

Particulars: Navigating Morality and Power in a Fictional City

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KEYWORDS

narrative-driven, moral choices, simulation, ethics, corruption, Africa

FORMAT OF WORK

Game prototype

DESCRIPTION OF WORK

Particulars is a narrative-driven simulation game set in a fictional African city where players assume the role of a policeman faced with daily moral dilemmas. In Nigeria, "*particulars*" refers to the necessary documents like a driver's licence and vehicle registration, commonly requested by police during traffic stops with the phrase "*show me your particulars*." The player must make choices that affect their wealth, reputation, and health by deciding whether to ask for bribes, issue fines, or let citizens go free. These decisions are influenced by external factors such as socio-political events, family needs and demands from the player's boss. Developed in Unity, Particulars offers over 20 different endings based on player choices, exploring themes of corruption, ethics, and personal responsibility. The game also aims to broaden our understanding of ethics within game design. The game will be displayed on a monitor with an interactive demo available for conference attendees.

RESEARCH STATEMENT

Background: There is a growing academic and industry focus on the role of games in exploring complex moral and ethical dilemmas, particularly in contexts where authority and power dynamics are involved (Katsarov 2019; Sicart 2009). Games like *Papers, Please* (Pope 2013) and *This War of Mine* (11 bit studios 2014) have introduced the concept of moral decision-making within constrained environments (Formosa 2016), yet there is a gap in games that address these themes from the perspective of developing regions, particularly Global South contexts (Olive 2020). *Particulars* addresses this gap by situating the player in a fictional African city, forcing them to navigate the cultural and social implications of corruption, authority, and familial and workplace obligations.

Contribution to Field/Industry: *Particulars* contributes a novel perspective to the gaming landscape by integrating African socio-political elements into its narrative design (Bayeck 2017). The game explores

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how cultural and localised forms of authority can influence ethical decision-making, making it relevant to discussions about the intersection of politics, ethics, and power within African contexts. It introduces a fresh approach to storytelling in games, offering insights into how moral choices play out differently in non-Western settings. The game also advances the industry by incorporating a nuanced portrayal of African urban life, bridging the gap between global gaming narratives and localised realities. Additionally, *Particulars* highlights the role of ethics within game design as a medium, exploring the moral responsibilities of developers to craft narratives that reflect complex social realities and engage players in critical thinking about power and justice (Breien 2021; Ma 2023).

Significance: The significance of *Particulars* lies in its ability to offer a unique exploration of modern day corruption and morality, contributing to the diversification of narratives in the global gaming industry. It serves as an important example of how African urban dynamics can be represented in interactive media. The game's emphasis on ethical decision-making and the consequences of power dynamics resonates with both local and global audiences, offering a platform for discussions about governance, law enforcement, and the everyday struggles faced by individuals in such roles. This work contributes to expanding the range of voices and experiences in game development, particularly within the Australian context where gaming industries are actively aiming to engage with diverse global narratives, both within and outside Australia (Keogh 2021). Though emerging, it is predicted that the African games industry will generate over US\$1 billion for the first time in history this year and the market for locally relevant video games continues to grow rapidly (Takahashi 2024).

EXHIBITION

The game will be presented as an interactive demo on a monitor, where attendees can play through scenarios reflecting the game's core mechanics. Display requirements include a monitor, keyboard, and mouse setup.

BIO

Neema Iyer is the founder of STEMtoto Studio, a game design and research studio based in Sydney. Neema's work focuses on exploring the intersections of technology, culture, and gender, particularly in Global South contexts. Her current projects include *Particulars*, a narrative-driven game about ethical decision-making in a fictional African city, *Kamata*, a cozy game promoting environmental conservation, *Digital Safetea*, a short web-based game on digital safety for women.

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