How Video Games Can Become a Tool for Social Policy Criticism:
A Study

Arditya Prayogi [1*], Widodo Hami [2], Riki Nasrullah [3]

[1,2] UIN KH Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan
[3] Universitas Negeri Surabaya

Article Information	Abstract
	Video games are often viewed as part of tertiary activities in human life. As a tertiary activity, video games are then considered to have no function in carrying out meaningful activities in society, including social criticism activities. This article then aims to explain that video games can conceptually and practically be used as a tool for social policy criticism. This article was written using a qualitative descriptive approach supported by a data collection process through a literature study. From the results of the study, it is clear that video games are capable of producing and reproducing culture and ideology in people's minds through participatory elements so that they can be created and used as a tool for social criticism of a policy. Conceptually, video games become cultural agents that have their own power in terms of generating open meaning from them. Practically, the form and function of video games as a tool for social criticism has led to the presence of video games as an alternative way of conveying criticism creatively.

INTRODUCTION

The development of human civilization today has advanced so much. In this way, there are many things in human civilization (cultural elements), without exception, which are also affected. In this case, one of the rapid developments in human civilization is technological development. Technological developments in this increasingly advanced era have given rise to demands among society to be able to obtain information easily and quickly. If it is related to human social life, the latest advances in technology today have brought and put forward new innovative approaches that also challenge conventional approaches in human social interaction. The emergence of digital (based) technology has resulted in the development of various methods for delivering interaction, including in the form of social criticism (Prayogi, 2024). Social criticism is currently carried out through various creative channels with the aim of making the critical message to be conveyed more interesting and relatable, especially if it is aimed at the millennial generation and generation Z (digital natives).

Thus, one of the technological (creative) media that can be used today as a tool for social criticism (policy) is video games (Prayogi & Nasrullah, 2024). Video games for the current generation can be likened to literature during the European enlightenment era. This means that video games are today's popular media which are

the most advanced form of popular culture (industry) today. However, in contrast to other forms of popular media such as films, music and comics, video games still receive little attention from researchers of popular culture studies, especially from other scientific disciplines. Since its first appearance in the 70s on the American continent, video games

Growing massively, both economically and (mainly) culturally. Economically, video games in 2010 became a large industrial sector with a valuation of around $52.7 billion USD and even surpassed the music and film industries which were "only" worth $35.1 billion and $31.8 billion USD. Furthermore, the video game industry has expanded throughout the world and in 2020 had a valuation of 159 billion USD. It doesn't stop there, currently with the presence of video games in mobile format, the influence of video games is increasingly increasing which is marked by the increase in elements related to video games such as gamers, streamers, and so on. The number of these elements, especially gamers, is even predicted to reach 3 billion people in 2022 (Cucuel, 2011).

The popularity of video games – as part of digital technology, has spurred the video game industry to develop various videos games that are diverse both in terms of content, visuals and technology used (Qonita & Prayogi, 2023). Video game developers (developers) make various efforts to attract consumer interest in accessing the games they launch. Regarding popular culture, it will be very closely related to creativity. Creativity and knowledge are two crucial assets if you want to produce something new, as well as a breakthrough that has high competitiveness in this increasingly fierce market. Creativity is able to stimulate the creation of various creative products or services which are directly proportional to economic improvement. However, it is not only about the economy, several forms of popular culture can also be used as a tool for social criticism, including video games.

As part of popular culture, video games are a medium that has the ability to produce and reproduce culture and ideology in the minds of the wider community. This is possible because, - in contrast to films, music or comics which place the users passively (becoming objects) only following the storyline, video games actually position the users as story subjects who, through their choices, gamers can shape the final outcome of the story being played experienced.

If in films, music and comics, the active space for the audience is only limited to interpretation, then in video games, the space for participation is actively provided not only at the level of interpretation, but also in the whole game process itself. This can be seen from the fact that if many endings in a film are realized metaphorically - single endings are the result of the audience's interpretation, then video games are able to realize multiple endings as a result of the actions of gamers as the main characters in the story. This ability of video games is referred to as a dimension of active participation, with this ability video games have greater power to produce and reproduce things outside of other forms of popular-creative culture (Suryajaya, 2014).

With such broad dimensions and rapid development, video games can take on a greater role not only as part of creative popular culture – which is alive and in demand, but also in other substantive roles, especially as a tool for social policy criticism. This article will examine how video games (conceptually) can be used as a

tool for social criticism, especially those related to policies taken by the government in the social life of today's society. Behind the pros and cons of using video games, as part of popular culture, video games can be developed into various other forms that encourage progressive social change.

METHOD

This article was written using qualitative research methods and supported by literature review methods by dissecting various things related to the function of video games as a tool for social policy criticism. The analysis is based on extracting library data/literature studies from several (written) literature sources. The writing was carried out through the process of extracting data from various reference sources which discussed various activities related to the use of video games as a tool for social criticism and their various impacts in previous research, which were published in public media. After that, descriptive-analytic analysis was carried out to find new meanings (Prayogi, 2024).

This research chose the content analysis method to obtain accurate textual results considering that content analysis is a method that involves systematic recording and study of media content that has been communicated, especially in the form of documents. Researchers do not make direct observations, but the validity of the data that has been obtained can be guaranteed based on scientific research theory, because the reference sources obtained, based on the methods used, are sources whose existence can be guaranteed. These sources can be accessed through various places (libraries) and open internet media. This article can be a further elaboration of various related articles and writings. Thus, this article is more of a synthesis of previous writings, to be seen in relation to what can be done in the current context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Conception of Video Games as a Tool for Social Policy Criticism

Broadly speaking, video games - or understood as video games - have various characteristics such as being interesting, fun and challenging. This can happen because video games are able to involve players in being actively participatory. Video games also have an artistic and creative dimension. Even though it is "new", - because it is related to technological developments, the entity (video) game - in this case games and human existence itself cannot actually be separated, so talking about games will be directly or indirectly related to human existence, and vice versa. Both exist and are mutual influence. This is because culturally, humans basically have a desire to play (Huizinga, 1990).

Along with its development, video games have now been installed in almost all forms of electronic media (technology), both in the form of hardware and software. Video games have also been mediated in textual-audio-visual form, to then be disseminated to the public. The development of video games then becomes inseparable from the presence of technological elements. The presence of technology makes video games more innovative, sophisticated and diverse. In the future, video games have even become a hegemonic means of satisfying leisure

considering that humans are basically creatures who are always looking for fun and happiness. The existence of elements of the use of technology in video games also leads people to understand that video games are a tool for finding practical fun and happiness.

If related to the role of technology, then video games - apart from being popular culture, can also be interpreted as modern culture. Modern (technological) culture itself can be interpreted as a culture that is not only related to science and technology, but a culture that also takes a dominant position in the life of society at large which can be seen from the existence of communication media, means of physical mobility and transportation, and even modern weapons systems (Bastian & Khamadi, 2016). As part of modern culture, it is then able to offer new ways of thinking in looking at various events that occur. The new way of thinking offered by video games is presented in a socio-cultural context in the form of simulations and representations of reality that involve the user.

In another sense, what is presented in content in a video game is actually a form of reflection of reality packaged in such a way that it becomes a game. However, behind what is presented in video game content, within it (conceptually) there is a real experience presented by the party who developed the video game. This real experience is then presented in certain symbols which sometimes have connotative meaning. There is a value/idea/ideology that can be deliberately planted in it. Instilling values through this kind of content can also be found in other modern popular culture such as on television shows, and even in advertising displays. In this way, video games find their relevance in being used by those who wish to be able to embed ideology in the reality of people's lives.

From this phenomenon, a paradigm shift occurred in understanding video games, from what was initially interpreted as a leisure activity to a substantive activity of instilling values/ideas and correcting reality (Allifiansyah). Video games are a means or media itself which is a cultural product, so its position is exactly the same as films, novels, or even clothing styles, all of which can be used as a medium for negotiating the hegemony of a system and culture. Thus, through a media content approach, conceptually video games can also be created and used as a medium for social criticism (resistance) over socio-cultural and political realities (policies). There is a paradigm that makes video games something that has educational value and correction of the reality of society.

Regarding its function as a tool for social criticism, video games have a more progressive nature when compared to other media. This characteristic is then needed to achieve a compromise balance (Storey, 2019). This compromise balance means that every time a reality appears, it will be accompanied by the emergence of another reality that is resistant to it. This kind of phenomenon can be proven on several occasions, for example, when the reality of a boom in a product emerges which then becomes a trendsetter, other products (similar or not) will appear that will challenge this hegemony. This compromise balance event makes video games an option (alternative) to be used as a medium for social criticism of emerging policies that may have previously been carried out by other media (Mulachela et al., 2020).

If social criticism in the pre-industrial revolution era was mostly carried out through literature, then in the current era this criticism can also be raised through video game media (Suryajaya, 2014). With this conception, video games can be seen as cultural agents. The conceptual idea of video games as cultural agents also marks the use of reception analysis theory as a support in the study of audiences in society, where in fact audiences are placed not only passively but are seen as cultural agents who have their own power in producing meaning from various discourses offered by the media. The meaning carried by the media can then be open or polysemic and can even be responded to in opposition by the audience (Adi, 2012).

Through its role as a cultural agent, there are three conceptions that can be drawn regarding efforts to interpret the role of video games as a medium for social criticism, including first, a hegemonic-dominant position which means it can be entered by video game users (gamers) which is carried out in accordance with what is stated desired by game makers in video game content. This means that values, attitudes, beliefs and assumptions will be accepted as fully appropriate with the meaning proposed and desired by the creator (developer) in video game content. Second, the negotiation position, which means that the video game user is to some extent in line with what has been programmed/existed in the video game content and basically accepts the proposed meaning. However, there are attempts at modification in such a way as to reflect the personal position and interests of video game users. Third, the oppositional position, which means that video game users do not agree with what is in the content and reject the existing meaning, and then determine their own alternative framework in interpreting the message in the video game content (Hall, 2011).

Application of Video Games as a Tool for Social Policy Criticism

As part of popular culture, video games have an impact on social change. In this case, video games can cause significant changes in people's values and lifestyle patterns (Hebdige, 1979). This means that, practically, video games have various impacts related to their form as a tool for social policy criticism. In practice, the use of video games as a tool of social resistance can be done by building the entire process on a video game platform. This effort itself is basically an effort to criticize itself because in the building process, various desired meanings can be contained with the aim that the resulting meaning can become a tool for social criticism of the policy itself (Storey, 2009).

How is the meaning of the content or content of a video game in the context of sociological and cultural studies, understood as a simulation in the form of a representation of reality which involves the player as a user who studies various issues regarding the reality contained in it (O'Sullivan et al., 2006). In this case then, the building blocks of what is presented in video games it is actually a reflection of reality which is packaged in such a way as to become a video game product which eventually becomes a mass product. This means that what is displayed in a video game must contain an experience of the reality presented by the (video) game maker. This experience of reality is then presented in certain symbols which are sometimes connotative if we are not careful in interpreting them (Allifiansyah, n.d.).

In this context, an example can be taken of how video games exist as a medium for social criticism of corrupt behavior in an event. There are anti-corruption games that are currently (still) being produced at the individual level which function as a tool for social criticism-correction in an interesting way. This means that in this (video) game they carry out social criticism in a fun way which is actually the opposite of what officials, bureaucrats and politicians generally do. The philosophy of utilizing "fun" in expression through video games - as a form of social criticism, is a strength in itself in the anti-corruption game. This way of thinking proves that the principle of information openness and technological progress can be actualized by creatively creating interpretive pleasure for users regarding the information texts they receive. Practically, in Indonesia, this form of fun in video games is made in various variations, one of which is a video game called D'Jamal. This video game has 3D features and has a game genre in the form of an adventure. In this game, users/gamers can play the main character named Djamal who intends to uncover a case of corruption in funds from the class decoration policy carried out by a treasurer named Susan. D'Jamal's video game even received an award as runner up in the 2013 ACFFEST (Anti Corruption Festival) event organized by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) in collaboration with Management Systems International (MSI) and USAID (Allifiansyah, n.d.).

This means that video games as a medium are capable of carrying out what is called social criticism. The way to do this is by making a firm statement ideologically by channeling it through the media of everyday discourse (Hebdige, 1979). How to instill ideology through anti-corruption themed games is an effort by activists to form an anti-corruption movement among the younger generation, considering that the majority of game users/gamers come from the younger generation. Video games can be considered a strong entry point for instilling this ideology, due to the era of technological sophistication like now, the younger generation is becoming attached to video games when they fill their free time every day (Allifiansyah, n.d.).

In video games, there is a narrative for thinking abstractly, which means there is a way of thinking that places problems "allegorically" and provides solutions that are no less important allegorically (Dovey & Kennedy, 2006). For example, instead of discussing social inequality due to an exploitative economic distribution system, video games abstract social inequality into a quasi-mystical matter of the struggle for ancient artifacts with the power to change fate. The video game entitled Final Fantasy 7 is an illustration of this tendency. Another example, instead of questioning suffering of groups of people within specific social structures, video games tend to abstract the issue into a matter of humanity versus "radical evil." This type of pattern is most visible in the RPG (Role-Playing Game) genre which tends to be plot-driven. Starting from the first RPG games such as Akalabeth: World of Doom from 1979 to The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim in 2011. Many social issues are rooted allegorically in the role of mystical entities such as giant dragons, wizards or evil politicians. Therefore, the solution to these problems tends to be returned to the mystical world, namely killing the rancid witch or evil politician, and the world will be peaceful as before (Suryajaya, 2014).

It is at this point that a form of social criticism can be developed practically in the form of heroic imagination. Another form of praxis, related to the function of video games as a tool for policy criticism, can also be seen in the socio-religious aspect. In this case, an example can be taken of how video games exist as a means of criticism of views that state that video games are something that is free of values (religion). Although, in some cases, there are several video games titles that have clear (or subtle) symbolization of religion which is used as a means of criticizing the character of religion. This can be seen in the game entitled Bioshock which tries to provide scathing criticism - in its storyline, of the conflict between conservative religious groups and scientists who are trying. In this video game, gamers can find the words "God is Dead" on inside (Prayogi et al, 2023).

Another practical form of the role of video games as a tool for social policy criticism is the phenomenon of collaboration on other platforms outside the video game system itself and requiring the support of internet networks and the involvement of other application platforms, such as the use of YouTube, Instagram, Tik-Tok and other applications or others that support the process of transferring data or information from one user to another user (streaming). This praxis can be an option considering that currently the development of video games is becoming increasingly rapid, especially network-based video games (online games) in all their forms (Martin, 2010). There is a demand to collaborate with other platforms, considering that not many (video) games are addressed explicitly or vaguely regarding their role as a tool for criticism(Leo et al., 2011). This means that this collaboration is more aimed at gamers who play popular games which are basically purely made for the benefit of the entertainment industry, such as popular (online) games, especially those based on smartphones which are currently very popular, such as Mobile Legends, PUBG, Free Fire, World of Warcraft, DOTA, and others. Because it is a popular game, even though it has absolutely no elements of reality criticism, this video game can still be used practically as a criticism tool by utilizing streaming media. However, there are two important things in this process, namely passion-skill and personality. These two keys are important to have in order to attract the attention of viewers/viewers who will later access the game streaming process, where the more viewers who are present in the game streaming process, the greater the popularity obtained, which in the end will also make the value transfer process easier in it.

CONCLUSION

From this article it can be concluded several things, including first, that considering its capacity as part of popular culture, video games can have many other roles, especially when viewed from the perspective of popular culture media which makes video games the (most) widely used media which has the ability to produce and reproduce culture and ideology in the minds of its users, both actively and passively. This certainly cannot be separated from the basic nature of video games itself has a participation function. Second, conceptually, video games can be created and used as a means of social criticism and correction of authority policies and

criticism of socio-cultural phenomena. With a role like that, conceptually video games can be seen as cultural agents.

With this, it means that video games can be seen as cultural agents that have their own strengths in terms of constructing meaning from various discourses offered by the media, where the resulting meaning can then be interpreted openly, polysemically or can even be responded to in opposition. Third, practically the role of video games as a tool for social criticism can be realized in various fields. However, it all comes down to how to build the entire process within the video game itself. This effort is carried out as a critical effort by inserting the desired meaning with the aim that the resulting meaning can become an effort of social criticism itself.

The study in this article is limited to conceptual ideas, both theoretical and practical. In this case then, the ideas in this article have not yet been tested concretely, so what is in this article is more about encouragement to be able to realize the ideas offered. Some of the video game practices presented are more of social facts that occur and there has been no further study, especially regarding more specific matters such as response, impact, and so on. For this reason, this article can provide/become a suggestion for studies that make the function of criticism in video games an object of study that can be implemented directly and examine various things further and specifically.

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