

YouTube

Culture & Trends Report

Grand Theft Auto

How one game is evolving
digital storytelling





GTA Is Changing How We Tell Stories Online

Anticipation for Grand Theft Auto VI has reached unprecedented heights on YouTube, with pre-release videos already surpassing 40B views[1]. Fans have scrutinized every second of the game's trailers, soundtrack lineups, and gameplay reveals in anticipation of its release on November 19.

For creators, a new Grand Theft Auto (GTA) is more than a crime epic to play through or an open world to explore; it's a content engine that will power new video formats for years to come. GTAV has been a cultural touchstone for more than a decade: it has ranked in YouTube's top 10 most-viewed games every year since its release[2].



40B

Prelaunch videos related to GTAVI have already topped 40B views.

Source: YouTube Data, Global, Lifetime.

GTA's longevity stems from immersion: both the player experience within its finely-detailed world and the viewer experience of watching stories built inside of that world. Creators use GTA's sandbox as a stage to mount their own storylines, building on widespread familiarity with the environment and drawing on the chaotic spectacle of Rockstar's simulation. GTAVI will massively expand that stage, opening new avenues for creative expression.

To better understand the creative and cultural impact of Grand Theft Auto, the YouTube Culture & Trends team reviewed data from the last 20 years of GTA content on YouTube. Research was supported by NRG surveys about popular culture. Respondents were active online, age 14–29.

TOP 10

Grand Theft Auto V has been a top-10 most-viewed game every year since its release.

Source: YouTube Data, Global, 2013 - 2025.



1 Source: YouTube Data, Global, Lifetime.
2 Source: YouTube Data, Global, 2013-2015

GTA's Cultural Dominance



900B

The GTA series has reached more than 900B views on YouTube.

Source: YouTube Data, Global, Lifetime.

Looking back, the rewarding complexity and adaptability of GTA's open world has made the series one of the biggest mainstream entertainment brands in existence. When asked about entertainment topics most people seemed to know about, 82% of respondents to a recent NRG study ranked GTA higher than Hollywood celebrities (79%) and comparable to the Super Bowl (83%)[3]. It has a similarly overwhelming presence on YouTube, reaching more than 900B views over its lifetime[4].

GTA's enduring popularity comes from a multifaceted appeal that transcends its crime genre. Some players show up to watch a bigger-than-Hollywood cinematic story, others to run wild in an open world that takes years to fully explore. But for many, GTA's free-form sandbox is the real draw: an intricately detailed, immersive world where plans are often derailed by the emergent behavior of pedestrians, police, and the other non-playable characters populating its cities.

The complexity of that simulation has been key to GTA's longevity on YouTube. The specificity of its authored world contrasts with more open-ended sandbox games; GTA gives creators an elaborate stage rather than a blank canvas. Its living cities invite players to get creative, engineering scenes and challenges that amplify emergent chaos. GTAVI massively expands this sandbox, opening a new range of possibilities for creators.

3 Source: NRG, YouTube Trends Survey, U.S. April 2026, N=496; online people age 14–29.
4 Source: Source: YouTube Data, Global, Lifetime.



82%

Survey respondents cited Grand Theft Auto (82%) at a rate similar to Hollywood celebrities (79%) and the Super Bowl (83%) among topics perceived as widely recognized.

Source: NRG, YouTube Trends Survey, U.S. April 2026, N=496; online people age 14–29.



Communities Expand GTA's Universe

GTA's near-inexhaustible world has given communities the building blocks for video formats like stunts, challenges, investigations, and, importantly, roleplay. Its physics engine and NPC simulation serve as a foundation for creators' designs, which have been refined over decades of playing together on YouTube.

Serendipitous moments shared on the couch with friends have evolved into player-directed spectacles shared with the world. Audience fluency with the game's props and conventions feed into the content cycle, making it easier to explain high-concept challenges and reactions to other creators' work. Older video concepts became the building blocks for new stories, creating an immersive shared universe of GTA content that will likely be adapted to GTAVI.



@VanossGaming
26M subscribers

The world of GTA became a never-ending hangout for creators like the **VanossGaming** crew, who brought the relaxed vibe of a living-room gaming session to a mass broadcast.



@z_Reported_z
187K subscribers



@FailRace
544K subscribers

Channels like **FailRace** and **Reported** enlist their audience in multiplayer manhunt challenges that use the familiar framework of GTA to capture the elemental fun of playground pickup games.



What GTA Is Today



GTA's perennial top-10 position among YouTube's most-viewed games has been driven by creators[5] using it as a stage for their own adventures and turning the world into a production studio. Some content remains anchored to the game's handmade world and stories, revealing the hidden depths of the simulation; other subgenres use audience fluency with GTA to enable high-concept scenarios with new rules and goals. All of these formats will be supercharged in November as players discover the new territories of Leonida and use them as a launchpad for their own creativity.

Survival challenges turn GTA's mechanics into high-stakes endurance entertainment. In his 24-hour five-star wanted level run, creator **Jelly** cycled between stolen supercars, military tanks, and fighter jets to outlast the simulation.



@Jelly
23.3M subscribers



@any_austin
1.62M subscribers

Video essays explore the games' mysteries and curiosities. **Any Austin**'s series uses mundane details to find hidden connections within the games and help viewers appreciate what went into their creation.

Whimsical animations and "YTPs" — like **FlyingKitty**'s musical rendition of "Big Smoke's Order" — turned GTA: San Andreas characters into meme icons for a new generation of viewers.



@FlyingKittyyy
3.28M subscribers



GTA's "Wasted" death screen has become ubiquitous shorthand for punctuating real-world fails. One upload of the asset has been viewed over 1.5 million times.

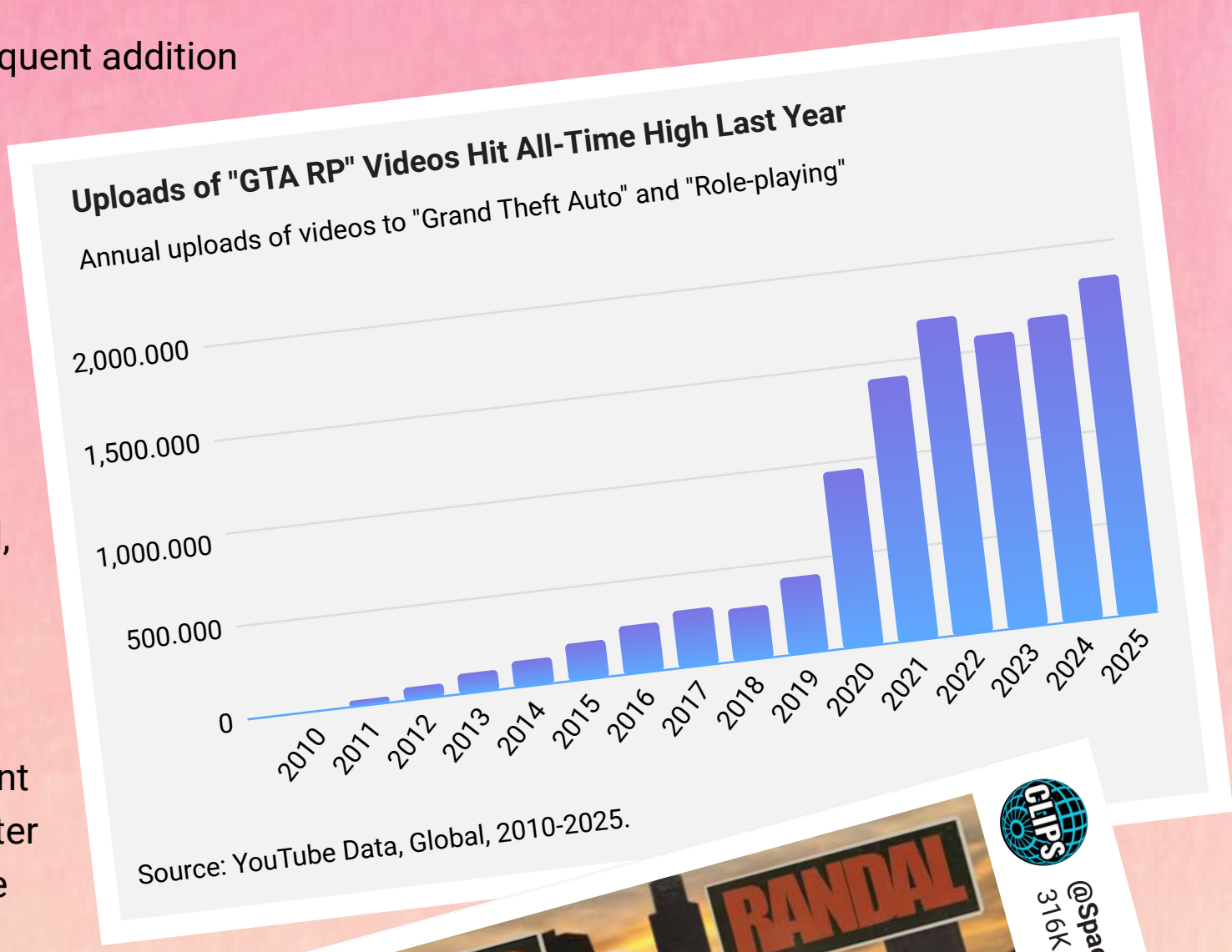
Animations and memes have turned GTA characters into internet everymen who serve as avatars for online storytelling. The technology and design of the series are now ingrained in internet culture, with fans recreating them in "NPC IRL" videos that mimic pedestrian behavior and game logic.

5 Source: YouTube Data, Global, 2013 - 2025.

Roleplaying Is a New Frontier in Digital Storytelling

The introduction of GTA Online created a new opportunity for players and creators to immerse themselves in the unique world that GTA built. It gave players the ability to create their own characters and play alongside others. This gave birth to roleplaying (RP) content in GTA. In RP content, creators improvise scenes as their own in-game characters alongside other players. It has become a new kind of appointment viewing for an audience that grew up in GTA's world. Parceled out in daily streams or edited recaps, these serialized stories have exploded in popularity: GTA RP reached more than 8B all-time views and an all-time peak of 1.7M uploads in 2025.

"In GTA RP" has become a frequent addition to video titles, promising creator spontaneity against a backdrop of player interaction and mechanical complexity. Rather than denoting an exact format, the phrase encompasses committed role-play on dedicated servers like NoPixel, improv comedy, movie-like edited narratives, and fast-paced short-form scenarios.



These videos reward a different kind of skill: staying in character and building scenes alongside other players rather than outplaying them. It also meets audiences where they are by delivering episodic storytelling in regular daily or weekly uploads, which are supported by recap and highlight accounts that further broaden the audience.





Roleplay As Next-Generation Entertainment

This freewheeling RP genre appeals both to longtime fans and to a young audience accustomed to watching creator-driven, emergent storytelling. It's next-generation entertainment for a next-generation audience. In June 2024, virtual creators (VTubers) collectively streaming their GTA roleplaying were responsible for Grand Theft Auto becoming the most-watched livestreamed game of the month. This next-generation audience participates, too. They help shape the ongoing story: codifying streamer lore, providing live feedback, and catching new fans up on the story.

Chaotic Roleplay

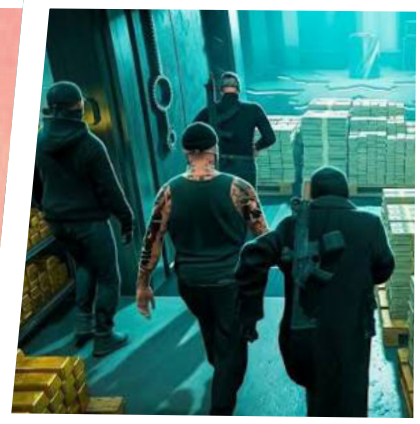
Indonesian creator **Jelool**'s channel engages in both slapstick and ongoing serialized stories on the Hope Indonesia server; the content hooks viewers by moving at the speed of the modern internet, rather than the slower release schedule of traditional TV.



@2LuciD
64K subscribers

Comedy Roleplay

Variety and comedy creators like **Jerma985** bring diverse audiences to role-play servers like NoPixel, sparking unexpected storylines as they cross paths with other streamers.



@LordKebun
357K subscribers

@Jelool
2.49M subscribers



Cinematic Roleplay

Some roleplay videos lead into cinematic presentation through edited narratives, like **LuciD**'s "Street Legal" series.



@2ndJerma
902K subscribers

Dedicated Roleplay

GTA RP creators like **LordKebun**, who has been role-playing in-game for nearly a decade, have won a dedicated audience that continues to follow their heists and episodic adventures.

While video games have been the subject of videos since YouTube's earliest days, "GTA RP" is an inversion. It turns the game into the source of video, and the video can be about anything as long as it takes place within the finely detailed, immersive world of GTA. So, what may seem to be just a game has actually become the entry point to a new frontier of storytelling, innovated by the aforementioned creators and viewers immersed in GTA. Whether in the game or in video, it is ultimately world-building and story that has powered GTA's cultural relevance, and with 40 billion views[6] already under GTAVI's belt, creators and viewers are clearly anticipating the world and story to come.

6 Source: YouTube Data, Global, Lifetime.

What This Means for You

The upcoming launch of Grand Theft Auto VI is not merely a massive cultural moment; it is a live demonstration of how modern culture is built, scaled, and sustained. For those seeking to connect with deeply engaged audiences and understand the next frontier of media, the GTA ecosystem on YouTube into which the game will emerge serves as a blueprint for cultural relevance in a fragmented world.

01

Grand Theft Auto is mainstream and intergenerational. With a mainstream popularity rating of 82%, GTA directly rivals legacy monocultural giants like Hollywood celebrities (79%) and the Super Bowl (83%). Its shared universe uniquely unites older millennials who experienced the series' origin with Gen Z and Alpha viewers who gather around modern YouTube creator formats. This massive, enduring footprint proves that deep, shared human passions can still bridge demographic divides and bring a fragmented society together.

02

GTA demonstrates that gaming is a horizontal cultural layer, not a vertical category. Over more than two decades, the series' hyper-detailed environments and satire have become deeply woven into our collective cultural fabric, acting as a structural foundation across all of digital culture. This deep audience comprehension demonstrates that gaming is no longer a vertical category to be marketed to, but a primary lens through which a generation establishes identity and interprets the world.

03

Unprecedented demand proves the value of encouraging participation. The staggering 40B+ views already generated by GTAVI prelaunch content demonstrates the uniqueness of GTA as a modern cultural phenomenon, driven by continued, always-on engagement with the series and speculation about the newest entry[7]. Because GTAV never lost visibility on YouTube over its 13-year lifespan, fans have enjoyed uninterrupted, participatory access to this world, driving interest in the world to come.

04

GTA RP is episodic, serialized "TV" for a new generation. In a media landscape where traditional TV seasons have shrunk to 10 episodes released years apart, the explosive rise of GTA Roleplay (8B+ views) has stepped in to fill the void[8]. By transforming the game's sandbox into a persistent, daily improv theater, creators produce unscripted series that serve as always-on appointment viewing for an audience whose relationship to the creators runs deeper than traditional television can match.

As we look toward this next chapter, GTAVI represents the start of a new cycle of discovery and creative evolution. Creators will inevitably build upon decades of established formats to explore this new sandbox, turning it into an even more powerful tool kit for collective human expression.

7 Source: YouTube Data, Global, Lifetime.
8 Source: YouTube Data, Global, 2010-2025

