

Deciphering Video Game Ban Policies in the Middle East: API and Sentiment Analysis Unveil Community-Government Dynamics

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Abstract:

This research delves into the intricate relationship between Middle Eastern communities and government policies on video game bans, aiming to understand how governments navigate the delicate balance between preserving cultural values and accommodating the influence of the global gaming industry. The investigation employs a comprehensive approach, utilizing Sentiment Analysis to evaluate comments sourced from prominent online platforms such as YouTube and Reddit. The analysis encompasses a wide range of perspectives, including critical assessments of banned games, public sentiments, and responses to articles or announcements related to video game bans. The research emphasizes its contemporary significance, detailing the meticulous data collection process and the applied methodology for Sentiment Analysis. The objective findings obtained through this research endeavor will serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, game developers, and cultural critics, fostering a deeper understanding of the dynamics between government policies, community sentiments, and the gaming industry. The ultimate goal is to contribute to the creation of a gaming environment that harmonizes freedom of expression with respect for cultural values, benefiting both creators and consumers of video games.

Keywords: Video game bans, Middle East, government policies, sentiment analysis, religious values, global gaming industry

Research Background and Objectives

This thesis delves into the regulation and prohibition of video games in the Middle East, exploring the reasons, socio-cultural implications, and evolving narratives behind these practices. The study focuses on the intersection of Sharia law and the global digital entertainment landscape, where religious principles guide the scrutiny and censorship of video game content (Hasan, 2023; Perfect, 2019).

The significance of the research lies in the potential dangers of censorship, including stifling creativity, limiting diverse perspectives, and constraining individual freedoms (Regoli, 2020).

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Despite intending to protect societal morals, excessive control may hinder the development of a thriving gaming culture and restrict access to diverse narratives.

Recognizing video games as tools for empathy and spreading knowledge, the study emphasizes their role in simulating historical events, cultural experiences, and societal challenges (Wulansari et al., 2020). Censorship or prohibition risks depriving users of valuable opportunities to enhance their worldview, limiting the educational potential of games.

The evolving role of video games as repositories of knowledge and platforms for cultural exchange underscores the need to critically analyze the impact of censorship in the Middle East. This requires a reevaluation of how regulatory practices intersect with cultural values, influencing content accessibility and shaping broader societal perceptions of gaming as a medium for expression and learning.

Methodology

The research methodology employs sentiment analysis to collect data from social media platforms like YouTube and Reddit, specifically focusing on user comments discussing banned video games within the gaming community. This approach aims to gather qualitative insights into players' and observers' attitudes, emotions, and opinions while respecting privacy and avoiding potential harm. By leveraging sentiment analysis, the study explores subjective experiences and perceptions related to banned video games, sidestepping ethical concerns associated with direct observation of potentially harmful activities.

To implement sentiment analysis, the research utilizes application programming interfaces (APIs) from YouTube and Reddit. Initially, API keys are acquired from both platforms, serving as authentication credentials for accessing their data.

1. Acquire API keys:

a. YouTube: Obtain API key by creating a project on the Google Developers Console, enabling the YouTube Data API, and generating the key for accessing comments from relevant videos.

b. Reddit: Acquire API key by creating a Reddit app through the Reddit Developer Portal, registering the app, and obtaining the client ID and client secret for accessing comments from relevant threads or subreddits.

2. Implement Python coding:

a. Implement Python coding, typically using libraries such as google-api-python-client for YouTube and praw for Reddit, within the environment, Google Colab.

b. Develop and execute code to extract comments and associated metadata (timestamps, usernames, text content) from specified YouTube videos and Reddit threads.

3. Create data visualization:

Create a bar chart as a data visualization tool to illustrate the sentiment distribution derived from the sentiment analysis. This step aims to provide a clear and concise representation of the overall sentiments expressed in the gaming community regarding banned video games.

Results and Discussion

The sentiment analysis of video game discussions revealed distinct patterns in public reactions to bans across genres. Positive sentiments predominated in the action-adventure and RPG genres, indicating agreement with bans, while the simulation genre saw negative sentiments, suggesting dissent. Discussions on platforms like Reddit and YouTube primarily focused on LGBTQ+ content bans, emphasizing societal interest in diverse representations in gaming.

Key trends highlighted the significance of action-adventure and RPG genres in public discourse on video game bans. Limited data on violence, sexual content, or nudity bans suggested these aspects may not be as salient in public discourse or occur in different online spaces.

Aligned with the hypothesis, findings indicated a divergence between official regulatory measures and societal attitudes, challenging the government's stance. However, limitations, including data source constraints, fragmented discussions, lack of in-depth analyses, and a geographical focus on Saudi Arabia and the UAE, call for caution in interpreting the results. Future research should explore perspectives in other GCC countries for a more comprehensive understanding of regional dynamics in gaming regulations and public reactions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the sentiment analysis on discussions about banned video games reveals intricate connections between regulatory actions, public attitudes, and online discourse. Different video game genres, particularly action-adventure and RPGs, exhibit distinct sentiment patterns. While there is noteworthy sentiment alignment between government decisions and public opinions on LGBTQ+ content bans, disagreement is evident in bans related to violence, sexual content, or nudity. The complexity of the relationship between regulatory actions and public sentiments challenges the clarity of government communication, raising concerns about transparency and accountability. The study underscores the importance of understanding specific elements within popular gaming genres for policymakers to navigate the balance between government decisions and public opinions when crafting gaming regulations. Future research avenues include exploring how local gaming industries handle regulatory constraints, studying the impact of educational interventions on digital literacy, and conducting cross-cultural studies on artistic freedom in the gaming industry. These insights can guide policymakers in adapting to the evolving landscape of digital entertainment. The case emphasizes the necessity for open dialogue between the government and constituents, promoting transparency for informed and inclusive decision-making.

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