

Comment:**Living the American Dream:
Playlist GTA in the Third World Country****Animesh Dhara***Abstract*

This research critically examines the nexus between video games, specifically the Grand Theft Auto (GTA) series, and the nuanced perceptions of the American Dream among teenagers in developing nations, primarily focusing on India. Situated within the broader exploration of the American Dream across academic disciplines, my qualitative research employs semi-structured interviews and online surveys. Targeting participants aged 13 to 22 with extensive GTA exposure, my purposive sampling strategy ensures diverse perspectives. Thematic analysis of game content, encompassing narratives, characters, and themes, serves as the methodological core. Adopting a case study approach, this study aims to investigate the influence of the GTA game series on teenagers from developing nations, particularly India, and how it shapes their perception of the American Dream.

Keywords

Grand Theft Auto, American Dream, identity formation, cultural perceptions

Introduction

The concept of the American Dream has been a topic of interest in numerous academic disciplines, including cultural studies, sociology, and anthropology. Scholars have argued that the American Dream is a complex and contested idea that reflects the aspirations and values of American society (Hochschild 1996). The American Dream is often associated with material prosperity, upward social mobility, and the pursuit of happiness. However, critics have also argued that the American Dream is an empty myth perpetuating social inequality and reinforcing capitalist ideologies (Krugman 2007). Video games, particularly open-world games like GTA (Grand Theft Auto), have been studied extensively in recent years to explore the relationship between video games and social behavior, cultural values, and identity formation (Yee 2006). Studies have shown that video games can have a significant impact on the perception of social norms, attitudes, and values (Ferguson 2015).

GTA (Grand Theft Auto) is a popular video game series produced by Rockstar Games (formerly Rockstar North) that has gained immense popularity around the world, particularly among teenagers. The game is set in a parody of American cities, allowing players to engage in a range of activities such as stealing cars, shooting, making gangs do illicit activities, going to clubs, dancing, and buying properties. It provides players with a virtual experience of the American Dream which for many teenagers from developing nations is an unattainable dream in reality. Furthermore, the first game of the series is set in a dystopian world where the 1933 Business Plot, a failed coup attempt to overthrow President FDR, succeeded, and a dictator is in power. The game's premise critiques and celebrates consumer culture and controversial mechanisms of postmodern global capitalism. The narrative of the GTA games is often dark and cynical. The American Dream depicted in the game is a pipe dream for many of the characters and the only way to succeed in this world is to break the law or exploit others. (Rockstar Games 1997, 1999, 2003, 2013; Rockstar North 2002, 2004)

This research aims to investigate the influence of Grand Theft Auto on teenagers from developing nations, particularly India. By examining how

these individuals perceive the American Dream, consumer culture, and postmodern global capitalism through the lens of video games, we aim to contribute valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on the intersection of digital media, cultural values, and societal perceptions.

Literature Review

The exploration of the American Dream has been a multifaceted journey shaped by the perspectives of various scholars and critics. In *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped the World*, Jim Cullen (2003) provides a historical lens, tracing the evolution of the American Dream and its profound impact on shaping societal ideals. Lendol Calder (1999), through *Financing the American Dream: A Cultural History of Consumer Credit*, delves into the intricate connections between consumerism and the American Dream, offering insights into how financial practices have influenced the pursuit of this national ideal. Furthermore, Mike Davis (1986), in *Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the US*, scrutinizes the nexus between politics and the economy, shedding light on how the American Dream can act as both an aspirational force and a constraint within the broader historical context. These scholars collectively contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the American Dream, examining its historical roots, economic underpinnings, and the political dynamics that have shaped its narrative over time. Their works offer a nuanced portrayal, unravelling the complexities inherent in the concept and enriching the literature on the American Dream.

Methodology

The proposed study uses a qualitative research design that employs semi-structured interviews and online surveys. The study involves teenagers of the age group 13 to 22 years who play GTA regularly or have extensively played the game in their childhood. The participants were recruited from schools, colleges, and gaming communities in urban and semi-urban areas in India. The survey link was distributed through various channels, and a predetermined response period was set. The participants were selected

through purposive sampling based on their age, gender, and socioeconomic status. The interviews had been conducted in the participants' preferred language and were recorded. The data is being transcribed and translated (where necessary). Ethical considerations were paramount, including informed consent, participant anonymity, and confidentiality. The collected data are analyzed using thematic analysis which actually involves analyzing the game content including the narratives, characters, and themes. Limitations, such as potential biases and sample representativeness, were acknowledged. Validation checks were implemented for data accuracy, and the results were presented comprehensively in a report, encompassing visual representations of quantitative data and key themes from qualitative responses. The research has adopted a case study approach to gain a more in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences with the game.

Playlist: GTA [Grand Theft Auto Universe]

To all Gamers and Game Enthusiasts,

This google form is sent out to know how do you feel about Playing Video Games and How GTA Universe has made an impact in your Childhood/Teenage life. Take a chance to express how you feel about your Gaming Journey.

"SO YOU GIVING ME A LECTURE?" ~GTA V



GTA [Grand Theft Auto Universe] to Gaming The American dream.

Questions Responses **46** Settings

G-Form Link- https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSej_LZ4zdnyDHDJGYYScqH_qf7WTpbM29YrzaxiF13RRMsMQ/viewform?usp=sf_llink

Figure 1: Introduction of the Google form sent to the participants as a part of the online survey.

What is the *American Dream* to a teenager from Third World Country, like India

The kind of responses we received through our interviews regarding the perception of the American Dream are vague as well as thought-provoking and genuine at the same time. Since the participants are chosen from varied academic streams and fields, the real meaning of the term *American Dream*

is unknown to the majority. For them, the “American Dream” is a “Dream Big;” “Live Big thing;” a “luxurious life, partying and having fun;” “freedom, equality and opportunity for every Americans;” or just a “shallow fancy pit where you can follow materialism blindly.”

Even GTA V has an achievement named the American Dream that the player can unlock after buying an Apartment and Garage from Dynasty 8 and buying an Insured Vehicle at Los Santos Customs while playing the game.

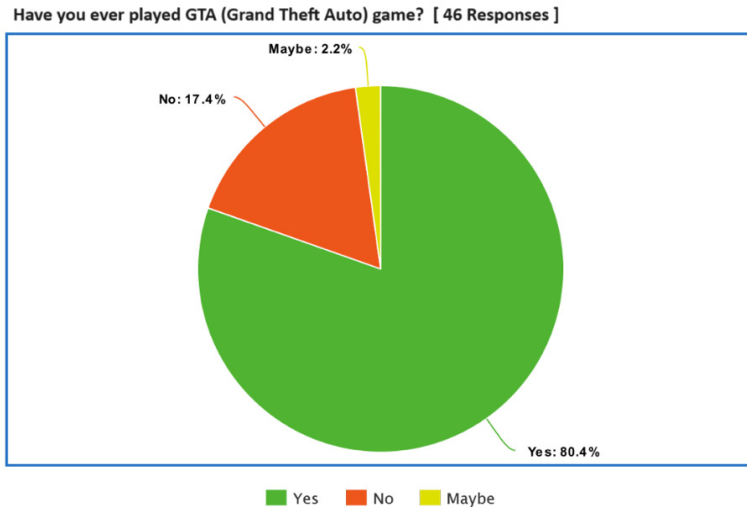


Figure 2: Pie chart depicting the percentage of the participants who have played the GTA game.

Grand Theft Auto (GTA) and American Society

Friend Request is the very first mission in Grand Theft Auto: V. The mission was assigned to the protagonist Michael De Santa by Lester Crest, where Michael De Santa comments, “Hey, I believe this country can still make interesting movies. There’s no better way to define American life than a two-hours plot in which the hero looks good and defeats evil” (Rockstar Games 2013).

In the Grand Theft Auto universe, the majority of the locations used in the games are based on cities and states found in the real-life USA, with the country logically serving as the game series' main setting. Liberty City is based on New York City, Vice City is based on the city of Miami, and San Andreas is based on San Francisco. Also, the names of the cities used are inspired by real-life American cities, like, Los Santos (Los Angeles), San Fierro (San Francisco) and Las Venturas (Las Vegas).

When the question: “Do you think GTA Universe is loosely based on American Society and American Life?” was asked to the participants of our survey, the majority of the Indian teenage gamers answered either “yes” or “somewhat.” One of our participants has written:

I do think that the GTA Universe is largely based on the American Dream, presenting an often-neglected picture of the fallacy of such dreams in the post-modern era. I view it as a not-so-subtle critique of the American Society wherein we witness the mirror American criminal underworld operate explicitly through the gameplay, especially with the protagonist who we see slowly descend into this criminal scene till he reaches the apex of the crime world by the end of the gameplay. It is important to note that this descend is set into play because of the socio-economic pressures and detrimental living conditions under the American society which remains veiled from focus but is highlighted throughout the games with the intrinsic storytelling, especially in the lowest rungs which are populated mostly by non-white immigrants. Hence, the games can be read as the critique of the American society and a mock-satire of the fallacious American Dream that still attracts second/third-world immigrants in hopes of a better life, only to be disappointed after arriving in the USA.

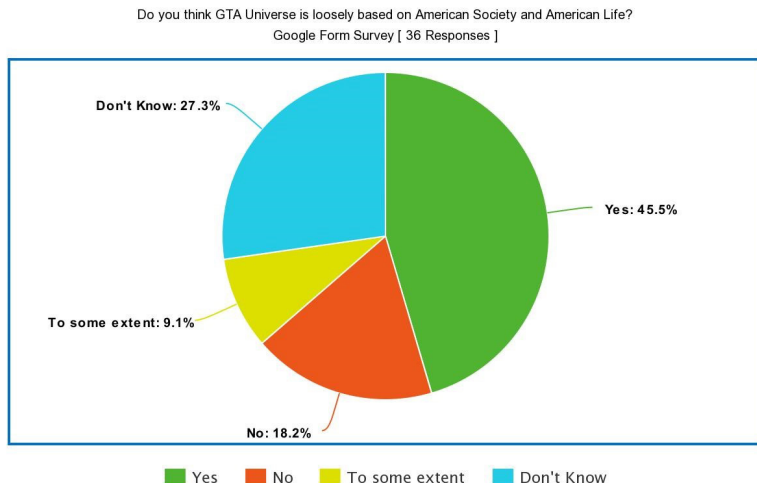


Figure 3: Pie chart representing the data based on 36 participants’ responses to the question: “Do you think GTA Universe is loosely based on American Society and American Life?” According to the pie chart, 45.5% of participants have responded yes to this question.

Grand Theft Auto (GTA) as a Parody or a Serious Satire on American Society

The Grand Theft Auto (GTA) franchise can be seen as a combination of mimicry, parody, and serious satire of American society and lifestyle. On one hand, the game’s developers have taken inspiration from real-life American cities, locations, and events, and recreated them in the game world. This can be seen as a form of mimicry or a copy of real-life American society. On the other hand, the game’s portrayal of violence, crime, and social issues is often done in a satirical and humorous way. This can be seen as a form of parody, or a funny imitation, of American society and its values. At the same time, the game’s satire is often serious and thought-provoking. It often comments on real-world issues such as politics, economics, and social justice.

From the participants supporting the argument that GTA game series is a parody of American Society, the responses given by them are:

Yes, I think Grand Theft Auto (GTA) franchise/universe is based on American society and American Life. First of all the map is based on real places in America, such as New York City, Miami, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas. American society is diverse and complex, composed of people from various racial, ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds, which is well represented in these games. From skyscrapers to people living on the streets, we can find them all in this game. The game's portrayal of violence, crime, and social issues such as poverty, racism, and corruption, can be seen on various aspects of American society, out of which gun violence is the most common. Other factors such as the availability of weapons and drugs are also a reference to the American Society and American Life.

And:

The whole concept of the game is based on making fun of its barbaric or rather unruly side. The racist comments, drug dealing, gang wars, murders and armed robberies, etc are involved in this game mocking the major prevailing problems currently America is facing and is actually infamous for. This is why the whole game series can be seen as a form of serious satire, or a critical commentary on American society and its values.

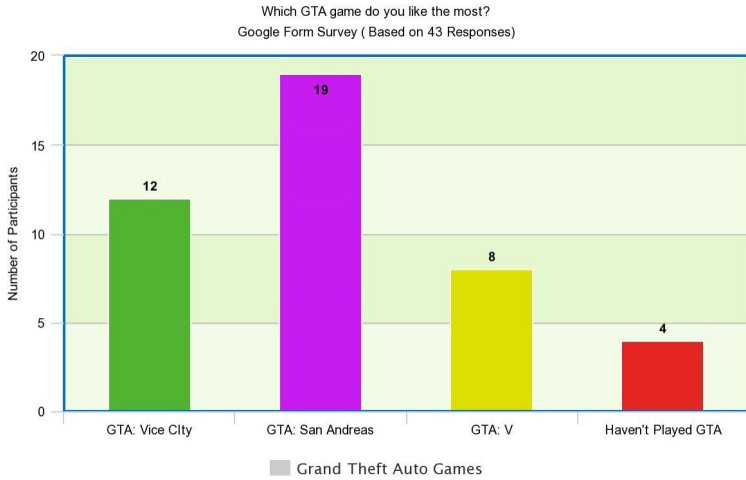


Figure 4: Bar graph representing the data on the number of participants who have played the different GTA games. GTA: San Andreas tops the chart with 19 out of 43 votes.

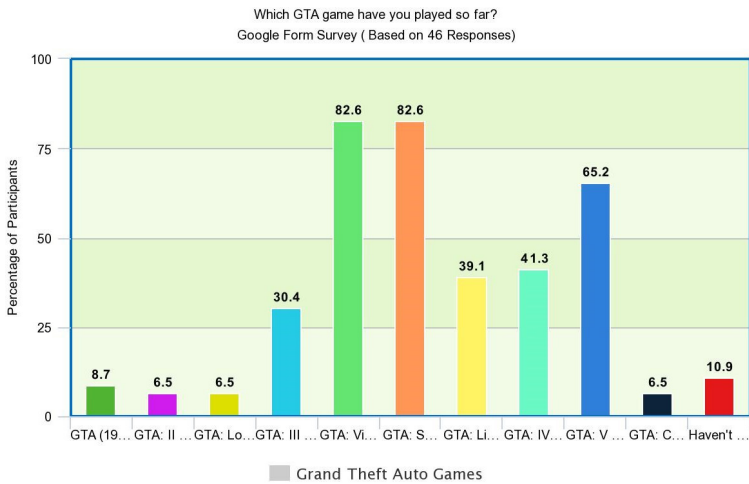


Figure 5: The bar graph shows the data about the popularity of each GTA game they played so far. The red bar depicts 10.9% of the 46 participants who haven't played any GTA games.

Conclusion

The study was conducted to find out the influence of Grand Theft Auto video game series on teenagers from developing nations and their perceptions of the American dream, consumer culture, and postmodern entertainment dynamics in video games. From the collected data set, we can infer that 80.4 percents of the teenage gamers from India (who did participate in our survey and interview sessions) have played GTA in their lifetime. From the long list of GTA game series, GTA: Vice City and GTA: San Andreas top the popularity chart with a whopping 82.6 percents, followed by GTA: V with 65.2 percents. These numbers show the popularity of the Grand Theft Auto game series in India. Since a large number of teenage population is invested in the Grand Theft Auto game series, this automatically demands an in-depth study of the game series, its narratives, themes, game mechanics and their influence on the budding teenage gamers.

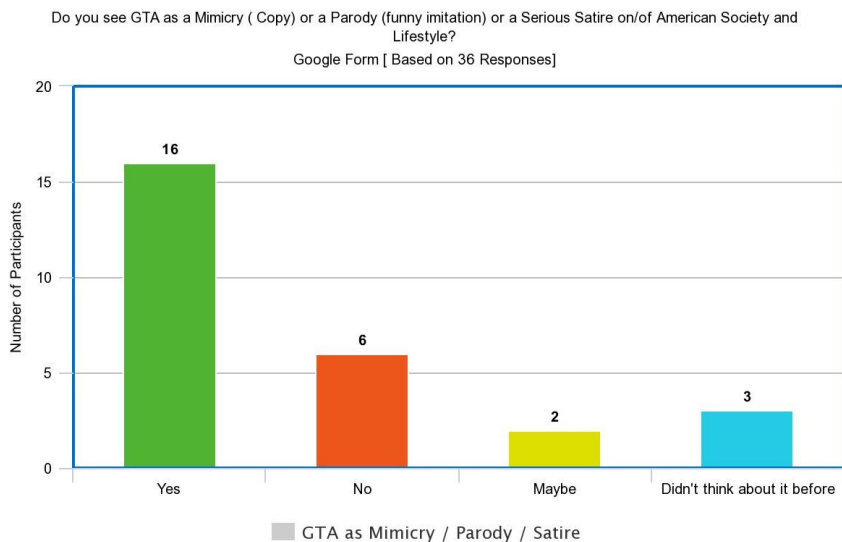


Figure 6: Bar graph representing the number of participants who have perceived GTA as a Mimicry–Parody–Serious Satire on American society and lifestyle and who have not. The responses of a few participants with ‘Maybe’ and ‘Didn’t think about it before’ are also in the bar graph.

The collected responses are sorted on the basis of a “yes or no” binary segregation. The majority of the participants have supported their responses with detailed answers and logic. A few of the participants have chosen not to elaborate on their answers or have opted for “I am not sure” option. Those answers have not been taken into consideration for supporting or defying any arguments. The study delves into the multifaceted nature of the GTA franchise as a mimicry, parody, and serious satire of American society. Participants reflected on the game’s portrayal of violence, crime, and social issues, recognizing elements of mimicry in the recreation of real-life American cities and events. The humour and satire infused into the game’s narrative, despite its serious commentary on issues like racism, and corruption, showcased the developers’ intent to provide entertainment and reflection. The participants echoed the sentiment that GTA is a form of serious satire, offering a critical commentary on the darker aspects of American society. The study’s findings provide a detailed insight into the ways in which a virtual game can shape the worldview and aspirations of teenagers from a third-world country, like India.

Additionally, the research also explores the entertainment dynamics of the game and the role of these dynamics in shaping the participants’ experiences with the game. Overall, the study aims to contribute to understanding the relationship between media consumption, childhood development, self-concept, and identity formation.

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Therefore, I, (author) declare that I hold the rights to the images used in this case study report.

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