



## Visual Storytelling and Design Analysis of “Sengoku BASARA” as a History-Based Game for the Implementation of Interest to the History

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**ABSTRACT:** Historical video games are one of the entertainment screen media genres that represent actual historical events influencing the players to learn interactively. Moreover, in an era where technology is increasingly advanced the presence of pop culture that is included in history-based games leads people to get interested more in things that were initially boring to follow. “Sengoku BASARA” (戦国BASARA) is a successful action game featuring a main character based on Japanese feudal warlords wrapped in fictional and dramatic form published by CAPCOM which is very popular in Japan. Yet, Indonesia hasn’t developed a game based on the history of their ancient kingdom with good qualities to bring their interest to learning. The research methodology in this study using a qualitative approach includes content analysis using the *5 W 1 H* technique to explore how the historical events and characters in the game are visualized and how it brings or gives the player an understanding of the history. This study aims to delve into two main points: 1. Understanding how “Sengoku BASARA” adapts the elements of their history, 2. The potential of this game as an educational tool is to introduce the historical characters as well as their story events. In conclusion, “Sengoku BASARA” does not have perfect accuracy in visualizing the original history yet it can be the first step to learning more about history interestingly and entertainingly.

**Keywords:** historical game, educational, Indonesian kingdom, ancient, Sengoku BASARA.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Video games have increasingly evolved beyond mere entertainment media into complex cultural artifacts capable of conveying historical narratives, values, and collective memory. In contemporary popular culture, historical-based video games play a significant role in shaping public understanding of the past by combining interactive gameplay, narrative design, and visual storytelling (Belyaev & Belyaeva, 2022; Burgess & Jones, 2021). Through immersive experiences, video games allow players to engage directly with historical themes, characters, and settings, making history more accessible and emotionally resonant, particularly for younger generations (McCall, 2016).

One notable example of this phenomenon is Sengoku BASARA, a video game series developed by CAPCOM that reimagines Japan’s Sengoku period through exaggerated character designs, fantasy elements, and dynamic storytelling. Unlike conventional historical games that prioritize factual accuracy, Sengoku BASARA adopts a highly stylized approach that blends historical figures with fictional narratives, thereby transforming history into an engaging and popular form of entertainment (Kawasaki et al., 2010). This distinctive design and narrative strategy has made Sengoku BASARA a long-standing cultural phenomenon in Japan since its initial release in 2005, with sustained popularity for nearly two decades.

The success of Sengoku BASARA demonstrates how visual storytelling can function as a powerful medium for historical engagement. Visual storytelling emphasizes the use of imagery, character design, and narrative flow to communicate complex ideas and emotions effectively (Caputo, 2003; Su & Zhao, 2012). In the case of Sengoku BASARA, historical figures are reinterpreted through bold visual aesthetics and dramatic characterization, allowing players to form personal connections with characters who might otherwise remain distant or abstract. This approach aligns with research suggesting that emotional engagement is a key factor in enhancing interest and learning outcomes in history education (Hanes & Stone, 2019).

Beyond entertainment, Sengoku BASARA has also influenced the preservation and revitalization of historical heritage sites in Japan. Yamamura (2018) highlights how the popularity of the game contributed to increased tourism at historical locations such as Shiroishi Castle, illustrating the phenomenon of “contents tourism,” where popular culture drives public interest in historical heritage. This indicates that video games can function as effective tools of public history, fostering participatory engagement and encouraging audiences to explore historical knowledge beyond the digital realm (Reid, 2024).

In Indonesia, Sengoku BASARA gained particular recognition through Sengoku BASARA 2: HEROES on the PlayStation 2 platform, where it became a nostalgic title for many Indonesian players. Indirectly, this exposure motivated players to search for and learn about Japan’s Sengoku era, despite the game’s fictionalized portrayal of history. This phenomenon contrasts sharply with the relatively low level of public interest and literacy regarding Indonesia’s own ancient history. Although Indonesia has a rich historical legacy marked by the rise and fall of numerous kingdoms, public engagement with this heritage remains limited, particularly among younger generations.

One contributing factor to this issue is the perception that history is a rigid and uninteresting subject. Previous studies indicate that the way historical content is presented greatly influences audience interest and comprehension (Fernández et al., 2019). Traditional educational approaches often fail to capture the imagination of learners, resulting in disengagement and low motivation. In contrast, video games offer interactive and participatory experiences that can transform historical learning into an enjoyable and meaningful activity (McCall, 2016; Sloan, 2016).

Furthermore, video games have increasingly been recognized as a medium for public history, enabling practitioners to balance academic rigor with public appeal (Reid, 2024). While historical accuracy remains an important consideration, the strategic use of fictional

elements and fantasy can serve as an entry point for deeper historical exploration, as demonstrated by Sengoku BASARA (Burgess & Jones, 2021). This approach allows players to become familiar with historical characters and contexts before engaging with more formal historical sources.

Indonesia itself has produced several video games that have gained international recognition, demonstrating the potential of the local game industry. However, there is still a lack of video games that successfully utilize Indonesia's rich historical narratives as their primary theme. This gap highlights an opportunity to explore how historical-based video games, supported by strong visual storytelling, can be used to increase public interest and awareness of Indonesian history.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the visual storytelling strategies employed in Sengoku BASARA and analyze how these strategies contribute to the popularization and preservation of historical narratives. By understanding the mechanisms through which Sengoku BASARA engages its audience, this research seeks to propose alternative approaches for addressing the low level of historical interest in Indonesian society. Ultimately, the findings are expected to contribute to the development of historically inspired video games that can serve as effective media for cultural preservation, education, and global promotion of Indonesia's historical heritage..

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

The writing method is a scientific way to obtain data with the aim of being able to describe, prove, develop, and find certain knowledge, theories, actions, and products so that they can be used to understand, solve, and anticipate problems in human life (Sugiyono, 2015). Therefore, in this writing study, a qualitative analysis approach is used where this approach is an approach in writing that aims to explain the phenomenon as deeply as possible through the deepest data collection (Rahmat Kriyantono, 2006). Qualitative writers express certain social situations by describing reality correctly, formed by words based on relevant collection and analysis techniques and obtained from natural situations. Qualitative writing is not only an effort to describe data, but the description is the result of valid data collection required qualitatively (M. Djunaidi Ghony & Fauzan

Almanshur, 2004). Therefore, in writing this type of research, the aim is to create a systematic, factual, and accurate description of the facts and characteristics of a particular population or object through various data source instruments in the form of articles, websites, blogs, videos, the author's environment, interviews, questionnaires, and social media using the

5 W 1 H application analysis method.

**WHAT** is being sought in this Sengoku BASARA research?

**WHY** should Sengoku BASARA be used as a reference?

**HOW** can Sengoku BASARA influence its fans to like and learn history on their own?

**WHERE** is Sengoku BASARA widely discussed?

**WHEN** was Sengoku BASARA widely discussed by the Indonesian people?

**WHO** is the benefit of this research aimed at?

Analysis Focus:

### **Media**

According to the Association of Educational Communication Technology (AECT), media is all forms and all channels that can be used in the process of conveying messages.

### **Visual Storytelling**

Visual narrative is the process of telling a story through visual media that can be told using still photography, illustrations, or videos and can utilize the use of graphics, sound, and text. [Caputo, 2003]

### **Character Design**

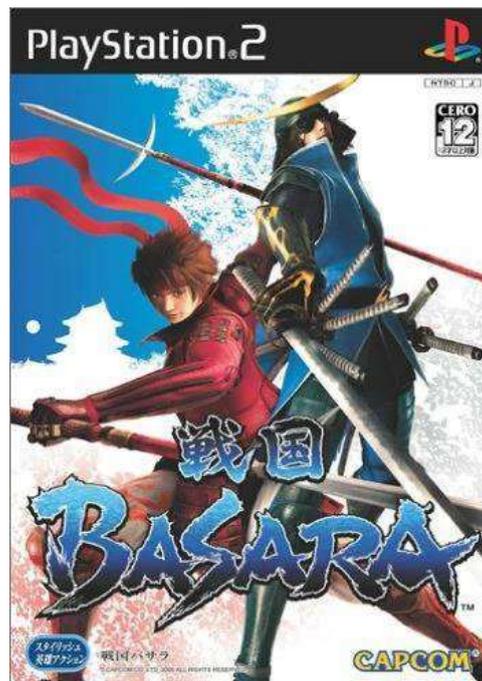
According to Su and Zhao, character design in general means designing human characters or those that resemble humans with the special uniqueness of the character. The specific meaning means designing characters starting from the body and visual appearance of the character, including hairstyles, costumes/clothes used, and character properties. [Su & Zhao, 2012]

## **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Origin of “Sengoku BASARA”**

Starting from the concerns of Hiroyuki Kobayashi the creator of “Sengoku BASARA”, regarding CAPCOM which already has a strong fan base saying their famous action game has a reputation for its game difficulty level which is not easy for beginner players so Kobayashi wants to remove the limitation completely and create a new fan base segmentation with the main goal is that this game can be enjoyed by everyone. Although his proposal was approved by the President of CAPCOM, Kenzo Tsujimoto, Kobayashi's idea of making “Sengoku

BASARA” invited various kinds of cons for those who did not understand his vision giving them various obstacles and big challenges for his creator team, however, Kobayashi's diligence and dedication in producing this even to the point of using his budget to hire famous voice actors. Finally, “Sengoku BASARA” was accepted by the entire team after its first try then published the 1st series on the PlayStation 2 platform in 2005 by introducing two main warlord characters, "Date Masamune" and "Sanada Yukimura". It was a huge success. [Capcom.co]



**Figure 1.** The first series of “Sengoku BASARA” Source: [sengokuBASARA.fandom.com](http://sengokuBASARA.fandom.com)

After the original “Sengoku BASARA” was released, Kobayashi and Yamamoto continued to release game sequels per year, while expanding the series into other media including drama CDs, comics, TV animation and action stage performances. “Sengoku BASARA” had now become a popular brand with a firmly fan-base and a established position in the company.

### **Character Design Development**

Quoted from CAPCOM's documentation website. “Sengoku BASARA” character design began after the chaos of making the game's concept and systematics which gave the creator team 9 months left before the deadline. Kobayashi tried to focus on the character elements with the gameplay and player behavior so that the elements of the character could

be enjoyed by the players. The director of “Sengoku BASARA”, Yamamoto, enlightened Kobayashi and had an agreement to “Sengoku BASARA” to have a unique character design as if it had never been seen before which later then be the first distinctive identity for the game.



Figure 2. Date Masamune design concept.

Source: Capcom.co

Taking from the creation of the Date Masamune character design, Yamamoto surprised his team of creators again with the idea that the character would speak English. This was explained again by that in its history the Date Clan had diplomatic relations with Western countries. As their initial goal in creating a distinctive character design, they would still maintain things related to the origin history. And as a fact that historical video game explicated in the optics of simulational ways reconstructs only individual elements of the historical continuum(Belyaev & Belyaeva, 2022).



Figure 3. Date Masamune as the only character who uses English words as he speak.

Source: author's documentation

On the other hand, when using a historical general as the character base, the convention contacted them to suggest that the design should follow its historical form. However, Kobayashi and Yamamoto managed to make a policy where they could reject suggestions to follow historical fact accuracy, by saying that imagination should be used freely and widely to create characters that were completely outside the characteristics of the warlords that are used, as historical-based kind of games are prioritized to be entertaining (Hanes & Stone, 2019).

Open discussions like this between Kobayashi and Yamamoto gave rise to many ideas. Through these discussions, they realized that the mixture of various entertainment themes created a patchwork feel. Turning Tadakatsu Honda into a robot was a touch of science fiction which indicating on the historical-fact that he is the strongest warlord who fought 100 battles and never lost once. Other elements are borrowed from girls' comics, horror, occultism, and comedy, all to add color to the characters and create a sense of excitement because no one knows what will happen next.



Figure 4. Honda Tadakatsu Character Design Sheet.

Source: Capcom.co

Another element to adds interest to the character is through the conversation. In the old times, characters in action games rarely spoke because of the lack of idle time to have small talk in the heat of battle. But in “Sengoku BASARA” which tends to place more emphasis on character than battle, dialogue such as Date Masamune's English is important as part of the uniqueness of his character[Figure 3]. Lines of dialogue are given not only to the main character and enemies but also to NPC soldiers who participate in conversations with the character, as well as when they are defeated during battle. On the other hand, even general characters who are not present in battle can speak freely to provide commentary on the battle action[Figure 5].



Figure 5. General enemy who are not present in the stage and the NPC soldier who joining in conversations.

Source: author's documentation

Around 2007, the media realized that many young women were very interested in sharing stories, information, and visiting experiences related to historical sites of feudal warlords and their traditional events. “Sengoku BASARA” is thought to be the beginning of this trend. Because of Kobayashi's initial concept of “Sengoku BASARA” which aimed for everyone to be able to play this game, many players who had no experience in playing games enjoyed it very much, including many female players who joined the fan base. The stylish characters and the many handsome male characters who gave the game various of colourfulness depending on the character chosen made it the main enjoyment for them, even the non-playable



people admitted that they had searched for more information about the history of the characters

introduced by "Sengoku BASARA" for reasons of searching because of their favorite characters or to learn about famous warlord figures in Japan as additional insight. Of course, they also realize and agree that the characterization of "Sengoku BASARA" is not accurate with its historical facts, but they do not mind it but rather enjoy every characterization given by CAPCOM because of its uniqueness.

### **Visual Storytelling**

"Sengoku BASARA" is known for almost all of its game series that do not have other language options nor subtitle settings which of course invites questions from fans outside Japan, especially fans from Indonesia who always thought that "Sengoku BASARA" is one of a nostalgia game. Nostalgia in videogaming can be (and frequently is) dismissed as a sentimental pandering to consumer-creator longing for a lost past (Sloan, 2016). "Sengoku BASARA 2: HEROES" are the most popular series for its nostalgic game from PlayStation 2, and despite the language, people are managed to remember and understand every pick choices and enjoy to play the game.



Figure 8. Title screen and main menu of "Sengoku BASARA" 2: HEROES.

Source: author's documentation

The reason why Sengoku Basara seems not to release its game in other languages it all began from the first series which was released with a different title, "Devil Kings", and not only the title changed but the creator team changed all the elements of the character names and stories so that they were not too tied to the Japanese historical background and could be generally accepted throughout the world, but unfortunately this actually disappointed foreign players and the game was a failure.

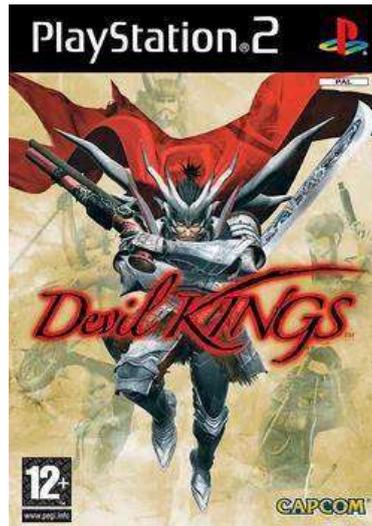


Figure 9. "Devil Kings" featuring Oda Nobunaga as the main character.

Source: [capcom.fandom.com](http://capcom.fandom.com)

Therefore, visual depiction through video cutscenes is the most important aspect for the foreign players to understand a plot in the game.

"Sengoku BASARA" certainly has its pattern in providing visuals to the story, namely the *Opening* scene in cinematic form as a prologue, *Gameplay Cutscenes* that support the building part of the story when playing in different stages, and *Ending* scenes are also in cinematic form as the end visual of the story.

We will show how the visual story form of "Sengoku BASARA" by taking samples from one of the most popular series in Indonesia, "Sengoku BASARA 2: HEROES".

Table 1. Visual storytelling explanations.

Description	Cutscenes Visual	Flow Explanation
Opening scene : Prologu		At the beginning we are shown 2 protagonists Date Masamune with his "right eye". Katakura Koiuro.
		It can be seen from Kojuro's facial expression that he admits that he has a good mood of confidence
		However, a soldier comes and makes them stop
		From the soldier's facial expression, it seems as if he is reporting something that seems very bad.
		They both decide to stop practicing, seen from Masamune who throws his wooden sword and leaves them



The scene shifts to Kojuro's face was look relaxed while training, becoming very serious and emitting an aura of anger after hearing the report from the soldier.

#### Gameplay cutscene : Problem context

The gameplay scene re-clarifies the bad report from the soldier, who turned out to be an antagonist named Matsunaga Hisahide, holding several Date clan soldiers hostage.



Towards the next scene, **Masamune is seen handing** over his 6 swords, giving further explanation that the reason



Matsunaga held his soldiers hostage was because he wanted Masamune's sword.



However, instead of releasing the hostage, Matsunaga gave Masamune an explosion until he fell from the location,



Followed by Kojuro who was in a hurry to save his master.



Meanwhile, Matsunaga was seen laughing with satisfaction at his actions and enjoying the results he got without any humane feelings,

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Gameplay cutscenes :  
First  
Tension



Masamune was injured from the explosion and Kojuro was seen ordering the soldiers to take Masamune to a safer place.



While he was going to fight Sanada Yukimura as the main enemy on that stage.



Back at the residence, Masamune had recovered, but he was seen challenging Kojuro to a duel with him.



Kojuro respectfully complied and they fought.



The fight was won by Kojuro. After that he was seen determined to pursue and fight Matsunaga himself.

Gameplay cutscenes :  
Second  
Tension



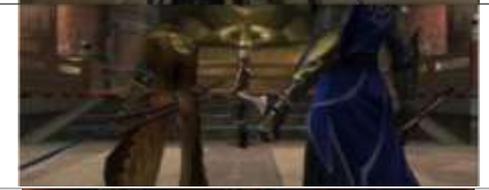
Kojuro finally meets Matsunaga but he did not expect that someone would hold him back from attacking.



With the presence of the ninja named Fuuma Kotarou, Matsunaga escaped for the second time.



From the movements that were seen, Kojuro's patience were at his limit, he was so much in distress growing a bloodthirsty killing intense.

		<p>Kojuro managed to defeat Fuuma breathing heavily as if he venting all his anger towards the ninia.</p>
		<p>After that, Kojuro was seen that he had enough and running to chase Matsunaga</p>
<p>Gameplay Cutscenes : Raising action</p>		<p>Kojuro came through alone to Matsunaga's place to fight and take back his master's six swords</p>
		<p>Unfortunately, Kojuro had entered a trap by meeting bunch of soldiers aiming a gun to him.</p>
		<p>Then followed by Masamune who suddenly appeared slaughtering all the</p>
		<p>Kojuro seemed surprised by the presence of Masamune who had saved him</p>
<p>Gameplay Cutscenes : Climax</p>		<p>The journey to hunt Matsunaga continued</p>
		<p>This made Matsunaga look satisfied with the arrival of Kojuro and Masamune.</p>



Then suddenly Kojuro took off his own body armor.



In front of Masamune and the other soldiers he knelt down, with a serious face he seemed to be expressing regret.

Until he took out a sword and



Kojuro and Masamune worked hard together this time to defeat Matsunaga who was starting to be cornered.



Kojuro was seen launching his final attack on Matsunaga.



Matsunaga was knocked down by the last blow.



Admitting defeat, Matsunaga blew himself up.



Witnessing him, Kojuro and Masamune finally completed their goal.

Ending scene :  
Epilogue



Matsunaga Hisahide's place burned down after the damage carried out by Katakura Kojuro and Date Masamune.



pointed it at his own stomach indicated that he would commit seppuku, which making Masamune surprised.



And before the sword stabbed his stomach, Masamune quickly snatch Kojuro's sword away as if he did not agree with what his subordinate had done.



Kojuro seemed very sorry he cried because Masamune seemed to still give him forgiveness.

Despite the lack of subtitles, the visual depiction of the storyline is quite helpful for players who do not understand Japanese to understand the plot, although sometimes they still use their own interpretation by looking at the character's actions, movements, environment settings, and vibes in each cutscene. Based on the questionnaire and interview data, some sources admitted that they did further research on the storyline which was then connected them to findings the original history.

### Story understanding through visuals

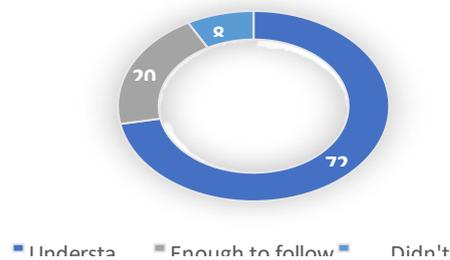


Figure 10. Survey by questioner. Source: author's documentation

Based on the questionnaire and interview data, the results show that 30 resources person can be identified in three categories. And some sources admitted that they did further

research on the storyline which was then connected them to findings the original history.

Table 2. Sources divided to 3 types of categories based on their answers.

Source: author’s documentation

<b>Category</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>Possibility of educational interest</b>
Who understand	Those who already understand the visual flow and really like the storyline.	Has a <b>high</b> possibility to search further and learn about the history facts.
Enough/yet to follow	Those who understand the flow well enough or poorly will try to dig up for more information.	It has a <b>very high</b> possibility because of curiosity to search further and learn about the history of facts.
Who does not understand	Those who don't understand are the type who don't pay attention or are not the type who follow the game storyline.	Has a <b>low</b> probability due to lack of interest.

The storyline itself has a different accuracy to the historical fact. While it was found that players understood historical accuracy and valued it in video games (Burgess & Jones, 2021), in the interview they hereby saying that they still enjoying the lore story of “Sengoku BASARA” even after learning the historical fact of the warlords background characters, knowing it just only made them interested to the characters even more.

### **Animation Style**

Unlike the other games that are created by Hiroyuki Kobayashi such as “Devil May Cry” and “Resident Evil”, “Sengoku BASARA” uses an approaching by anime style animations for its visual which explain the differences between the opening-ending story scenes and the gameplay cutscenes. But as their growth for years past they started to use more 3D graphic visual in their next series with a better realism-texture touch in “Sengoku BASARA: Samurai Kings” (川崎 et al., 2010).



Figure 11. “Sengoku BASARA” 3 published in 2010 Source: Gematsu.com

Until they adding anime visual again in “Sengoku BASARA” 4 and “Sengoku BASARA” 4: Sumeragi by using the same animation style as their TV animation series as it become a signature animation style to the game.

## CONCLUSION

From the analysis, it was found that the character design in “Sengoku BASARA” is the source with the greatest impact especially on female players, proving that character design plays the most important role in attracting the attention of its players. Starting from that, players who have chosen their favourite warlord character will seek further information and learn about its original history. This findings confirms, with unique and interesting character designs as well as a good storyline that is easy enough to understand even for foreign player, “Sengoku BASARA” indirectly and unknowingly leads the players and the fans become interested and learn things about history despite the inaccuracy to the origin history fact. This study aims to analyze the influence of the video game "Sengoku BASARA" in making its players likes to learning history and making history a hobby and passion. The scientific implications of this finding, the author hopes that it can help game developers in Indonesia in creating a historical-based video game about the ancient history of the Indonesian Kingdom that as interesting as “Sengoku BASARA” to increase the interest of the Indonesian people in liking and learning their history with self-enjoyment. However, this study has limitations, such as the sample is limited to sources and observations in the scope of Indonesia and Japan, which

may not reflect conditions in other countries. In addition, this study only measures short-term impacts and has not explored long-term effects. For further research, it is recommended to expand sampling to other countries, especially the CAPCOM.USA fan base, and add a long-term study component to understand the impact of digital technology more deeply in a broader context.

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