn Sina I & II	Named after (Persian) Arab 10 th century physician. A two cartridge game with educational aspects.
	Information Race	An interactive informative game. Character advances through making the right choice.
	Kufi	A calligraphy interactive interface with a playable aspect. Multiple choice quiz.
	Language of Numbers	Mathematics related games
	Let's Learn Math I & II & III	A three-part game collection.
	Let's Think	IQ games
	Magnetics	A circuitry gaming interface.
	Landmarks and Ruins	An educational game interface about famous international landmarks.
	Memory	Memory Games.
	My Watch	Educational game about time.
	Number and Goal	A multi-game platform about numbers and mathematical exercises.
	Our Arab World	An Arab world geographically based interactive game.
	Periodical Table	A game about the periodical table. There is a similar game by Bawareth as well.
	Picture and Word	A game helping children to read.
	Power	A scientific gaming and educational interface.
	Projectiles	Clone.
	Rainbow Stories	Teaching Arabic composition through gaming.
	Riddles	a game about solving various problems through logic.
	Sea Horse	*** I could not understand this game. It has some kind of logic

		that was supposed to be obvious.
	Secret Word	An interactive word puzzle
	Sets	Learning sets as a part of mathematical curricular. Interactive game interface.
	Al Shatir Hasan	Al Shatir Hassan is a character name derived from Arab folklore. The title was also used in a game by Barq. It is a game about word matching and association.
	Sibawayh I & II	A two part game named after (Persian) Arab grammarian in the 8 th century. Interactive textual gaming.
	Space Math	Invaders clone with mathematics spin off.
	Start with Turtle	I could not understand this game.
	Test your Intelligence	A two part game with IQ tests.
	Test your Knowledge I, II & III	A three part Information and knowledge game. The latest installation 3 was modelled after Horroof (letters) a famous and popular game show in Saudi and UAE.
	A trip to Makkah	An informative interactive program with a playable quiz section. It is a game about Hajj. Explaining the man activities and trip.
	Visuals	A projectile game. The angle of the projectile is changed depending on the colors.
	Who	An information and knowledge test. It follows the snakes and ladders boardgame rules with addition to information condition.
	A Window to the World	Geographical game.
	Wonder Child I & II	A two-part game for children. Shapes and numbers..etc
	Little Artist	A drawing program to use Sakhr's peripherals: mouse, joystick...
	Young Detective	A game about young detective: clues and visual intelligence.

	Zoo	A game about animals. Information based.
Barq	Aladdin	A multi-game collection about letters and pictures. One of which is a spin off the famous Konami's King's Valley.
	World of Knowledge	An knowledge game show clone. Similar to Horroof.
	Al Bayan	An educational English game with a gaming element.
	Al Murshid	English learning with gaming element.
	Amjaduna (our glory)	An interactive game and knowledge base about Muslim conquests and battles. The gaming element has people trying to sneak into a fort and gamer must shoot them. They can hide behind trees.
	Barq Games	A game collection of two. One of them is a clone of Bomber Man and the other is a Breakout clone.
	Best of words I & 2	A grammatical gaming program. The examples are a little political.
	Our Country	An game with information about Islamic countries.
	Fractions	Gaming in Math
	Game Box	A collection of visual games
	Helper	English learning through gaming
	Meanings	English vocabulary through gaming
	Lady	A game for "women". At the time. Also has some good Arab recipes.
	Numbers World	Mathematical gaming. Do the math and shoot the right duck. Clone.
	Our Historical Figures	A game about historical figures from the Islamic historical narrative.
	Papa Smurf	Gaming with Arabic grammar.
	Physics	Gaming with Science.

	Shatir Hassan	The name is similar to ALalamiahs but the game is different. It is borrowed from Arab folklore. The game is designed with multiple visual games for children.
	Sinbad	Named after Sinbad in 1001 nights. But the game is collection of visual games for children.
	Sky Wolf	Fighter Jet clone.
	A Trip to Space	An educational interactive quiz game about space.
	The Treasure	A Clone
	Think with Me	A 5 game collection. Visual and mental challenges.
	Traffic	An Interactive game about traffic law.
Bawareth	Al Kamil in Science I, II & III	Three part interactive game about Saudi's ministry of education's curriculum.
	Al Hassan ibn Al Haytham	Named after Arab mathematician of 10 th century. Textual gaming.
	Electricity	Databank with a textual interactive gaming interface.
	English	You guessed it, teaching English.
	Geometry with Donald Duck	A game about geometrics featuring Donald duck.
	Information Bank	An interactive knowledge quiz game. The player catches the right answer with the net.
	Kamil in Mathematics: I, II, III, IV & V.	A 5 part educational game compliant with the Saudi Ministry of Education's Math curriculum.
	Kamil in Arabic	Am Arabic curriculum game
	Master in English	An language educational game.
	The Computer	Shoes you Mithali's computer and asks you to push the right button.
	Tom and Jerry: I & II	A two part games about math with gaming interfaces.
	The periodical Table	And interactive video game about the periodical table.

		Similar to AL Alamiaiah with different interface.
Indie Developers		
Ahamd Isa	Educational Programs and Games 1	(localized) content and games. Indie work shared on floppy drive.

