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Mainstreaming video games: A cultural response

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Abstract

This paper examines the integration of video games into Dhaka's cultural landscape in Bangladesh, considering the impact of sociocultural and economic factors. Through ethnographic research and the application of theoretical frameworks such as the theory of attainment, this study investigates the factors contributing to the popularity of video games in Dhaka. The research explores how vocational expectations in education and a focus on specific career outcomes shape the cultural narrative surrounding video games. Video games serve as sources of entertainment and social validation, filling the void created by limited recreational spaces and changing social norms. The commercial aspect of video games also facilitates peer bonding and social interaction, aligning with the prevailing neoliberal ethos in Dhaka's society. The theory of attainment helps explain the motivations underlying the widespread adoption of video games, linking it to the pursuit of predefined objectives within the neoliberal paradigm. As Dhaka undergoes neoliberal transformations, video games have become central to its cultural landscape, functioning as coping mechanisms and sources of identity and connectivity in the face of limited leisure spaces and changing social configurations. This article seeks to understand the popularity of video games in Dhaka by exploring the interplay of culture, technology, and socioeconomic factors. It presents video games as both reactions to and reflections of the city's evolving environment, shedding light on the dynamics shaping leisure practices in urban Bangladesh. This research can contribute to further investigations and studies on online gaming within the sociocultural context of Bangladesh.

1. Introduction

Video game has always been considered as a niche genre in Bangladesh. Prior to the emergence of smart devices, the accessibility of gaming was predominantly restricted to individuals of higher socioeconomic status who possessed the financial means to acquire game consoles and personal computers. However, a shift has occurred with the increasing affordability of smartphones and the widespread accessibility of internet. Consequently, video games have succeeded in attaining widespread accessibility and popularity among the youth regardless of their socio-economic circumstances.

It is worth noting that the gaming sector in Bangladesh is still nascent, as it has not garnered the same level of acceptance as other forms of entertainment such as music or movies. However, it is evident that the gaming sector is experiencing a surge in popularity, with an increasing number of individuals actively participating in video game related activities. The present study seeks to investigate the reasons behind the widespread popularity of mobile gaming among the younger demographic in Bangladesh along with its consequential cultural responses.

2. Literature Review

In this research our aim is to explore the nuances of interaction which has been brough forward by the advent of video game proliferation in our culture. In anthropological discourse, the dichotomy between face-to-face and digitally mediated interactions reveals a complex interplay influenced by cultural dynamics (Miller & Sinanan, 2014). Rejecting static authenticity, scholars like Miller and Sinanan (2014) present humanity as an ongoing project constrained by resources, a concept encapsulated in the Theory of Attainment. This perspective redefines technological progress as a means to achieve goals rather than a threat, challenging our limited understanding of humanity. Embracing a holistic definition that spans past and future, technological advancements actualize aspects of humanity previously inaccessible, exemplified by the transformative impact of inventions like horses, automobiles, and airplanes on human mobility. With the advent of advanced transportation modes enabling rapid travel (Miller, Nicolescu, Sinanan, Costa, & Haynes, 2016) it becomes evident that such technological strides do not Formulated as a top-down conceptualization, it challenges conventional reactions to new media technology studies, steering away from empirical generalizations and emphasizing a nuanced understanding of the term "human."

New media, initially perceived as an intrusive mediation in daily life (Miller & Sinanan, 2014) challenges the notion of technology as an external force in human interactions. Contrary to the traditional view of memory as an individualized cognitive function, Dijck (2007) posits it as a cultural norm and shared experience. Miller and Horst (2012) assert that humans aren't becoming more mediated; rather, mediation itself is evolving. Miller and Sinanan advocate for a perspective that recognizes new technologies as transformative shifts in awareness and fundamental aspects of life, beyond a mere alteration in essential humanity. This underscores the foundational premise that mediation is inherent to the human condition.

Achievement, distinct from attainment, denotes the realization of what is considered accomplishment—an inherent state taken for granted in defining human identity. The capacity to write, once an accomplishment, is now a prerequisite, akin to skills like typing, driving, or using a telephone, reflecting contemporary indicators of attainment. A Theory of Attainment perceives new technology not as disrupting a past ideal state but as revealing latent capabilities in the human condition. Cultural application of technology arises from societal needs rather than a gadget's invention, with future technology inspiring unattained goals. This perspective presents humanity as dynamically evolving, neither inherently conservative nor fully realized in a utopian future. The omnipresence of smartphones in Bangladesh illustrates how norms swiftly evolve, turning once-luxurious items into societal standards. Applying the theory of attainment to the realm of video games offers insight into their growing acceptance as a medium, influencing lives without diminishing or enhancing our essential humanity. The discourse on video games, a pivotal aspect of technological evolution within the Theory of Attainment, has drawn considerable attention for its profound impact on human behaviour and cognitive functions.

Examining key theoretical frameworks and empirical studies, this literature review explores the intricate relationship between video games and individual actions, dispositions, cognitive skills, and social behaviors. Bacon (2011) assertion of the video game industry as the fastest expanding media form underscores the need for a comprehensive investigation into the profound influence of video games on modern society, seamlessly connecting the evolving landscape of technological attainment with its implications on human behavior and cognition. Within the context of technological attainment, the influential work of Anderson and Bushman (2001) enriches the ongoing discourse on video game effects. Their studies offer robust evidence linking television violence to heightened aggression, antisocial conduct, and addictive tendencies, emphasizing the imperative for a nuanced comprehension of the potential consequences of video game engagement. This aligns impeccably with the Theory of Attainment, exploring the intricate dynamics between technology and human behavior, urging a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted impact of video games on individuals and society.

Marone highlights video games as complex adaptive systems, emphasizing their multifaceted nature and potential to foster vital life skills like teamwork and socialization (Marone, 2016). Granic, Lobel, and Engels

(2014) research adds a cognitive dimension, demonstrating enhanced attention, visual processing, and mental rotation abilities in participants engaged with shooter video games (Granic et al., 2014). Complementarily, Kowert, Griffiths, and Oldmeadow (2012) explores the intricate links between online video game participation and social competence, scrutinizing effects on social objectives and skills (Kowert et al., 2012). Collectively, these perspectives contribute to a nuanced understanding of video games' varied impacts on human behavior and cognition, aligned with the overarching framework of technological attainment.

In the unfolding narrative of technological attainment, the rapid ascent of online gaming has provoked sweeping generalizations, shaping a prevalent but often exaggerated and unfavorable portrayal of its consequences (Kowert et al., 2012; Williams, Yee, & Caplan, 2008). This anthropological exploration, guided by Muriel and Crawford (2018) and Paul (2018) delves into the textured landscapes of video game culture, navigating the currents of meritocracy and immersing us in the turbulent seas of virtual violence. Against the backdrop of prevailing stereotypes, which depict online gamers through traits such as competitiveness, addiction, social isolation, obsession, immaturity, and youthfulness, this odyssey prompts reflection on the intricate cultural responses of contemporary society and the evolving role of video games within it.

Jenkins (2006) provides a comprehensive view of video games' cultural significance, situating them in the broader context of convergence culture—a shift where new and old media intersect and influence each other. Concurrently, Taylor (2006) ethnographic study delves into the social and cultural dynamics of online gaming cultures, emphasizing the significance of virtual worlds in negotiating and developing player identities. Additionally, Dutton (2010) comprehensive overview of internet studies explores the cultural, social, and political implications of the internet and its associated technologies. These perspectives contribute to the nuanced understanding of video games within the evolving landscape of technological attainment.

Collectively, the amalgamation of these articles offers a diverse spectrum of perspectives regarding the cultural significance of video games. These viewpoints underscore the complex positioning of video games within broader cultural, social, and economic systems. They illuminate the reciprocal influence between video games and overarching societal trends and technological shifts, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted role video games play within the broader context of cultural evolution and technological attainment.

Anderson and Dill (2000) unveil a positive correlation between real-life engagement in violent video games and the manifestation of real-world aggression and delinquency. Intriguingly, this correlation finds resonance among individuals already inclined toward aggression and within the male demographic. A twist in the tale comes in the form of a negative correlation between academic achievement and the time spent engaged in video game adventures. To top it off, they take us into the controlled environment of the laboratory, demonstrating how exposure to graphically violent video games can kindle the flames of aggressive thoughts and behaviors. Some researchers such as Ng and Wiemer-Hastings focus on the addictive elements of gaming and try to vilify the industry as a whole. Researchers often put out papers marking the addictive nature of video games (Ng & Wiemer-Hastings, 2005).

The phenomenon of parents developing a high reliance on digital media has been observed in various studies. It has been noted that parents may struggle with effectively managing their usage of digital media due to the increasing complexity and challenges associated with technological advancements. This can result in difficulties adapting to the ever-evolving digital landscape (Livingstone, Mascheroni, Dreler, Chaudron, & Lagae, 2015). The influence of family context on children's media habits has been a subject of investigation among researchers. It has been observed that children's media consumption patterns often develop and are shaped within the family environment (Vandewater, 2013).

3. Methodology

In this research, we have focused on the question— whether the mainstreaming of video games is a cultural response in our designated area. From a methodological standpoint, the research undertaken in this study is firmly rooted in the framework of Actor-Network Theory (ANT), aligning with the seminal works of Latour (2005) and Law (1999). This inquiry places a particular emphasis on the novel dimensions of digital ethnography, as delineated by Hine (2010) and its intricate interplay with more conventional research methodologies, as elucidated by Thornham (2011).

The overarching aim of this methodological approach is to transcend the conventional focus on social agents or actors and their verbal discourses, instead venturing into the realm of their practices and procedures. Consequently, the interview protocol incorporated inquiries not only into the interviewees' habitual engagements, objectives, and affective states but also into their nuanced perspectives concerning various facets of the intricate landscape of video game culture.

To provide a robust foundation for our investigation, we drew upon data gleaned from ethnographic exploration into the domain of video game culture, spanning the period from January 2022 to December 2022. This research mosaic was meticulously crafted through an amalgamation of diverse research tools, including the deployment of formal semi-structured interviews, participant observations, informal conversational exchanges, a focused immersion within the online and offline realms of video game culture, and the innovative utilization of gameplay as a methodological instrument.

This research is also autoethnographic, both the researchers identify as 'avid gamers.' They have been gaming for more than 10 years, cumulatively. Thus, this research draws on the researcher's experience, observations and knowledge. However, an active decision was made to engage with video game culture more analytically during the length of the research. The researchers played video games regularly, they have kept research diaries— which have detailed documentations of the autoethnographic process.

In order to ensure a broad spectrum of perspectives from a diverse array of social actors, our research endeavours encompassed semi-structured interviews with 50 participants in the city of Dhaka across spectrums of age, income and gender. The interviews were conducted both face-to-face and, more commonly, through the virtual medium of Zoom, Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp. This diverse array of participants and contexts enriches the tapestry of our inquiry, rendering it a tapestry interwoven with multiple threads of cultural and geographic diversity. The participants have all been given a pseudonym for the purpose of the research.

4. Contextualizing Gaming in Bangladesh

Within the chronology of video games in Bangladesh, the researchers emphasize the firsthand experience of the rise of video games, underscoring the necessity of contextualization. This contextualization is crucial for understanding the socio-cultural and economic realities of Bangladesh, providing essential context for the research. The researchers' direct engagement with the evolution of video games in the local context adds depth to the ethnographic exploration, ensuring a nuanced understanding of the impact of technological advancements on recreational preferences and societal dynamics. This contextual grounding links the historical narrative of arcade gaming to the contemporary landscape of digital entertainment, contributing to a comprehensive examination of the evolving role of technology in Bangladeshi society.

During the late 1990s and early 2000s, Bangladesh witnessed a surge in arcade gaming, captivating the interest of the younger population in both urban and suburban areas. This phenomenon involved substantial investments of time and financial resources, with popular games like Cadillacs and Dinosaurs, Street Fighter 2, and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles gaining immense popularity. Cadillacs and Dinosaurs, locally known as Mustapha, became a significant cultural phenomenon, indicative of the widespread influence of arcade gaming during that era. This cultural shift in recreational preferences further underscores the evolving landscape of entertainment choices, linking it to the broader theme of technological attainment and its impact on societal dynamics.

The surge in arcade gaming during the late 1990s and early 2000s led to a notable attraction among children, compelling them to accumulate or appropriate funds for gameplay. The novelty of arcade machines fueled heightened enthusiasm, with children investing significant effort and resources, even playing truant during school hours. The completion of game levels conferred social status among peers. In response to growing restlessness and disruption caused by excessive arcade use, a nationwide prohibition was imposed by the governing body. This prohibition reflects the societal response to the changing dynamics of recreational preferences, marking a transition from arcade gaming to newer forms of entertainment.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, gaming consoles like Atari, Nintendo NES (Nintendo Entertainment System), SNES (Super Nintendo Entertainment System), and Sega Mega Drive were primarily accessible to the affluent, while the early 2000s saw the proliferation of pirated PC games in Bangladesh, particularly among the upper-middle class. The availability of cheap personal computers further expanded gaming accessibility. A significant majority relied on pirated game discs and crack files, obtained from shopping malls. These markets also facilitated the sale of gaming consoles, making gaming a niche genre. This historical overview contextualizes the evolving gaming landscape, linking the accessibility of gaming to socio-economic factors, and connecting it to the broader narrative of technological advancements in Bangladesh.

The surge in smartphone usage, identified as a recurring phenomenon in urban Dhaka, has transformed cultural gaming practices. Smartphones, recognized as ubiquitous appendages to humanity (Miller, 2021) have gained widespread acceptance globally due to their usability and dimensions (Ahmed, Mondal, & Parvez, 2017; Davey & Davey, 2014). In Dhaka, the increasing ubiquity of electronic devices and internet accessibility has led to a significant migration from traditional to smartphone usage, with statistics indicating a substantial rise in mobile phone subscribers and internet users (AMTOB, 2022). The GSMC's (Global System for Mobile Communications) projection that 62% of mobile users in Bangladesh will use smartphones by 2025 highlights the growing accessibility and affordability of smartphones, providing abundant access to mobile video games (Bhuiyan, 2021). This shift in technology aligns with the broader narrative of technological attainment, linking historical gaming trends to contemporary practices within the evolving socio-cultural landscape of Bangladesh.

Despite the enduring popularity of mobile games in an environment marked by societal resistance and government prohibitions, a cultural inclination opposing gaming as a hobby persists, fueled by parental antagonism (Karim, 2016). This sentiment has escalated to a governmental level, resulting in a nationwide prohibition on several mobile games, met with widespread approval from the non-gamer segment, who cite concerns over children's studies and addiction (Batmaz & Celik, 2021; Chowdhury, 2018; Ikhtear, 2019; Tech Observer, 2021). Law enforcement raids targeting a mobile gaming competition further underscore societal

apprehensions, leading to the arrest of approximately 100 individuals (The Daily Star, 2022). In this challenging environment, the enduring popularity of mobile games among a considerable number of individuals raises intriguing questions about the resilience and allure of these digital forms of entertainment within the socio-cultural landscape of Bangladesh. This resistance and governmental intervention add a layer of complexity to the evolving narrative of gaming practices and technological advancements in the region, linking historical attitudes towards gaming to contemporary challenges and perceptions.

In navigating the anthropological terrain of gaming practices in Bangladesh, our ethnographic journey unfolds against the backdrop of a dynamic socio-cultural landscape deeply influenced by historical technological shifts. From the zenith of arcade gaming in the late 1990s to the surge of smartphone ubiquity in recent years, our exploration intertwines with the evolving narrative of technological attainment. The rise of video games, initially reserved for the affluent, found roots in pirated PC (Personal Computuer) discs before flourishing in the era of smartphones, making gaming a ubiquitous phenomenon. However, this ascent has not been without contention; societal resistance, parental antagonism, and governmental prohibitions reveal an underlying cultural inclination against gaming as a recreational pursuit. Amidst these complexities, the enduring popularity of mobile games persists, challenging conventional perceptions and showcasing the resilience of digital entertainment in the face of societal apprehensions. Our findings unravel a tapestry woven with historical gaming trends, contemporary challenges, and the intricate interplay between societal attitudes and technological advancements in the unique context of Bangladesh.

4.1. Role of Parents

In examining the societal dynamics shaping children's engagement in recreational activities, particularly sports, parental influence emerges as a pivotal factor. Extensive research, such as the work conducted by Hossain and Sakib (2016) underscores the significant role parents play in shaping their children's sports involvement. Green and Chalip (1997) further illuminates that parental influence extends to children's leisure choices, impacting their participation in sports. However, within the urban landscape of Bangladesh, a contrasting narrative unfolds, where youngsters encounter obstacles hindering their active participation in sports. Concerns over time allocation and the perceived value of sports activities vis-à-vis academic pursuits lead parents to discourage such engagements. A father's perspective exemplifies this sentiment, dismissing sports as a "waste of time" and emphasizing the paramount importance of academic success for future career prospects. Consequently, children turn to smartphones as a refuge, seeking social recognition and parental approval through technological prowess. The integration of digital devices into social gatherings becomes a source of pride for parents, who view their children's technological proficiency as an asset for future success. This overreliance on digital media, noted by Livingstone et al. (2015) highlights a complex interplay between parental expectations, societal norms, and evolving technological landscapes, ultimately influencing children's recreational choices in the urban context of Bangladesh.

The ubiquity of televisions and digital devices, even in the lives of infants, has become a focal point of research interest (Cheung, Bedford, Saez De Urabain, Karmiloff-Smith, & Smith, 2017; Elias & Sulkin, 2019). Parents often embrace the perception of smartphones as modern-day babysitters, a sentiment reinforced by the convenience and versatility these devices offer (Digitalhub, 2013; Lev & Elias, 2020). As multifaceted tools, smartphones function as platforms for recreation, hubs for entertainment, valuable educational resources, and potential workspaces for future endeavors. Despite concerns about excessive screen exposure and addictive behaviors among children, parents find themselves grappling with the challenges of regulating device usage, sometimes resorting to extreme measures like physical restraints. Paradoxically, while parents acknowledge the importance of physical activities including football or cricket, the changing urban landscape and the unavailability of play spaces lead them to introduce smart devices to keep children engaged. This acceptance is further amplified during the COVID-19 induced lockdowns, where smartphones transition from 'perceived sources of evil' to essential tools for education and occupying children while parents work from home. The intertwining of technological shifts, parental struggles, and societal norms underscores the complex landscape shaping children's recreational choices in the urban context of Bangladesh.

4.2. Future Security and Job Market

The cultural reality of Dhaka reveals a deeply ingrained emphasis on future security, framing recreation and entertainment as perceived indulgences. Our research uncovers a prevalent sentiment among respondents, echoing the societal construct that views pursuits beyond monetary gains as superfluous. In this cultural milieu, the prevailing belief links success to lucrative employment, either through high-paying positions in multinational companies or prestigious government roles. Parents, guided by a strong focus on financial stability and social status, prioritize their children's career paths as pathways to a secure future. The urban challenges of Dhaka, such as traffic congestion and demanding work schedules, contribute to the scarcity of time for its residents. Many individuals, particularly students, invest significant time in formal education and supplementary academic support services, reflecting a commitment driven by the pursuit of academic success and the promise of secure job opportunities. This commitment often leads to sacrifices in leisure activities and hobbies, with the cultural narrative emphasizing the practicality of pursuing careers in established fields like engineering, medicine, law, or business. This prevailing sentiment shapes the city's cultural climate, where

societal recognition is accorded to those pursuing careers deemed essential for financial stability, reinforcing the broader societal narrative that devalues pursuits outside traditional academic and professional realms.

Following sentiments from a few of the respondents paint a picture of the sentiments; *"We are poor, no one gives me salam* (a respectful greeting in the Muslim community, people receiving salam is considered to be respected ones in the community). *If he has a high-paying job or a government job, then he will be all set. Money will ensure him everything in this world. Government jobs will not get him as much money, but the government will take care of his every need."* Says a 40-something-year-old woman. She had a university-age son. *"You either join a multinational company for a high wage or be a first-class government officer."*

In a poignant reflection, one participant encapsulates a prevailing sentiment within the cultural fabric of Dhaka, emphasizing the stark reality of economic precariousness. The respondent articulates the perception that the pursuit of research and knowledge is often considered a privilege accessible primarily to the affluent, who, as the narrative goes, depart the country with substantial financial backing to become scientists. This sentiment underscores a dichotomy between academic aspirations and economic circumstances, echoing a broader pattern observed in our ethnographic research. The prevailing belief suggests a limited perception of success, with viable career options predominantly confined to established fields such as engineering, medicine, law, or business. The sentiment mirrors the societal narrative that places a premium on careers deemed essential for financial stability, potentially influencing the academic and professional choices made by individuals in Dhaka.

4.3. Lack of Playgrounds

The dearth of well-designed playgrounds in Dhaka poses a substantial threat to the holistic development of children, both mentally and physically (Islam, 2022). Acknowledging the vital role of playgrounds in fostering children's outdoor engagement, experts emphasize their fundamental necessity (Ahmed, 2018). However, the urban landscape of Bangladesh reflects a disconcerting decline in accessible recreational spaces, aggravated by the oversight of essential amenities like playgrounds in the construction of new residential complexes. This scarcity, exacerbated by academic pressures and security concerns, reinforces the prevailing socio-cultural norm dictating that children resort to alternative measures for recreation, often confined within domestic spaces. A survey conducted by the Bangladesh Institute of Planners underscores the severity of the issue, indicating a need for at least 2,000 parks and 4,000 open fields to accommodate the 25 million residents in areas under the two city corporations, with an optimal area of one acre per facility (Islam, 2021). Despite these figures, the existing 235 playgrounds face accessibility challenges due to competition and administrative reluctance, where only 42 are open to the public (Islam, 2021). Moreover, the sorry state of many facilities, characterized by overgrown vegetation and water-logging, renders them unsuitable for sports activities. Parents, concerned about the safety of roadways, negligent drivers, potential kidnappers, and uncovered manholes, deter their children from visiting these locations, particularly children from economically advantaged households, further limiting the engagement of certain demographics in recreational activities (Ejaj, 2018).

Sumon, a 22-year-old actively engaged in playground sports, articulates a shared concern prevalent among participants. His narrative reveals the rigorous competition for access to the playground, necessitating early gatherings to secure time slots for football matches. The discernible pattern emerges as three to four adult groups frequent the field daily, with a notable absence of children engaging in sports. Sumon expresses apprehension about the safety of the playground for children, contributing to their exclusion from physical activities. This shared sentiment highlights a broader issue—limited access to recreational spaces for both adults and children. Sumon advocates for authoritative intervention to enhance field accessibility, proposing designated times exclusively for children, thus accentuating the overarching theme of restricted recreational opportunities within the urban landscape of Dhaka.

The Khilgaon playing field, initially conceived to nurture football development, has deviated from its original purpose to become a revenue-generating venture, permitting reservations for a fee and limiting access to adults. The research findings reveal a pricing structure, where groups can secure the ground for three hours at a cost of 1500 Bangladeshi Taka (BDT) (equivalent to 14.50 USD) as of 2022, resulting in regular reservations by 4 to 5 groups. However, this commercialization has taken a toll on maintenance, with an emphasis on revenue overshadowing effective quality monitoring. Dissatisfied informants highlight the deteriorated conditions, particularly the unplayable surface during rainfall due to grass degradation, and water logging.

This commercial trend in play spaces contributes to a diminishing array of recreational options for children and youth, compelling them to turn to smartphones for leisure. The consequent shift in youngsters' socialization patterns, transitioning from peer interactions to screen-based activities, is becoming increasingly apparent as smartphones assume a central role in their daily lives. Parents, feeling compelled to provide digital devices for minimal involvement in recreational activities, witness a notable shift from physical play to digital engagement, raising valid concerns about its impact on social development.

In the broader technological landscape, these findings underscore the ramifications of commercializing play spaces and the subsequent alteration in children's recreational preferences. The observable impact on

socialization and the growing dependence on digital devices reflect the evolving socio-cultural dynamics within urban environments. This resonates with the overarching theme of inadequate provisions for children's play, signaling a broader societal shift. Such lack of resources, are compelling the culture and society in general to accept the practice of video gaming into the mainstream culture. The research findings posits that despite the initial resistance, video games have made their mark onto the mainstream cultural practices, because there is a sever lack of infrastructures or alternatives.

Children's growing affinity for digital games like PUBG (PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds) and Free Fire, alongside apps such as TikTok, raises pertinent questions about the implications of their increasing reliance on screen-based activities. Echoing the observations of Yasir (2022) this trend aligns with the prevailing belief among psychiatrists that an ample number of playgrounds could potentially mitigate these emerging concerns. Beyond the scope of sports, playgrounds are recognized as crucial arenas for acquiring life skills, facilitating interpersonal interactions, and offering practical experiences not readily accessible through digital interfaces in indoor settings (Yasir, 2022).

This revelation adds another layer to the ongoing discourse on technological attainment, emphasizing the pivotal role of physical play spaces in addressing the challenges posed by the increasing reliance on digital entertainment. The inadequate provision of playgrounds and the resulting shift towards digital activities contribute to the complex socio-cultural dynamics within urban environments, echoing the overarching theme of the consequences of commercializing play spaces and altering children's recreational preferences.

4.4. Drug Abuse and the Emergence of Youth Gangs

Drug abuse is an escalating concern within urban settings, with a growing prevalence observed across diverse social demographics, particularly among the youth, with an average age of addiction reported at 22 years. The adverse effects of drug abuse on educational attainment and school attendance among students are widely acknowledged (The Daily Star, 2013). The Home Affairs Minister of Bangladesh estimates a staggering eight million individuals grappling with drug addiction in the country (Corraya, 2021). This pervasive issue poses multifaceted challenges to society, impacting the national economy, public health, social cohesion, and overall peace (Rahman, Ahmad, & Ali, 2016).

This phenomenon in urban areas has prompted parental concerns, fostering a preference for ensuring the safety and well-being of their children within the confines of home surveillance. As articulated by Foucault's perspective on surveillance, society employs control mechanisms to enforce desired expectations on its members (Foucault, 1977). A concerned mother reflects this sentiment, emphasizing the perceived safety of keeping children at home, away from the risks associated with drugs and the burgeoning issues of street violence and gang involvement.

The rise of youth gangs in the city further solidifies this social consensus, intensifying the inclination towards protective measures. Atkinson-Sheppard's study investigates the involvement of street children in organized criminal activities in the Bangladesh context, shedding light on the mechanisms through which fear permeates family dynamics due to such involvement (Atkinson-Sheppard, 2015). This pervasive fear contributes to a broader pattern of seeking refuge within the home environment, aligning with the prevalent theme of prioritizing safety and control within urban contexts, as observed in earlier findings.

4.5. Evolution of Family Structure

Drawing from our comprehensive ethnographic exploration, the study substantiates that the amalgamation of academic pressures and restricted access to recreational spaces is a pivotal force shaping the phenomenon of children primarily confined to their residences. In response, parents consistently turn to smartphones as the predominant means to address their children's limited recreational needs. The omnipresence of smartphones and the widespread availability of internet connectivity have propelled gaming into the mainstream of children's leisure activities. Our fieldwork reveals a dichotomy in parental attitudes: a sense of pride in their children's adeptness with phone operation skills or a distinct contentment stemming from the perceived protection against the potential dangers associated with adolescent gangs and substance misuse. This nuanced parental perspective emerges as a recurrent theme, providing valuable insights into the complex interplay of socio-cultural factors influencing parenting choices within the urban landscape of Dhaka. These findings intricately connect with earlier observations, forming a cohesive narrative that underscores the intricate dynamics between academic demands, recreational constraints, and parental responses in shaping the everyday lives of children in Dhaka.

Within the urban context of Dhaka, the pervasive adoption of mobile games emerges as a pragmatic solution to the evolving dynamics of parenting. Traditionally, the responsibility of nurturing children was shared among extensive kin networks. However, the shift towards nuclear families, propelled by changes in the country's work culture, places the entire burden of child-rearing on the shoulders of parents. Simultaneously, the prohibitive costs associated with hiring assistance and the limited skill sets of available babysitters render smartphones, equipped with comprehensive gaming capabilities, a practical recourse for occupied parents. This reliance on mobile games as a means of occupying youngsters during parental work hours reflects a broader pattern in the urban landscape, where technological solutions adapt to meet the changing demands of contemporary family structures. This finding seamlessly integrates into our earlier

observations, providing a nuanced understanding of how socio-cultural shifts influence the role of technology in addressing parenting challenges within Dhaka.

The prevailing cultural resistance against video games in Bangladesh is a deeply rooted phenomenon, often leading to hasty attributions of these games as the primary catalyst for various social issues. This inclination towards scapegoating is particularly pronounced in the context of mobile video games, deemed a children-oriented niche entertainment genre, making it susceptible to societal censure without substantial scrutiny. Notably, this stance contrasts with the more lenient reception of certain social media applications that harbor features linked to addictive behaviors. Our ethnographic research underscores this paradoxical distinction within the city's cultural fabric.

The resistance against video games has been a long-standing narrative, as recounted by a 51-year-old development worker who vividly recalls familial opposition during the 1990s. His younger brother's affinity for gaming was met with punitive measures, driven by religious beliefs and the cultural adherence to the proverb, 'Spare the rod, spoil the child.' The family's resistance, rooted in religious convictions, reflects a broader cultural aversion to video games, shaping collective attitudes over a significant period. This historical perspective aligns with our broader findings, highlighting a consistent cultural disposition that has implications for how video games are perceived and regulated within Dhaka's urban milieu.

5. Are Video Games Mainstreaming?

The prevailing cultural resistance against video games in Bangladesh is a deeply rooted phenomenon, often leading to hasty attributions of these games as the primary catalyst for various social issues. This inclination towards scapegoating is particularly pronounced in the context of mobile video games, deemed a children-oriented niche entertainment genre, making it susceptible to societal censure without substantial scrutiny. Notably, this stance contrasts with the more lenient reception of certain social media applications that harbor features linked to addictive behaviors. Our ethnographic research underscores this paradoxical distinction within the city's cultural fabric.

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The ubiquity of smartphones, particularly among the younger demographic in Dhaka, emerges as a central component in the cultural tapestry, bestowing social status and symbolic cultural capital to both children and their parents. This aligns with Bourdieu's assertion that social and cultural capital opens avenues for tangible opportunities within society (Bourdieu, 1989). Bourdieu contends that the possession of social and cultural capital serves as a key that unlocks tangible opportunities within society. In essence, he argues that individuals endowed with these forms of capital gain access to distinct advantages, privileges, and pathways that can significantly shape their experiences and outcomes in the societal landscape. Social capital pertains to one's social connections, networks, and relationships, while cultural capital encompasses the knowledge, skills, and cultural awareness one possesses. According to Bourdieu, these forms of capital are not merely symbolic but play a crucial role in determining an individual's trajectory in various aspects of life, including education, employment, and social standing. Moreover, the evolving social dynamics indicate that video games, despite facing cultural resistance historically, serve as a significant means for social acceptance among the younger generation. In a society where traditional large kin groups have transitioned into nuclear families; parenting responsibilities now predominantly rest on the two parents. The affordability and accessibility of smartphones, equipped with engaging gaming capabilities, make them a practical option within the urban environment.

Inside the education-centric culture of Dhaka, where students face immense pressure to excel, video games provide a respite, offering a sense of achievement and social bonding. The limited availability of recreational spaces and the societal emphasis on academic pursuits create a reality where social interaction and achievement outside the realm of education find expression through smartphone screens and video games. Notably, the acquisition of high-end smartphones becomes a tangible manifestation of this desire for social inclusion. University students, navigating the demands of academia and part-time work, invest in smartphones as a means to engage in popular games and be part of relevant conversations.

The cultural landscape in Dhaka, shaped by the intricate interplay of traditional values, societal expectations, and the impact of modern technologies, finds resonance with the theory of Attainment. Within this context, the widespread adoption of smartphones and the prevalence of mobile video games can be viewed as manifestations of individuals seeking to attain certain social and cultural goals. In line with the theory of Attainment, individuals strategically utilize mobile technology as a means of negotiation, socialization, and individual expression in response to the challenges posed by academic pressure and limited access to

recreational spaces. This dynamic interaction underscores the role of technology in the pursuit of social status, cultural capital, and a sense of achievement within the urban environment of Dhaka.

6. Conclusion

The mainstreaming of video games in Dhaka is a multifaceted cultural response to the prevailing sociocultural and economic dynamics. The cultural narrative, shaped by mercenary expectations from education and an emphasis on specific job outcomes, has propelled individuals towards activities that offer both social status and entertainment. The mobile video game, emerging as a symbol of neoliberal culture, addresses the void left by diminishing recreational spaces and evolving social structures. As Dhaka transforms under the influence of neoliberalism, video games have become a pervasive and mainstream cultural phenomenon, serving as a coping mechanism and a source of identity and connection within this complex urban landscape.

The commercial nature of video games, serving as a conduit for peer-to-peer bonding and socialization, resonates with the neoliberal culture permeating Dhaka's society. As the city undergoes transformation, the mainstreaming of video games becomes a cultural response to the evolving landscape, providing a coping mechanism and a source of identity within the constraints of limited recreational spaces and changing social structures.

In essence, the theory of attainment illuminates the underlying motivations driving the mainstream adoption of video games—a cultural manifestation intricately tied to the pursuit of specific outcomes within the neoliberal framework. As Dhaka continues to grapple with the complexities of urban life, video games emerge as a pervasive and mainstream cultural phenomenon, reflecting the city's adaptation to the challenges posed by neoliberalism.

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