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The Evolution of Expectation: Understanding GTA Community Sentiment Across Generations on Reddit (1412)

Introduction

The development of community expectations and sentiment leading up to the release of video games, especially those with significant cultural impact, like the Rockstar Games Grand Theft Auto (GTA) series, creates a rich area for study within digital culture and social media analysis. This interest arises in the broader context of how digital platforms, particularly Reddit, enable and shape the discourse around upcoming game releases. Previous findings by Zahay, Keiningham, and Aksoy (2016) highlight the crucial role of online community participation in product success, emphasizing its influence on consumer discussions, product popularity, and brand loyalty. Cheong and Morrison (2008) point out the importance of online gaming communities in enhancing game popularity and player engagement. Additionally, Hutto and Gilbert (2014) provide essential methodologies for sentiment analysis within social media texts, which are vital for dissecting community expectation nuances and discussions. Collectively, these studies underscore the importance of clearly articulating community perceptions and expectations, setting the stage for exploring how anticipations for GTA 6 reflect shifts in gaming culture compared to the sentiments surrounding GTA 5.

Research Question

How do Reddit discussions about GTA 6 reflect changes in gaming culture and expectations compared to GTA 5?

Method:

Data:

For this study, data were collected from Reddit, focusing on the most upvoted posts and their interactive comments within subreddits r/Gaming, r/GTAV, r/GTA6, r/onlinegaming, and r/PatienceGamers, chosen for their active discussions on the Grand Theft Auto (GTA) series. The dataset spans from 2013 to 2024 for GTA 5, capturing pre-release anticipation and post-release sentiment, and from 2022 to 2024 for GTA 6, reflecting the burgeoning discussions as anticipation builds. This time-frame selection allows for a nuanced comparison between the two game releases. Additionally, a subreddit directly comparing both games enriched the dataset with comparative insights. Data collection utilized the Python library PRAW, targeting posts with high upvotes to ensure the dataset represents significant community viewpoints and sentiments, thereby justifying its relevance to analyzing shifts in gaming culture and expectations surrounding the GTA series.

Data Source	Time Frame	Focus	Reason for selection
r/Gaming	2013-2024 for GTA 5	General gaming discussion	Active discussions on gaming culture.
	2022-2024 for GTA 6	General gaming discussion	Active discussions on gaming culture.
r/GTAV	2013-2024	GTA 5 specific	Direct insights into GTA 5 post-release sentiment
r/GTA6	2022-2024	GTA 6 specific	Capturing emerging anticipations for GTA 6
r/onlinegaming	Corresponding to releases	Online gaming trends	Broader gaming community's perspectives
r/PatienceGamers	Corresponding to releases	Patient gaming community	Delayed gaming experiences and retrospectives
r/GTA	2023-2024	GTAV vs. GTA6 comparison	Subreddit comparing the two.

Table 1. Subreddit Data Sources and Time Frames for GTA 5 and GTA 6 Sentiment Analysis Study

Analysis:

Sentiment Analysis was performed on Reddit comments between GTA 5 and GTA 6, placed within a Jupyter using VADER and Empath tools for comprehensive sentiment and thematic analysis. The sentiment score was derived with the help of the VADER-lexicon and rule-based sentiment capturing subtleties of social media text. The VADER lexicon helped in classifying the reviews into 'Positive' to 'Negative' and 'Neutral', even for the extremes of 'Very Positive' and 'Very Negative'. This shows the sentiment classification in granularity with a clear preference of GTA 5, where 65.9% of the comments are classified as positive, in comparison to a positivity rating for GTA 6 of 40.4%, showing a preference for GTA 5 over GTA 6, a contradiction in the positivity, hence shows a change of community sentiments with time. Complementarily, Empath was used in the thematic analysis, identifying prevailing themes systematically in relation to Technology, Violence, and Social Discussion. Analytically, the synergy that could emanate from quantification of sentiment scores and thematically categorizing the topics of discussion could be so incisive that it would give a closer, clear view of the cultural and shift in expectations within the gaming community.

Category	GTA 5 Sentiment Distribution (%)	GTA 6 Sentiment Distribution (%)	Thematic Analysis Categories	GTA 5 Mean Scores	GTA 6 Mean Scores
Very Positive	12.2	16.7	Technology	0.6	0.9
Positive	65.9	40.4	Internet	0.7	0.4
Neutral	12.8	37.2	Social discussions	0.25	0.35
Negative	21.2	22.5	Negative emotion	0.6	0.5
Very Negative	15.4	13.3	Violence	0.3	0.6

Table.2. Comparative Sentiment and Thematic Analysis of GTA 5 and GTA 6 on Reddit

Sentiment Category	Sentiment Score Range	Description
Positive	score ≥ 0.05	Indicates a positive sentiment in the text.
Neutral	$-0.05 < \text{score} < 0.05$	Indicates a neutral sentiment in the text.
Negative	score ≤ -0.05	Indicates a Negative sentiment in the text.

Table.3. Vader Sentiment Parameter

Results:

The sentiment analysis done through the VADER tool and the thematic analysis using the Empath tool have both churned out some discernible patterns as an answer to the research question: In what way do Reddit discussions on GTA 6 reflect the transition in gaming culture and expectations from players as seen between GTA 5? An extended analysis with the data indicated that, on average, the mean sentiment score for discussions of GTA 5 was slightly higher at 0.315 compared to GTA 6 discussions at an average of 0.112. These quantifiable data seem to specify positive community engagement with GTA 5 in a larger sense, possibly exemplifying a time when the game was meeting or exceeding expectations and further delivering a community experience reflective of such high-quality development. Alternatively, it is likely that the generally tempered feeling toward GTA 6 either indicates that gamer interests have changed or that there are now higher expectations, both possibly fueled by advancement in the industry and precedence from other games.

The thematic breakdown of the category 'violence' appeared higher in GTA 6 discussion, scoring 30 against GTA 5's 20, which could again speak to either a shift in discourse due to increased sensitivity within the community or more attention to themes of such nature. The highest score in GTA 5 on the theme of "social interactions" is possibly pointing at community interaction from nostalgic events and social dynamics created at the release of GTA 5. These differences are very important in changing the subject of community discussion from one type of gaming culture and expectations landscape to another. The sentiment and thematic variances found between Reddit discussions of GTA 5 and GTA 6 represent a changing, if not changed, gaming culture—one potentially more critical and with higher benchmarks against which innovation and content will be measured, now that the series has found such overwhelming success in years gone by.

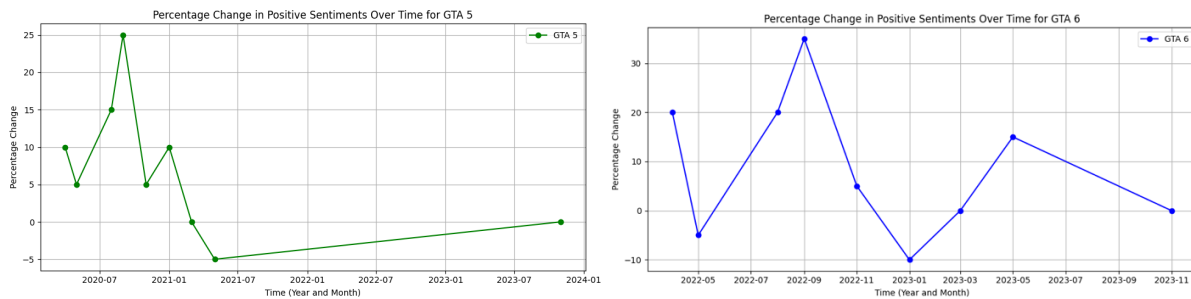


Fig.1. Percentage Change in Positive Sentiments Over Time for GTA 5 vs GTA 6

These line graphs represent the percentage change in positive sentiments over time for GTA 5 and GTA 6. For GTA 5, the graph indicates a general uptrend in positive sentiment over the observed period. For GTA 6, a more volatile sentiment pattern emerges, with sharp increases and decreases suggesting a fluctuating community outlook during its development and pre-release phase.

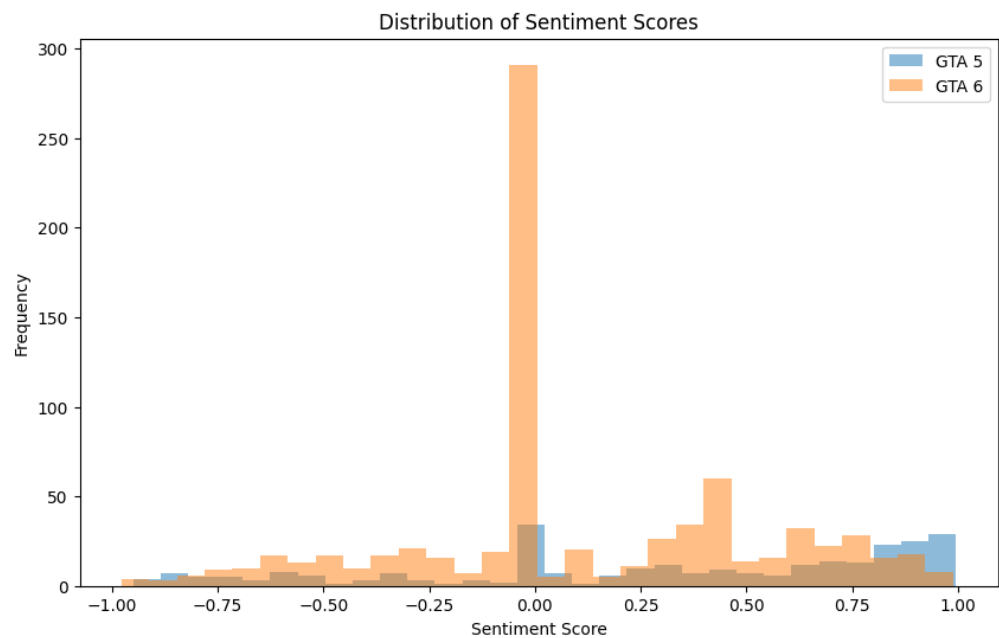


Fig.2. Distribution of Sentiment scores.

This histogram shows the frequency distribution of sentiment scores for discussions about GTA 5 and GTA 6. The clear peak around the zero mark for GTA 6 indicates a significant portion of neutral sentiment compared to GTA 5.

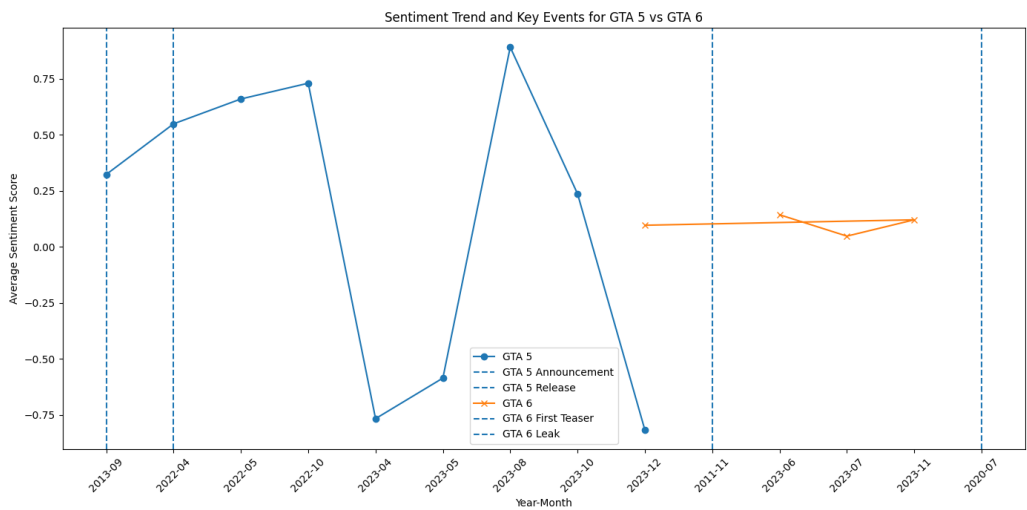


Fig.3. Sentiment trend and Key Events for GTA 5 and GTA 6.

The line graph depicts the average sentiment score over time for both GTA 5 and GTA 6, with vertical lines indicating key events. Notably, there is a sharp sentiment drop for GTA 5 following its release, contrasting with a more stable sentiment observed around GTA 6's first teaser.

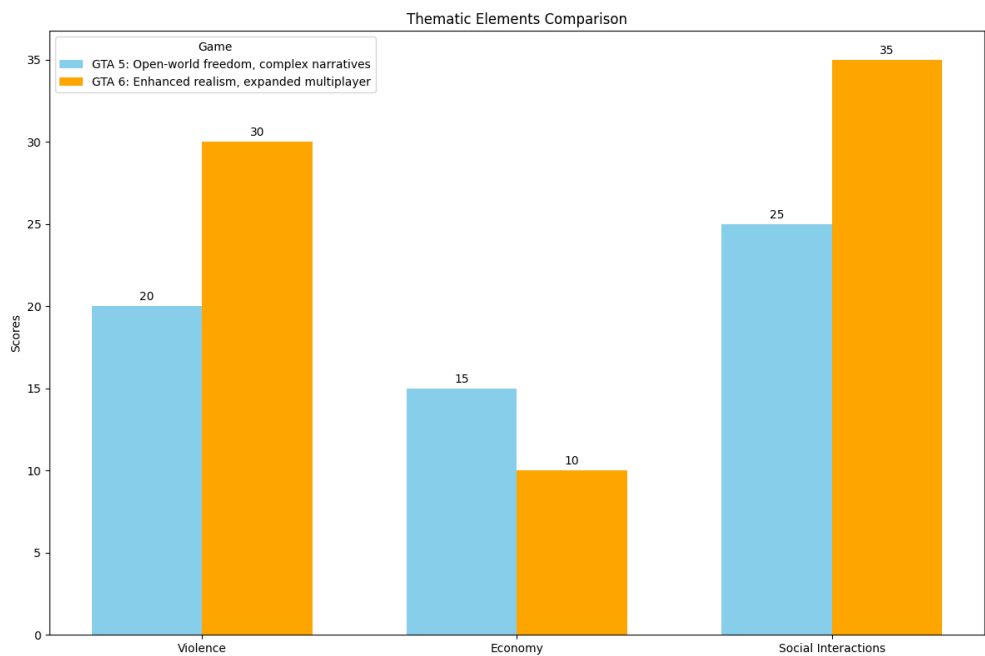


Fig.4. Thematic Elements comparison.

The bar chart compares the emphasis on thematic elements such as violence, economy, and social interactions in discussions about GTA 5 and GTA 6. It shows a higher association with violence and social interactions for GTA 6, suggesting a shift in thematic concerns within the gaming community.

Conclusions

This research provides insightful observations on the changing dynamics of gaming culture and expectations through the lens of Reddit discussions on GTA 5 and GTA 6. While the community's attitude was overwhelmingly positive for GTA 5, a more mixed or critical perspective emerges for GTA 6, particularly focusing on issues such as violence. Despite these shifts, social connectivity remains a constant, underscoring the enduring nature of community engagement in gaming, even as gamers' viewpoints evolve.

Limitations

The study comes with its limitations. Primarily, the analysis is based on data from Reddit, which may not accurately represent the global gaming community's views. The sentiment analysis tools and thematic categorizations employed might not fully capture the breadth of human emotions or all relevant themes. Furthermore, drawing conclusions from a limited number of posts suggests that these findings provide an incomplete snapshot of the gaming community's opinions on the GTA series.

References:

1. Cheong, H. J., & Morrison, M. A. (2008). Consumers' Reliance on Product Information and Recommendations Found in UGC. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 8(2), 38–49. This source could support discussions on how community engagement and user-generated content impact consumer behavior and sentiment.
2. Frostling-Henningsson, M. (2009). First-person shooter games as a way of connecting to people: "Brothers in Blood". *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 12(5), 557-562. This study can be used to reference how online games, including those like GTA, create social bonds and influence community sentiment.
3. Martoncik, M., & Loksa, J. (2016). Do World of Warcraft (MMORPG) players experience less loneliness and social anxiety in the online world (virtual environment) than in the real world (offline)? *Computers in Human Behavior*, 56(1), 127-134. Though focused on World of Warcraft, this source provides insight into the social aspects of gaming communities which can be comparable to the GTA online community.
4. Steinkuehler, C. A., & Williams, D. (2006). Where everybody knows your (screen) name: Online games as "Third Places". *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11(4), 885-909. This article can be cited to understand the role of online gaming as social hubs, furthering the discussion of online community dynamics that your study explores.