

An Analysis of Gharar and Maisir in Claw Machine Games: A Review from the Perspective of Islamic Economic Law

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ABSTRACT

Claw machine games have become an increasingly popular form of entertainment in various places, including shopping malls and cafés. However, despite their popularity, these games raise several concerns, particularly for children and teenagers. This study aims to analyze the practice of claw machine gaming and its impact from the perspective of Islamic economic law. A qualitative research method with a field study approach was used. Data were collected through observations and interviews with café owners, players, and parents of players at Café Kopi INJE, Tanjung Solok. The findings reveal that the game's appeal lies in its element of challenge and luck, which encourages players to keep trying until they successfully win a prize. However, the game also increases consumerist behavior, triggers addictive effects, and can lead to psychological impacts such as frustration due to repeated failures. Furthermore, the game contains elements of uncertainty (gharar) and gambling (maisir), which contradict the principles of Islamic economic law. In the context of Indonesian law, luck-based games involving money may violate gambling regulations. The novelty of this study lies in its specific analysis of the implications of claw machine games from the perspective of Islamic economic law and their impact on the consumer behavior of children and teenagers. Therefore, stricter regulations are needed for luck-based games targeting children, along with early financial education. Educational and skill-based entertainment alternatives can serve as solutions to reduce the negative effects of these games.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Games represent a form of activity that provides both entertainment and learning experiences for children as well as adults (Martinez, Gimenes, & Lambert, 2022). Along with technological advancements, various types of modern games have emerged, one of which is the claw machine. Initially, this game was only available in large shopping centers, but it has now become increasingly common in diverse locations, including cafés and recreational venues. Café Kopi INJE, located in Kelurahan Tanjung Solok, is one such place that offers this game as an attraction for its visitors. The popularity of claw machines is driven by the element of challenge and the sensation of success they provide, often resulting in addictive behavior, particularly among children.

Several previous studies have examined games of chance and their implications in Islamic law. For instance (Fadhil, Mariana, & Armia, 2024), explored the element of *gharar* (uncertainty) in Islamic economic transactions, while (Andziri, 2018; Khairuddin, 2019) discussed the principle of *maslahah mursalah* in determining the legality of economic activities not explicitly addressed by primary sources. However, studies that specifically analyze claw machine games within the framework of Islamic economic law remain limited, particularly in investigating how *gharar* and *maisir* influence the legality of such games and their impact on children's consumptive behavior.

This research, therefore, seeks to address a central question: Do claw machine games involve elements of *gharar* and *maisir* that contradict the principles of Islamic economics? This question is crucial given the growing prevalence of claw machines, alongside increasing parental concerns regarding their influence on children's financial habits and psychological well-being.

Academically, this study contributes by filling a gap in the literature concerning games of chance within the scope of Islamic economic law. From a practical standpoint, the findings may serve as a reference for regulators, business owners, and society in understanding the Shariah-related implications of claw machine games. Consequently, the outcomes of this research are expected to support the formulation of policies and educational efforts regarding games that align with Shariah principles.

2. METHODS

This study is a field research employing a qualitative approach (Mappasere & Suyuti, 2019; Sujarweni, 2014), aimed at understanding the phenomenon of claw machine game practices at Café KOPI INJE, Kelurahan Tanjung Solok, from the perspective of Islamic Economic Law and its implications for Shariah economic education within society. The data consist of primary sources obtained directly through observation and interviews with the café owner and other relevant parties, as well as secondary sources, including official documents, books, undergraduate theses, journals, and Islamic legal references such as the Qur'an, Hadith, Ijma, Qiyas, and fatwas issued by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI). The research subjects are the café owner and manager who provide the claw machine game, actively contributing information regarding the game system, transaction mechanisms, and aspects of Shariah economic education that can be learned by the public, particularly in understanding the principles of *halal* and *haram* in the entertainment business.

Data collection was conducted through three main techniques: (1) direct observation of the claw machine game practices, (2) interviews with the café owner to obtain insights on operational systems and compliance with Shariah principles, and (3) documentation as supporting evidence to ensure research validity. Data analysis employed a descriptive method by presenting the findings as they are, in order to assess the conformity of the game practices with the principles of Islamic Economic Law and to explore how the game can serve as an educational tool for society in understanding Shariah-compliant transactions. To ensure the credibility of the findings, this study applied

triangulation techniques by cross-checking data from multiple sources, thereby enhancing the reliability of the results. Consequently, the research is expected to serve as a reference for Shariah economic education within the community, particularly concerning business and entertainment practices that align with Islamic values.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. *The Practice of Claw Machine Games at Café Kopi INJE*

The claw machine game at Café Kopi INJE began operating in May 2023 and quickly attracted the attention of visitors, particularly children and adolescents. The game operates with a simple mechanism: players insert a coin, maneuver the joystick to direct the claw toward a doll or other prize, and then press a button to attempt to grasp the item. If the claw grip is sufficiently strong and the object is positioned favorably, the player obtains the prize. However, in many cases, players fail to secure any prize despite spending money to play.

Based on observations and interviews with the café owner, the claw machine was acquired from a sales agent who offered the unit to a colleague of the owner. Recognizing its business potential, the café owner decided to install the machine as an additional entertainment facility for customers. As Mr. Hendra, the café owner, explained: "At first, we only wanted to add some variety to the entertainment in the café, but it turned out that many children were interested in playing, and some even came solely for the claw machine."

The machine operates with a straightforward payment system: players insert coins valued at IDR 2,000 to IDR 5,000 per round, maneuver the joystick to aim at the desired prize, and press the button to activate the claw. If the mechanism functions optimally, players may win a prize. Nevertheless, the chances of success are uncertain, as the claw grip is often not strong enough to lift the selected prize.

Interviews with players revealed interesting behavioral patterns in their engagement with the game. Most players encountered difficulties in winning a prize on their first attempt, yet they remained motivated to continue playing. Bayu Subhi Saputra, a 22-year-old student, stated: "Sometimes the doll is so close to falling, but I fail. So, I keep trying until I get it." He admitted to spending more than IDR 50,000 on over ten attempts, describing the game as offering a sense of curiosity and adrenaline rush.

Conversely, some players reported losing interest after repeated failures. Witri, a 16-year-old high school student, expressed that she lost interest after several unsuccessful attempts: "I would rather spend my money on food," she remarked. Similarly, Karima, a 13-year-old junior high school student, indicated that she preferred free games such as UNO or chess, which were also available at the café. These interviews suggest that the game's appeal is highly subjective, depending on individual experiences. For some, it provides a unique challenge and enjoyment, while for others, the attraction diminishes quickly, leading to frustration.

Games of chance such as claw machines not only affect consumption patterns but also have psychological and social implications for players. Interviews with several parents revealed concerns about the long-term impact of this game on their children. The findings highlight the dual impact of claw machine games, encompassing both economic and psychological dimensions. These include:

- a) Increased Consumptive Behavior – Children tend to spend their pocket money on the game, sometimes neglecting more essential needs.
- b) Addictive Effects – The "near-miss" sensation encourages repeated attempts, fostering repetitive behavior patterns that may lead to addiction.

- c) Psychological Consequences – Repeated failures may lower children’s self-confidence and create frustration, while occasional success fosters an illusion of victory that drives impulsive behavior.
- d) Lack of Legal and Ethical Awareness – Many children and parents are unaware that the game resembles gambling mechanisms, particularly in its elements of uncertainty (gharar) and wagering (maisir).

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the claw machine game at Café Kopi INJE has significant economic and social impacts, particularly on children and adolescents. With the increasing proliferation of such games in various entertainment venues, further investigation is needed regarding their legal implications from an Islamic economic perspective, as well as the development of educational measures for society.

3.2. The Impact of Claw Machine Games on Children and Adolescents

Claw machine games have become an increasingly popular form of entertainment in various venues, ranging from shopping malls to cafés offering additional leisure facilities. The appeal of this game lies in its challenge mechanism, where players attempt to direct the claw to grasp a prize with uncertain chances of success. However, behind its popularity, the game entails a number of impacts on children and adolescents, spanning psychological, consumptive, and broader social dimensions.

One of the most visible impacts is the emergence of consumptive behavior among children and adolescents who frequently engage in this game. Based on interviews with several parents, many children tend to spend their pocket money on claw machine games rather than on more essential needs. They are driven to keep trying until they successfully obtain a doll or other prize, often unaware that their expenditures far exceed the actual value of the rewards. This phenomenon indicates a tendency toward impulsive consumption, in which financial decisions are made emotionally without careful consideration.

Moreover, the game has the potential to foster addictive behavior due to its reliance on chance and uncertainty. Many players are motivated to continue playing because they feel “close” to winning, willingly spending more money in the hope of success in subsequent attempts. This sensation is recognized in psychology as variable ratio reinforcement, where individuals persist in repeating an activity because they cannot predict when success will occur. In the context of claw machines, this pattern leads players to keep trying despite repeated failures.

The addictive effects become more apparent when children begin to experience negative psychological consequences. Interviews with parents revealed that children who repeatedly fail to obtain prizes often experience frustration and disappointment. Yuli (38), the mother of Bayu, stated that her child frequently becomes angry or cries after losing: “Sometimes he sulks when he doesn’t get a doll, even after spending a lot of money. I worry this is affecting his emotions.”

Conversely, some children who manage to win a prize experience an illusion of success, believing that their victory results from skill rather than mere luck. This illusion fosters a misleading mindset about effort and outcomes, which may, in the long term, influence their decision-making in real-life situations. Children accustomed to such systems may develop unrealistic expectations regarding hard work and achievement, potentially shaping unhealthy perspectives in their social and academic lives.

Beyond psychological consequences, claw machine games also raise legal and ethical concerns that remain poorly understood by many parents and players. Interviews revealed that most parents were unaware of the game’s similarities to gambling mechanisms under Islamic economic law. Marlina (40), the mother of Fadhi, explained that she initially considered the game harmless entertainment, but

later questioned its alignment with her family values after observing her child's frequent requests for extra money to play.

From the perspective of Islamic economic law, claw machine games involve elements of *gharar* (uncertainty) and *maisir* (gambling), which contradict the Shariah principles of clarity and fairness in transactions. In addition, under Indonesia's positive law, games of chance involving monetary stakes may be classified as gambling, as regulated in Article 303(3) of the Indonesian Penal Code and Law No. 7 of 1974 on the Control of Gambling. The lack of public awareness regarding these regulations highlights the need for stronger educational efforts concerning the legal implications of chance-based games like claw machines.

Furthermore, the game fosters unhealthy financial habits among children and adolescents. Those accustomed to spending money on such games often lack a sound understanding of financial management. They rarely consider cost-benefit analysis—comparing the money spent with the value of the rewards obtained—leading them toward wasteful spending patterns that may persist into adulthood.

Given the wide-ranging impacts described, regulatory and educational measures are necessary to mitigate the negative effects of claw machine games. Local governments and religious leaders may consider stricter regulations on chance-based games targeting children and adolescents. In addition, schools and parents should enhance children's financial literacy, teaching them how to manage money wisely and understand the risks associated with chance-based activities.

As an alternative, cafés and entertainment centers could provide more educational and constructive activities for children and adolescents. Strategy-based, skill-oriented, or creativity-driven games may serve as healthier options compared to chance-based games that offer only temporary enjoyment but entail long-term risks. With appropriate measures, children and adolescents can enjoy entertainment that is not only enjoyable but also beneficial for their personal development.

3.3. Discussion

The claw machine game represents a form of entertainment that appeals particularly to children and adolescents. With its chance-based mechanism, players insert coins, maneuver the joystick, and press a button to attempt to obtain a doll or other prize. Success yields the desired prize, while failure results in no return. According to interviews with the owner of Café Kopi INJE, the machine has been in operation since May 2023, introduced after a sales agent offered the unit to a colleague of the owner, who saw its potential as an attraction for the café. Consumer interviews revealed that the game is considered exciting and challenging, though it also carries addictive potential. For instance, Bayu Subhi Saputra reported playing more than 100 times, spending approximately IDR 500,000, and often winning a doll after two or three attempts. In contrast, other respondents, such as Witri, a high school student at SMA Negeri 9 Tanjung Jabung Timur, expressed diminishing interest after repeated failures. Similarly, junior high school students from SMP Negeri 7 Tanjung Jabung Timur, such as Khairunnisya and Karima, preferred free games available at the café, including UNO, chess, and karaoke. These findings suggest that the game's appeal depends heavily on individual experience: for some, it provides challenge and entertainment, while for others, interest quickly declines following repeated losses.

Every game has both positive and negative effects (Aydemir, 2022), particularly for children and adolescents who are still in the process of cognitive and social development (Alanko, 2023; Clemente-Suárez et al., 2024). From an educational perspective, claw machines may provide lessons in perseverance and risk management, but they also carry potential negative consequences if parental supervision is lacking. Interviews with parents illustrate this duality. For example, Yuli (mother of Bayu) described the game as enjoyable for children in the village, who previously could only access it in large shopping malls. She noted that her son even used the dolls he won as birthday gifts for friends,

which helped reduce family expenses. However, she also admitted that her son spent more time playing and became less focused on studying. Similarly, Marlina (mother of Fadhi) acknowledged that while the game provided entertainment, it also fostered addictive tendencies; her child often requested additional money to continue playing, even after winning a doll. These accounts indicate that the claw machine has a dual impact in educational contexts: on the one hand, it offers entertainment and new experiences, but on the other, it risks fostering addiction, overspending, and reduced study time. Accordingly, parental oversight is essential to ensure children manage their playtime responsibly.

Within the Tanjung Solok community, the claw machine has become widely known since its installation at Café Kopi INJE. Many children and adolescents are drawn to play, though their awareness of the game's legal and ethical dimensions remains limited. According to community figure Nurhaidah (47), the game is "fun and enjoyable," yet carries the potential to encourage consumptive behavior among children. Several parents expressed concern that their children spend more money on the game than on other essential needs. From an educational standpoint, however, the game can be used as a discussion tool for teaching financial management, the importance of self-control, and the balance between luck and effort. Parents and educators can leverage the game as a concrete example to instill lessons on money management and wise decision-making.

The claw machine game thus holds several important educational implications (Fitri, Fauzi, & Mursal, 2024; Karhulahti, Heljakka, & Jo, 2023). First, in financial education, it offers children an opportunity to understand spending and money management, as well as the reality that not all investments (in this case, coins for play) yield returns. Second, in emotional intelligence, it helps children learn to regulate emotions, such as coping with disappointment after failing to win a prize. Third, in time management, children should be taught to balance playtime with study time to avoid disrupting academic development. Fourth, in ethics and legal awareness, parents and teachers can use the game to introduce concepts of ethical behavior and legal frameworks, including discussions about chance-based games from the perspective of Islamic law.

In conclusion, the claw machine game at Café Kopi INJE can serve as a valuable learning medium if approached wisely. Nevertheless, strong parental and educational guidance is necessary to minimize its negative impacts and to ensure that children benefit from the experience in ways that support both their personal and social development.

4. CONCLUSION

The claw machine at Café Kopi INJE is appealing to children and adolescents but poses economic, psychological, and social impacts. The game encourages consumptive behavior, potential addiction through its chance-based mechanism, and frustration or illusions of victory that affect financial decision-making. From the perspective of Islamic economic law, the claw machine contains elements of *gharar* (uncertainty) and *maisir* (gambling), which conflict with the principles of justice and certainty in Shariah-compliant transactions, and it may also be classified as gambling under Indonesian law.

This study highlights the impacts of claw machine games from the perspective of Islamic economic law and the consumptive behavior of children, filling a gap in previous research. Recommendations include stricter regulation of chance-based games, improving children's financial literacy through schools and parents, and promoting educational entertainment based on skills or creativity. The study is limited by its location and sample size, so further research with broader coverage and deeper methodological approaches is necessary to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of claw machine impacts.

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