

**ELECTRONIC GAMES BETWEEN ACCEPTANCE AND REJECTION: THE
CHALLENGE OF CLASSIFICATION AND EVALUATION CRITERIA**

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Abstract

This article examines electronic games as a subject of debate, with particular attention to the challenge of classification and the criteria by which such games are evaluated. It does so against the background of the widespread diffusion of modern information and communication technologies and their growing influence on children and young people. The article notes that electronic games have become one of the most prevalent forms of entertainment worldwide, raising important questions about the suitability of their content for different age groups and the need for appropriate regulation and oversight. It defines electronic games as interactive digital programs that run on computers, smartphones, and other gaming devices, characterized by audiovisual effects that heighten their appeal to users. It also distinguishes between directed electronic games, which serve educational and cognitive purposes, and non-directed games, which are played primarily for entertainment without clearly defined regulatory controls. Finally, the article examines the Arab-Islamic Classification Project for Electronic Games, supervised by the Center for the Classification and Development of Electronic Games, which seeks to establish a classification system that takes into account Islamic values and the social customs of Arab and Islamic societies by evaluating moral and religious content alongside age-based classification.

Keywords: electronic games; game classification; evaluation criteria; children; young people; Arab-Islamic classification system.

Introduction

The world is witnessing significant development in modern information and communication technology, which has contributed to the emergence of media and communication phenomena that have become widespread in contemporary society. These phenomena exert considerable influence on individuals and society, including children, who constitute a sensitive and important social group. The concept of play has undergone considerable change in response to global transformations, and the spread of electronic games is evidence of this change. Users of different ages play these games for long periods because of their popularity, as they rank fourth globally after films, songs, and football. Electronic

games have become so widespread that oversight of users is often absent, a situation that poses a risk to children when the permitted age for play is not observed. This raises questions about the classification systems in force and the extent of oversight over users.

First: The Concept of Electronic Games

Electronic games are computer-programmed games played on special devices connected to televisions, portable devices, computers, mobile phones, or palmtop computers. Examples of such devices include PlayStation, PSP, Xbox, and Dreamcast.¹

In programming terms, electronic games are files or multimedia that often include images, sounds, and displays consisting of a particular combination of graphics and scenes that give the user a sense of places, obstacles, and enemies, in addition to the ability to respond to specific commands from the user, thereby creating a sense of enjoyment and challenge.²

Electronic games are activities governed by a controlled framework and a set of rules that regulate the course of play. They are often played by two or more participants seeking to achieve predetermined objectives. This interaction includes elements of competition and chance, and play usually ends with one team winning.³

They are digital games accessed via computer screens, televisions, and mobile phones, characterized by engaging audiovisual effects. They create an atmosphere of virtual interaction between the game and the player.

They are also defined as rule-governed systems in which players engage in an artificial conflict that produces measurable outcomes upon victory. The elements that make a game engaging include its objective, rules, feedback, difficulty, challenge, competition, and mode of presentation.⁴

Electronic games are divided into two categories:

- Directed electronic games: games selected based on their own specifications, as presented by the manufacturer, and their suitability for the ages of the study participants. They are expected to contribute to the development of cognitive processes.
- Non-directed electronic games: games selected randomly and without prior rules governing their selection.

Second: Classification of Electronic Games

¹ Mustafa ibn Abd al-Salam al-Amudi, "The Information Revolution," *Journal of the Humanities*, no. 73 (Kuwait: Scientific Publication Council, 2001), 13.

² Amina Rizq, "Children's Games," *The Arab Electronic Encyclopaedia*, vol. 3 (Syria), 2.

³ Hanan Abd al-Hamid al-Anani, *Play among Children: Theoretical Foundations and Application* (Dar al-Fikr for Printing and Publishing, 2002), 18.

⁴ Ahmad Atallah Abd al-Basit, *Electronic Games between Recreation and Addiction* (Al-Neelain University Press, n.d.), 742.

Electronic games may be classified into three main types according to their purpose and the category of users for whom they are intended:

A. Games of Pleasure and Excitement

These games generally aim to entertain and occupy leisure time. They rely primarily on the user's interaction with situations and conditions that begin at simple, manageable levels and then become more complex and faster, often exceeding the user's abilities, however well-trained the user may be. Such games are exciting, attractive, and attention-grabbing because of the rapid succession of situations and their use of images and sounds that closely resemble reality. They therefore greatly appeal to young children.

The player uses accompanying electronic tools that enable three-dimensional viewing and sensory engagement. This type includes a wide range of car- and motorcycle-racing games, fighting games, battle and war simulations, and space-invasion games.

B. Intelligence Games

These games rely on logical reasoning in decision-making and require thought. Chess is perhaps among the most famous games in this category, as playing against electronic chess devices or computer chess programs has become a major challenge, at times surpassing even leading players.

The strength of electronic games and computer programs in this field lies in their ability to process a vast number of possibilities and to choose optimal solutions according to specific criteria derived from the rules of the game and from the expertise of professionals, whether players or programmers, within a short period of time that is difficult to match.

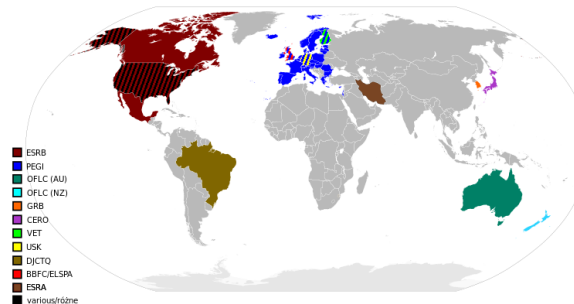
C. Educational and Instructional Games

Educational and instructional games aim to balance play and enjoyment while engagingly conveying information. These games have a very broad audience, covering most educational stages up to university level. They range from simple games that teach children to read and write letters and numbers to more complex games that teach them to construct words and sentences, deal with scientific and mathematical problems, and understand the concepts of form and function. There are also games and programs focused on general culture and the transmission of information in fields such as mathematics, science, history, geography, language learning, computing principles, and other sciences.

Third: Electronic-Game Rating Systems

The following figure shows a map of the countries that operate electronic-game classification systems.

Figure 1. Map showing the presence of electronic-game classification systems worldwide



- Countries shown in grey use more than one rating system.

A video-game content rating system classifies game content into specific categories. Most such systems cooperate with governments to establish ratings, while some cooperate with companies specializing in ratings.

Among the most prominent systems are the following:

ESRB: adopted in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

OFLC: adopted in Australia.

BBFC: adopted in Britain.

PEGI: adopted in European countries.

The American Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB)⁵ and the Pan European Game Information (PEGI)⁶ Systems are two important references for reducing the harms of electronic games to children and young people. These systems classify electronic games according to the age stage appropriate for each game and clarify their content through brief descriptors. They are useful to parents and guardians when selecting suitable games for their children.

• **The Electronic-Game Classification System in the United States**

The ESRB rating system is a voluntary body that classifies the content of electronic games played on various devices, such as Xbox consoles and PlayStation consoles, as well as on personal computers.

This rating system does not evaluate the quality of an electronic game. Rather, it objectively describes the game's content and indicates whether the game contains anything deemed undesirable by those responsible for the rating system. The system then issues a rating for the game and a brief explanation of its content, such as "contains scenes of violence" or similar descriptors.

The ESRB website provides a comprehensive explanation of the approved age ratings and the various terms used to describe the content of electronic games. For online games, which may include content added by players during gameplay, such as chat, instructions, maps, and other additions, the rating system uses phrases indicating this possibility, such as

⁵ Entertainment Software Rating Board, "Ratings Guide," accessed November 24, 2018, http://www.esrb.org/ratings/ratings_guide.jsp#symbols.

⁶ Pan European Game Information, "PEGI Age Ratings," accessed November 24, 2018, <http://www.pegi.info/en/index/id/952>.

“The content of this electronic game may change during gameplay.” This alerts parents that the rating system has not yet rated content added by players during gameplay.

A review of the American Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) website shows that the American rating system has two basic components:

A. Description of Game Content

This component provides a brief, objective description of the content of the electronic game and indicates whether the game contains anything deemed undesirable by parents or those responsible for the rating system.

B. Rating the Game According to Age Stage

This component classifies the game according to the age stage appropriate for playing it. The classification is represented by a set of symbols indicating the appropriate age rating for players.








Content-Description Terms Approved by the American Entertainment Software Rating Board⁷

Term	Meaning of the Term
Drug Reference	Refers to the mention of drugs or depictions of them.
Use of Drugs	Refers to the presence of scenes involving drug use.
Alcohol Reference	Refers to the mention of alcoholic beverages or depictions of them.
Use of Alcohol	Refers to the presence of scenes involving the consumption of alcohol.
Tobacco Reference	Refers to the mention of tobacco or depictions of it.
Use of Tobacco	Refers to the presence of scenes involving tobacco use or smoking.
Simulated Gambling	Indicates the player’s inability to practice gambling, including betting on money or currency; however, it includes gambling simulation.
Real Gambling	Indicates the player’s ability to practice gambling, including betting on cash or currency.
Partial Nudity	Refers to the presence of depictions or scenes involving slight nudity.
Nudity	Refers to the presence of clear and prolonged depictions or scenes of nudity.
Sexual Content	Indicates the absence of explicit scenes of sexual behavior, but may include partial nudity.
Sexual Themes	Refers to the presence of scenes involving certain sexual behaviors and acts.

⁷ Electronic Games Rating and Development Centre, “American Classification of Electronic Games,” accessed November 24, 2018, <http://egrdc.org/ESRB>.

Strong Sexual Content	Refers to the presence of explicit and repeated scenes of sexual intercourse, including nudity.
Sexual Violence	Refers to the presence of scenes involving certain sexual behaviors and violent sexual acts, such as rape or others.
Violent References	Refers to the presence of scenes containing violent conduct and acts.
Violence	Refers to the presence of scenes involving aggressive conflict.
Fantasy Violence	Refers to the presence of scenes involving fantastical violent acts, which may involve human or non-human characters in situations that can easily be distinguished from real life.
Intense Violence	Refers to the presence of scenes of realistic fighting or combat that closely resemble real life, which may involve offensive bloodshed and the use of weapons in a manner that ingrains the act of shooting as gruesome and frightening.
Blood	Refers to the presence of scenes containing blood.
Animated Blood	Refers to the presence of scenes depicting bloodshed.
Blood and Gore	Refers to the presence of scenes involving depictions of bloodshed and the mutilation of parts of the human body.
Cartoon Violence	Refers to the presence of scenes of characters in animated cartoons performing actions predominantly characterized by violence.
Comic Mischief	Refers to the presence of scenes or dialogues of a comic or humorous nature.
Crude Humour	Refers to the presence of scenes or dialogues containing vulgar, coarse, or provocative humor.
Mature Humour	Refers to the presence of scenes or dialogues that may contain humor unsuitable for adolescents, including humor centered on sex.
Lyrics	Refers to the presence of scenes or dialogues in which certain profane words are used, or certain words relating to patterns of violence, drugs, or alcohol.
Strong Lyrics	Refers to the presence of scenes or dialogues in which explicit and repeated profane words, or words relating to patterns of violence, drugs, or alcohol, are used.
Mild Language	Refers to the presence of scenes or dialogues in which undesirable language is used.
Strong Language	Refers to the presence of scenes or dialogues in which profane language is used.
Suggestive Themes	Refers to suggestive scenes or dialogues.

Figure 2. Age-rating categories and symbols approved by the American Entertainment Software Rating Board

Age-Rating Category and Symbol	Meaning of the Age Rating and Symbol
 EC – Early Childhood	Titles rated EC – Early Childhood are suitable for children aged three and older. This means that the content of the electronic game is appropriate for children aged three or above, or that the game does not contain any material that parents may find unsuitable.
 E – Everyone	Titles rated E – Everyone are suitable for children aged six and older. This rating indicates that the content of the electronic game may contain minimal cartoon, fantasy, or mild violence, or infrequent use of mild language.
 E10+ – Everyone 10+	Titles rated E10+ – Everyone 10 and Older are suitable for children aged ten and older. This means that the content of the electronic game is appropriate for children aged ten and above. It indicates that the game may contain more cartoon, fantasy, or mild violence than games rated E, or may contain a moderate amount of violence, repeated use of undesirable words, or suggestive themes.
 T – Teen	Titles rated T – Teen are suitable for teenagers aged thirteen and older. This rating indicates that the content of the electronic game may contain violent scenes, suggestive themes, crude humour, a small amount of bloodshed, simulated gambling, or occasional use of strong language or undesirable words.
 M – Mature 17+	Titles rated M – Mature 17+ are suitable for young people aged seventeen and older. This rating indicates that the content of the electronic game may contain intense violence, graphic bloodshed, sexual content, or strong language.
 AO – Adults Only 18+	Titles rated AO – Adults Only 18+ are suitable only for adults. This means that the content of the electronic game is suitable for young people aged eighteen and older. It indicates that the game may contain prolonged scenes of intense violence, graphic bloodshed, nudity, or sexual practices.
 RP – Rating Pending	Titles rated RP – Rating Pending have not yet received a final rating from the rating system. This symbol appears only in advertising and marketing campaigns and on promotional materials relating to games that are expected to receive an ESRB rating in the future. Once the rating process has been completed, the electronic game displays the appropriate age rating assigned to it.

• **The Electronic-Game Classification System in the European Union**

A review of the Pan European Game Information (PEGI) website shows that the classification system has two basic components:

A. Description of Game Content

This component provides a brief and objective description of the content of the electronic game. It indicates whether the game contains anything deemed undesirable by parents or by those responsible for the classification system.

B. Rating the Game According to Age Stage






This component classifies the game according to the age stage appropriate for playing it. The classification is represented by a set of symbols indicating the appropriate age rating for players.

Content-Description Terms Approved by the Pan European Game Information System⁸

Meaning of the Symbol	Rating Symbol
Indicates the presence of scenes involving drug use.	
Indicates the presence of scenes that may be frightening or disturbing for children.	
Indicates the presence of scenes that encourage racial discrimination.	
Indicates the presence of dialogue or scenes containing obscene language or profane expressions.	
Indicates the presence of scenes that teach or encourage gambling.	
Indicates the presence of scenes involving violence or brutal acts.	
Indicates the presence of scenes involving nudity, including certain sexual positions.	
Indicates the presence of scenes involving sexual practices.	
Indicates that the game may be played online.	

⁸ Electronic Games Rating and Development Centre, “European Classification of Electronic Games,” accessed November 24, 2018, <http://egrdc.org/PEGI>.

Figure 3. Age-rating categories and symbols approved by the Pan European Game Information system

Meaning of the Age Rating	Age-Rating Category and Symbol
This rating indicates that the content of the electronic game is suitable for all age groups from the age of three. Games in this category may contain some comic violence or scenes set in a childlike context. However, the game must not include any frightening sounds or images likely to scare young children. It must not contain bad language, scenes of nudity, or any reference to sexual acts.	 www.pegi.info
This rating indicates that the content of the electronic game is suitable for children aged seven and above. This rating is similar to the classification for children under seven; however, games in this category may contain some scenes or sounds that may be frightening for this age group. They may also contain partial nudity, provided that it is not presented in a sexual context.	 www.pegi.info
This rating indicates that the content of the electronic game is suitable for children aged twelve and above. Games in this category may include scenes of violence involving fantasy characters, animated figures, animals, or violence directed at characters that do not resemble real human beings. They may also contain partial nudity involving human or cartoon characters, as well as a limited amount of bad language and suggestive material that does not amount to sexual activity.	 www.pegi.info
This rating indicates that the content of the electronic game is suitable for young people aged sixteen and above. The content at this level may include violence or sexual behaviour at a level closer to real life. It may also contain stronger bad language and scenes that encourage the use of tobacco, alcohol, or drugs, as well as the commission of various criminal acts.	 www.pegi.info
This rating indicates that the content of the electronic game is suitable for adults aged eighteen and above. Games in this category may include extremely severe violence, including motiveless killing or violence directed at defenceless characters. They may also contain prolonged and explicit scenes of sexual activity and nudity, as well as scenes that encourage gambling or drug use.	 www.pegi.info

• **The Proposed Arab-Islamic Classification System through the Electronic Games Rating and Development Center (EGRDC)⁹**

The Electronic Games Rating and Development Center is a specialized center for the classification and development of electronic games. It operates according to a specific mechanism and methodology that support both Arabic and English. Each electronic game is assigned a description of its content and an appropriate age category by expert reviewers in electronic games, psychology, and education, based on precise criteria approved by the center.

The center is supervised by the International Commission for Technological Means, one of the bodies of the Muslim World League. Its headquarters are in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The center seeks to become an Islamic reference authority for the classification of electronic games.

It provides, with complete objectivity, a concise description of the game’s content and indicates the age-rating category appropriate for playing the electronic game. The proposed system comprises two main components:

⁹ Electronic Games Rating and Development Centre, “About Us,” accessed November 24, 2018, <http://egrdc.org/AboutUs>.

A. Content Description

Because many electronic games widespread in the Islamic world contain numerous violations of Islamic law, ethical classification seeks to provide a concise description of electronic games from an Islamic perspective.

The proposed classification system provides a brief and objective description of the content of the electronic game. It also indicates whether the game contains anything deemed undesirable by parents or by those responsible for the classification system. The system then issues a rating for the game and a brief explanation of its content, such as “this game contains scenes of violence.”

B. Rating the Game According to Age Stage

The proposed classification system establishes categorical age classifications appropriate for playing electronic games. It also represents the proposed age categories using symbols that indicate the appropriate age rating for players wishing to play a given electronic game.

Content-Description Terms in the Proposed Islamic Classification System for Electronic-Game Software








Meaning of the Symbol	Rating Symbol
Indicates the presence of one or more violations that are offensive to the Muslim faith.	
Indicates the presence of one or more violations that may lead to assault upon human life or its taking.	
Indicates the presence of one or more violations that may affect the intellect.	
Indicates the presence of one or more violations that may corrupt or adversely affect honour, morality, or public decency.	
Indicates the presence of one or more violations that may lead to the squandering of wealth or to its acquisition by unlawful means.	
Indicates the presence of one or more violations that may arise during online gameplay.	

Figure 4. Age-rating categories and symbols approved by the ethical classification of electronic games

Age Rating and Symbol	Meaning of the Age Rating and Symbol
	Titles rated 2 are suitable for all age groups. This rating means that the content of the electronic game does not contain any violence, and that it may contain some cartoon violence (such as violence in a funny and child-friendly context). It may also contain some very mild forms of violence between fantasy characters. It does not contain any sounds or images that might scare young children. It is suitable for all members of the family, including young children.
	Titles rated 7 are suitable for children aged seven and older. This rating means that the content of this game is similar to and milder than content typically found in programs classified for all audiences, or that it contains scenes or sounds that may be frightening to young children.
	Titles rated 10 are suitable for children aged ten and older. This rating means that the content of this game may contain more cartoon, fantasy, or mild violence than that found in games rated 7, or may contain mild depictions of bloodless violence or depictions of tobacco or drug use that are not aimed at glamorizing such behavior.
	Titles rated 15 are suitable for young people aged fifteen and older. This rating means that the content of this game may include images or sounds of violence, or may include portrayals of tobacco or drug use and scenes of crime in a fictional context.
	Titles rated 21 are suitable for young adults aged twenty-one and older. This rating means that the content of this electronic game may contain depictions of violence, including serious violence, and may include explicit sexual content with or without nudity.

Conclusion

The American and European classification systems for electronic-game software were developed by countries far removed from the culture and beliefs of Islamic societies, particularly regarding the production and classification of such software. From this standpoint, matters of belief and religion are absent from Western classification systems for electronic game software. This absence is unacceptable and necessitates the development of an Islamic classification system for electronic game software. The proposed classification system should therefore proceed from the principles and teachings of Islam, providing a system or model - including tools and mechanisms - for classifying electronic games based on those principles and teachings while taking into account the customs and traditions of Islamic societies. It should provide parents, guardians, educators, and consumers with clear and reliable information on the minimum age-appropriate stage for playing a given electronic game, along with a brief, objective description of the game's content, in accordance with the Islamic perspective on which the classification system is based.

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