Viral or Social Friends?

"I want to build relationships while playing a game. I want to meet real people."

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Abstract

Since 2008 there has been a rapid rise of casual games on social networking platforms such as Facebook. There are now games based on popular television shows such as CSI and sports, ESPN College Town, as well as the familiar farming and decorating games. As the user base for social networks continues to expand so does the number of casual game players. The purpose of this study was to observe social and viral exchanges between casual game players to determine how these players define friendship and interaction. The results show that the average Facebook game player finds a stronger bond of friendship with players in games with in-game social interaction over games with heavy viral interaction. Data also shows that games where players feel a stronger social bond with other players have a higher sticky factor and avoid the heavy churn rate of some more popular games.

Keywords: Facebook; Friends; Games; Farm Town; YoVille; FarmVille; FrontierVille

1.0   Introduction

In April 2009, Facebook opened its core product, the data stream, to outside developers paving the way for a surge of new applications available to users of the social networking giant. Game developers such as Zynga, Badoo, and Electronic Arts did not hesitate to develop social networking game products for the platform and by 2011, there were over 1000 game titles from which the Facebook user could choose. Since its founding in 2004, Facebook has expanded from an environment restricted to university students/staff to one where in January 2011, there were over 600 million worldwide active users.[1] With this expansion of who's using the platform there's also been a demographic expansion from users primarily aged 18-22 (college students) to one where 27.5% of users are 35-65. [2]

According to research conducted in January 2010, by Information Solutions Group (ISG) the average social networking game player in the United States and United Kingdom is a 43 year old female working full time. Additionally the survey found that the social networking game player is, on average, more highly educated and earning more than the median household income in both the US and UK. Furthermore, 36% of US game players played more than six hours a week compared to 22% in the UK. [3]

There is, however, a tendency to unjustifiably refer to any web game that features on a social networking website, such as Facebook, as being a social networking game. Early research by Price and Smith has shown that the more popular Facebook games, such as FarmVille, CityVille, and FrontierVille (all Zynga titles) are also the most viral and have few, if any, social exchanges between players. [4] According to Wohn et.al. social network game players do not seek direct social interaction in the game. [5] The authors would argue that game players are often limited in seeking social interaction by the structure of the game itself.

The aim of this paper is to examine social and viral exchanges between frequent game players to determine how these players are defining friendship and interaction within social networking games. According to Chan and Cheng online friendships grow quickly after a 6 month - 1 year stage and the difference between online and offline relationships decrease after this time. [6] We will further investigate whether this holds true for friendships based on viral interaction as well as social interaction. Because viral games such as FarmVille require 'gifting' from friends to play the game there is also the question of players creating 'virtual/fake' friends to help them advance in the game. The study will focus on female players and the methodology will follow a non experimental approach using qualitative methods of observation and interviews conducted online with participants in a variety of countries.

1.1   Review of the Literature

Video Games are no longer in their infancy and it's only natural that this maturing part of the entertainment industry has diversified in kind of games available but also in the demographic profile of game players. The tricky act of defining games has been a contested subject since Huizinga [7] and Callois [8] set out the field with their analysis of children playing games in the 1950's. With the introduction of personal computers into the home in the 1980's it was only natural that games, and play, embraced the technology available. According to Juul game definition includes:

1. Variable and quantifiable outcome;
2. Valorization of outcomes;
3. Player effort;
4. Player attached to outcome;
5. Negotiable consequences.

Juul also defines a game model that takes into account the flexibility that is needed for any future analysis and study of games. What he doesn't attempt to do is categorize games, or the genres that are inhabited by the wide field of interactive entertainment. [9]

Since the games field is a complex one, basic selections of genres have been identified by Rollings and Adams as:

1. Action Games;
2. Strategy Games;
3. Role-Playing Games;
4. Real-World Simulations;
5. Construction and Management Games;
6. Adventure Games;
7. Puzzle Games.[10]

Noticeably missing from this list is 'Casual Games'. Recently both academia and the mainstream press have been paying attention to the rise of games played, primarily, over the Internet, and more recently still, over social networks like Facebook. But what is a Social Game, and can it be defined? In 2006, the International Games Developers Association (IGDA) presented a white paper detailing research and the current state of play of Casual Games, which they define as:

> *"...games that are easy to learn, utilize simple controls and aspire to forgiving game play."* [11]

The key aspect to this definition is the lack of any key defining features. Other genres of games can often be pigeon-holed by characteristics. For example a First Person Shooter (FPS) is defined by the weapon involved, the tactics for dispatching enemies, and the point of view of the player. Puzzle games conjure images in the mind akin to Tetris or Bejewelled. Casual games, however, appear to be defined by other aspects such as the player and the platform.

The Casual Games Association (CGA), an organisation set up in 2005, to promote casual games and to unify the industry has the following definition:

> *"Developed for the general public and families, casual games are video games that are fun and easy to learn and play. The games are platform agnostic, meaning they can be played via the Internet, Facebook, PC, and Macintosh computers, Xbox, PlayStation, Nintendo DS, Wii and even mobile phones, iPhone and PDA. They're nonviolent, arcade-style games that involve puzzles, words, board and card games, game show and trivia"* [12]

There is no attempt by the association to categorise casual games into any further sub-genres, allowing for freedom and flexibility to incorporate a wide range of development. There are, however, some trends emerging within the different definitions of casual games. The prominent mention of Facebook in the

CGA's definition cements the connection between the popular global social network, and casual gaming. This in turn has given rise to the term 'Social Games' or 'Social Networking Games'.

In isolation, the term 'Social Games' is a misleading one, because by its very definition, play is primarily social, while games do not have to be. The rise of games as a hobby during the 1980's and the 1990's led to single player gaming rising to the forefront, and social gaming happening in a split screen, one room capacity. With the advent of the Internet in people's homes, and further still with high speed broadband connection it became possible to play games in a more social context, with players not necessarily needing to be physically in the same room. In 2010, the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) published in its annual report that computer or video games were played in 67% of American households with a gender divide of 60/40 male to female.[13] This only differs slightly from a 2005, British Broadcasting Company (BBC) report where it was reported that in the UK there was a gender split of 55/45 male to female.[14]

There is no longer a suggestion that women don't play games; the burden of research has instead shifted to what kind of games they play and how they play games. The Entertainment Software Association's data also debunks another common myth, that only the young play games. It placed the average age of a game player in the US at 34. The BBC, report had the average gamer in the UK at 28. Even taking the average age between these two statistics at 31, it's a world away from the stereotype teenaged hardcore gamer, sitting in a dark basement, illuminated only by the glare of a monitor.

In 2008, Lenhart, Jones, and Macgill in a study for Pew Internet (a project of the Pew Research Center) found that while 97% of American teenagers play video games, (a figure aligned with the findings of the BBC and ESA reports), it also discovered that older American gamers tend to play on a more frequent basis. According to the Pew study, 36% of gamers 65 and older play games every day or almost every day. [15] This data is further supported by a detailed report entitled *The 2010 Leisure Market Research Handbook* which details how adult Americans spend their leisure time. According to the data, Americans 35-74 years old, on average, spend 0.23 hours per weekday playing games online and 0.27 hours on the weekend. The data spiked with the 75 and older age group playing on average 0.41 hours a weekday. [16]

It appears from this, and other research, that adults and seniors favor computer over console gaming. In 2009, Nielsen measured a steep drop in console ownership, from 17-18% of 18-34 year olds to just 8% of 35-44 year olds and dropping further still to 1% for those 55 and older.[17] Pearce notes, that baby boomer gamers (those born 1946-1964) are understudied by the academic collective. Her findings do confirm some of the other data represented here, namely that the PC is the platform-of-choice for baby boomer gamers. Her research was one of the first to provide data to back up oft repeated anecdotal evidence, that older women are playing games.[18] The core of Pearce's research focused on baby boomer gamers and their habits and favourite games but since the research was carried out in 2006, it was unlikely that any of the respondents interviewed would have been playing Facebook games since the social networking site was in its infancy, and at the time was only available to university students and staff.
Since its inception in 2004, [19] Facebook has risen to have over 600 million active users.[20] It has a worldwide reach and supports an impressive selection of languages. Its commitment to games is clear, recently holding a Games Event [21] and announcing a '5-year strategic relationship' with social gaming behemoth Zynga [22]. According to the CEO Mark Zuckerberg, over 200 million Facebook users play games every month. Fast Company recently reported that "Zynga, Facebook's biggest application developer, has nineteen games that attract 275 million users a month". [23] Jared Morgenstern, speaking at the 2010 Facebook Gaming event stated that the top ten games on Facebook have more than 12 million active users each. [24] Facebook is clearly a prominent platform for game playing, and a profitable one, but there would appear to be a trend for gamers on the network to congregate on certain games. [25]

In January 2010, Information Solutions Group (ISG), while conducting research on social networking users, included questions concerning the use of social networking games. As previously stated, their findings showed that the average social gamer was female and 43 years old. But what that statistic

doesn't show is that significantly more women play than men 55/45% and in the UK it's even higher at 58/42%. In the US 46% of game players are at least 50 years old. This is a significant difference in the age profile of the UK gamer where only 23% of gamers are 50+. Overall the data showed that 58% of gamers in the two countries were 40+. [26] The aim of this investigation was to examine social and viral exchanges between frequent game players who were assumed by their Facebook profile to fit into the above gender and age demographics to determine how these players are defining friendship and interaction within social networking games.

2.0   Methodology

Non experimental qualitative research methods of participant observation were used for a period of 24 months of daily game play. This was accompanied by Skype interviews with twenty game players and a further group Skype interview with six game players who also administered the fan page Yo Junkies, for players of the game YoVille. Three additional email interviews were conducted with game players who either could not master Skype or who did not feel comfortable with their command of English to participate in an oral interview. All of the respondents were female and ranged in age 25-76. The majority of them worked full time (over 30 hours a week) and only three were stay at home mothers/housewives/retired. Participants lived in the United States, United Kingdom, Spain, Ireland, Russia, Australia, Italy, and Finland.

The Principal Investigator (PI) participated in Social Networking games on the Facebook platform from March 2009 to April 2011 playing numerous games but focusing on four main titles: Farm Town; YoVille; FarmVille; and FrontierVille. The last three titles are from developer Zynga while Farm Town was developed by Slashkey. The PI began playing social network games on her personal FB account (she has a separate professional academic account) in 2009, but discovered that in order to progress through the games quickly she needed to have more 'friends' to help her with viral tasks. With this in mind she created other accounts (during the course of this investigation she created nine accounts to help with game play) and slowly began to focus the majority of her game playing on one of these accounts with the exception of Farm Town which she continued to primarily play on her personal account. Three of the additional accounts were only known to a handful of other players, three accounts were created with a male persona, and two accounts were created in the names of her cats (in the game YoVille these persona only wore cat costumes).

The Secondary Investigator (SI) also played a variety of games on the Facebook platform. Primarily the SI's personal account was used for all game playing, including the following Zynga titles: Café World; Mafia Wars; FarmVille; and FrontierVille. Progression in these games was augmented by a selection of fake accounts, in much the same way as the PI, in some cases named after soft toys or imaginary people. One account was attached to the Games Technology course at Staffordshire University as a way of communicating with students who had the account as a friend. Some of these fake accounts were 'friends' with some of the SI's extra accounts. These secondary accounts were used primarily to play games in which the viral/social aspects of these are integral to progression. On her own account the SI also played Backyard Monsters, developed by The Casual Collective, cooperatively alongside her co-workers, and Bejewelled Blitz by PopCap Games.

During the two years of the investigation using the six active gaming accounts the PI Facebook friended anyone who requested friending, or who was recommended by another FB friend . The main gaming account had 310 friends and the other five active accounts had a number of friends ranging from 90-229. Of the 310 FB friends on the PI's primary gamer account only four were known to her prior to gaming. Of these four FB friends, one had known the PI in elementary school, one while at university, one from a chatroom group of friends in that was active 1994-1997 and one was a fellow academic. When these friends requested the PI to play games with them on her personal FB account she directed them to friend her on her primary gaming account. Two of these FB friends were selected to participate in the Skype interviews.

There were four games that were used as the basis of the study: Farm Town; Farmville; YoVille; and FrontierVille. Two of the games, Farm Town and YoVille, allow in game player interaction (synchronous -

social) and two of the games FarmVille and FrontierVille depend on asynchronous (viral) FB wall player interaction. Game play (asynchronous, and synchronous), fora, and Facebook game fan pages were used and observed on a regular basis.

3.0   Results and Discussion

3.1   Game Data

3.1.1   Farm Town and FarmVille

Farm Town, developed by Slashkey, debuted in March 2009, and in June of the same year Zynga introduced FarmVille. FarmVille copies many of the same features of Farm Town (sowing and harvesting crops) with the exception that there are no public spaces where 'farmers' can interact with each other in a synchronous manner. Instead, in FarmVille, all player communication is out of game and based on players posting on each others' Facebook 'wall'. In Farm Town players progress faster in the game by hiring other players in a synchronous 'Market Place' to harvest crops. Players can also 'Buddy' other players and see who is online from their 'Buddy' list. Additionally, players can visit a Buddy's farm and have a text based synchronous chat. Prior to 2010, Farm Town limited viral asynchronous exchanges to gift giving between players. With the introduction of 'Facilities' (flour mill, sugar refinery etc) players could then ask other players to help in the facility by posting a request on their FB wall. To date, these are the limits of the viral, asynchronous, interaction in the game.

On April 1, 2011, Farm Town was ranked 128 on the AppData Leaderboard of Facebook applications with 2,099,523 monthly active users (MAU). [27] During the six month period from October 26,2010-April 24, 2011, Farm Town saw its MAU drop by half from approximately 4,000,000 to 2,000,000. Farm Town, does, however, remain popular to its core group of users with daily active users (DAU) as a percentage of MAU between 22 and 24 (excluding Christmas week).[28]

FarmVille on the other hand ranks consistently high on the App Data Leaderboard. On April 1, 2011 it was the third most popular Facebook application with 47,486,699 MAU.[29] The six month period from October 27, 2010 - April 10, 2011, saw FarmVille lose 10,000,000 MAU with a change from 57,000,000 to 47,000,000. During the same period, FarmVille also saw a steady decline in its DAU as a percentage of MAU from a peak of 32% (on December 6, 2010) to 25% on April 21, 2011.[30]

3.1.2   YoVille

YoVille was developed independently and acquired by Zynga at their startup in 2008. YoVille is a social synchronous environment where players can buy, sell and trade goods they acquire in the YoVille stores. The objective in YoVille is to buy a house, clothes, and other decorative items and impress your friends with how 'cool' you are. Players also buy, sell and trade 'Rare' items to acquire YoCoins (in game money) in order to buy more expensive items. Items are placed in the stores for a limited time so players who begin playing later have to acquire older goods through attending sale events or responding to an advertisement on the YoVille Forum. Players interact synchronously in game and can host and attend parties and events where they talk and trade. As in Farm Town, in the early days of the game, the only asynchronous interaction was 'gifting' free items offered by the game. In 2010, YoVille began to include more viral elements by having, for example, players get other players to co-sign a 'loan agreement' for the purchase of a house. As in all viral game elements these requests were posted on a player's Facebook wall.

YoVille ranked 46th on the App Data Leaderboard on April 1, 2011, with 6,240,002 MAU.[31] During the six month period of October 27, 2010-April 10, 2011, its MAU was relatively stable with 6,600,000-6,200,000 MAU excluding Thanksgiving weekend when it dropped to 5,700,000. Not surprising its DAU as a percentage of MAU from October 27, 2010-April 22, 2011, was also stable hovering between 13.5 and 12.8 with a peak of 16% on two separate occasions. [32]

3.1.3   FrontierVille

Social games have long been dismissed by core game developers; at the 2010 Game Developers Choice Awards (GDC) members of the audience booed Zynga's FarmVille General Manager Bill Mooney when he accepted the first-ever GDC award for Best New Social/Online Game. But in June 2010, Zynga launched FrontierVille, which was developed by core game veteran Brian Reynolds. FrontierVille brought a new approach to the typical farming game. In this title, players had the environment interact with them as they progressed through a series of set 'missions'. Beginning with clearing the land and building a cabin the pioneer (player) had to contend with snakes, bears, groundhogs, and weeds and trees that would grow back if the game wasn't played on a regular basis. Again, the game was viral in nature with players helping each other by responding to requests for items such as hammers, drills, paint, and bricks to build a house. Players were also able to gift some extra items to other players as well.

As the newest of the four games examined, FrontierVille has proved to be a hit with Facebook players. On the App Data Leaderboard for April 1, 2011, it ranked 11th in Facebook applications with 15,543,712 MAU.[33] The six month period October 27, 2011-April 11, 2011, saw FrontierVille lose approximately 16,000,000 MAU as its numbers went from 31,000,000 to 15,000,000. However, of the four games examined it's the only one who has seen its percentage of DAU to MAU numbers increase during the same period, rising from 24-27%.[34]

The data from App Data for the four social networking games examined shows that the more viral the game (depending on asynchronous communication) the higher the churn rate for the game. Churn rate in this context describes the number of users who stop playing a game in a certain month. The 'sticky factor' is a game's number of Daily Active Users compared to its number of Monthly Active Users. In the games examined in this study the percentage of DAU to MAU is more consistent in the games with in-game communication as part of the play.

3.2   The Internet and Social Networking

All of the respondents in this study were experienced Internet users before joining Facebook, with the exception of one. This particular respondent purchased a computer for the sole reason of joining Facebook to keep in touch with her family in another country. She was also the only user who adopted a different/obnoxious personality for game play. Her view was that it was for a 'lark' and since it wasn't real she could/would do things that she wouldn't do in real life. She later went on to admit that she dropped the obnoxious personality when she actually got to know people online. The assumption of a different/obnoxious personality is not uncommon in new online users as they experiment with interacting with people in what is essentially a text based environment. Another respondent said that when she created a different account to help her earn money she created the avatar as male. She said she didn't necessarily change her personality but players reacted in a different way because they thought she was male. She has one game friend who won't speak with her on her regular female account but who flirts and chats with her male avatar. She went on to stress that there was nothing sexual or salacious about the conversations, but that her friend seems to have more time for the male character than the female character.

The most common reason for joining a social network site mentioned by the respondents was to stay in touch with family. One 50 year old respondent said that she's now managing to keep in touch with her cousins in another part of the US, whereas in the past they'd married, had children, and divorced before she'd heard any news. She went on to add that she's learned more about her brother, who lives a mile away in the same city, from reading his Facebook page than she'd learned growing up in the same house with him. She added that she would often meet her brother on his farm in Farm Town and have a chat with him.

3.3   Social Network Gaming and Friendship

All of the respondents began playing games on Facebook soon after they started using the social networking platform and the majority of them created additional game playing accounts because of the difficulty in getting neighbors to help with viral tasks. Respondents would create a new account and send their main game playing account free gifts or help with missions such as clicking to help 'raise a barn'. One respondent admitted to having created over 10 accounts but said that she only plays seven of them

now. The only respondent who said that she did not have a second FB account admitted that she'd been considering adding one to help her with the games. One respondent raised the issue of Facebook's terms of service that states that users are allowed only one account and expressed concern that all of the items that she'd purchased for her games would be lost if FB decided to close her extra accounts.

All of the respondents had in excess of 150 friends on their primary FB account. Those who have a separate gamer account averaged over 200 gamer friends. One 31 year old respondent stated that she only adds those she trusts to her gamer account. Other respondents said that they would add anyone to their gamer account but that they would have to know a person for a while before adding them as a friend to their primary account. All of those who admitted to having more than one FB account said that they friended fellow gamers just to play the game.

Two of the respondents stated that they were extremely shy and find it difficult to leave the house without a family member. Both women said that they enjoy using the computer to play games and to interact with friends. There was, however, a difference in the type of games these women preferred. One likes the games that are more viral in nature: FarmVille and FrontierVille. She stated that she likes starting with nothing and building her farm or town and likes the fact that the game gives the player tasks to complete. She added, "When I've finished one task, I've already started another." She also feels a bond of friendship with neighbors when they post requests and that she tries to respond to as many as possible. This particular player only plays with people that she's known in real life or who are friends of a friend. She has not friended any strangers she's met playing a social networking game.

The second of these respondents prefers games that have in-game social activities although she does play FarmVille and FrontierVille. She feels strong ties of friendship with her gamer friends and has friended numerous players she's met in game and through the game forum. She stated, "I feel the giving and receiving of gifts for the games creates a friendship of sorts. In fact, I feel rather offended when there are just "takers" who I constantly help, but won't return the favor. I have unfriended quite a few of these people since they were only added for a game. On the other hand, I have literally cried when given YoCash gifts from perfect strangers."

Of the respondents who are frequent players of both viral and social games there was a definite friendship bias toward the players with whom they play social games. One player of all four games stated, "I feel a closer bond to the people I have actually met in-game such as in YoVille outside of the apartment, in the stores, and playing games on the forum; and in those I've hired in the market or who have hired me in Farm Town. My neighbors in FrontierVille and FarmVille are for the most part simply the ones I met and befriended in YoVille or Farm Town."

A respondent in the US said that she felt some degree of friendship when she helps gamer friends by sending an item from a viral request but that her priority is to help her gaming friends that she knows in real life. She further stated, "There's the time thing. It's a pain in the neck to do the wall thing. If it's someone I don't know, and they've sent me stuff, then yeah, I do want to help them out. But I'm not like my sister who worries that she might be annoying people when she ignores their request."

Another respondent stated that she doesn't feel any degree of friendship with viral game players when she's helping them complete a task, "I am just helping them because they ask. It's nothing to do with friendship or working toward a common goal." She then went on to state that she begins to feel that gamers are her friends when they begin to discuss real life issues either on her Facebook wall or in Facebook chat. She stated that she rarely discusses real life issues in games that have a chat facility because "you never know who is going to pop in a room and interrupt."

A two year monitoring of the official fora for the four games covered in this research revealed that the majority of the posts were of the 'I need help/neighbors' variety or official posts from the game developers announcing game updates and known technical issues. There was, however, a large percentage of posts in the 'off-topic' forum for all games. In these areas, game players discuss things that are not related to the game and tell jokes and banter back and forth. It is obvious from following the posts that some players interact with each other on a regular basis on the fora. Indeed several of the respondents in the study admitted that they friended gamers because they got to know them on the fora.

All of the respondents who have Facebook friended strangers to help play their games have ended up discussing events in their real life with these game playing friends. One woman in the UK stated, "I talk with gamer friends about what's going on in my life all the time. I find that very therapeutic." One woman in Italy said that she and another Italian woman used to get in their YoVille cars and race through the city of YoVille then meet up and sit in their cars and chat about what was going on in their real lives. She said that she became good friends with this other woman because they were online at the same time. She further stated that even though they live in the same country they've never met in real life. All of the respondents have friended people in other countries. The only hesitation about international friending came from an American woman who deleted anyone who posted on her FB page in Arabic because she was afraid that they may be a terrorist. All of the respondents who have friended previously unknown gaming friends stated that they would love to meet them face to face. One woman in Russia stated, "We talk on the phone and send packages for holidays to each other. Some of my FB friends have become my family. And we are planning to meet up soon."

All of the respondents have stopped playing certain games, usually FarmVille. Players who've stopped playing this popular game said that they got tired of the constant clicking and found the game boring and repetitive after a while. One Australian stated, "I stopped playing FarmVille because of the time limit with the crops. I had to make sure that I harvested my crops before they died. I would get up in the middle of the night to harvest crops. Also, FarmVille isn't social, you can't go talk to people. It got to the point where I'd be out somewhere in town and I'd think, 'Oh, I have to get home or my crops will die.' I loved decorating the farm, but I didn't like the time issue with the crops." Players who stopped playing Farm Town cited the lack of neighbors as the main reason. They said that they enjoyed the social interaction of the game but that it was frustrating when their friends were playing FarmVille. The respondents who stopped playing YoVille all stated that they stopped because of the constant need to spend real money in the game to acquire the items that they wanted. One player in Finland stated, "I didn't mind spending about $25 a month on the game, but then it became $50. When I realized that I needed to spend over $100 per month to get everything I wanted, I quit." The newest game included in this study was FrontierVille and it also had the biggest love/hate relationship among the gamers. One respondent said, "My favorite game now is FrontierVille, I don't know why, it's really beginning to irritate me. You have to harass people who don't play the game. You have get people who don't play the game to do things for you. I have a policy that I don't harass people who don't play the game. Also, the missions are just piling on. I have a notebook I use to keep the missions listed and what I need to do. I've had to give that up because there were too many missions I'd not completed." One respondent in the US, two days after participating in the interview for this study, posted on her Facebook wall, "FrontierVille friends: sorry but I can't play this stupid game anymore. It's too much work and takes too much time! I quit!!!"

3.4   Favorite Game

Although all of the respondents had played numerous games, the game that was the clear favorite was YoVille. YoVille is also the most interactive of the games examined in this study and is an immersive virtual world more like Second Life than a game with clearly defined goals. In YoVille, players buy goods with either YoCoins or YoCash. YoCoins are earned by working in the Factory and YoCash is purchased with actual currency. Because YoVille was such a favorite of the respondents it was decided to interview the administrators of the Facebook fan page Yo Junkies. Yo Junkies was started in January 2010 by a Canadian marketing executive who is also an avid player of the game and has over 16,000 subscribers. Like many fora and FB fan pages the Yo Junkies page has posters who post a lot then disappear. At any given time there are approximately 500 active users of the page.

The Yo Junkie's popularity rests with its professional layout and design as well as its focus on community with planned online parties (in YoVille), FB wall contests, a trading section and the general help and advice given to posters by the administrators and members. A typical example of this, posted April 26, 2011 follows: (sic)

Carol: Hey, I have a question that maybe you can help me with... I have been posting for over a week now the post for the hawaiian house and have gotten more than enough cosigners to help me I have not gotten my house what should I do? Thanks for your help.

Yo Junkies: Hi Carol. I've heard of this happening to other people too. My only advise is to submit a ticket to Zynga. Here's the link... http://support.zynga.com/CP_ContactUs?gameid=45&loc=en_US ... Good luck!

Carol: Thank bunches

YoJunkies You're welcome!

Yo Junkies was started by Lisa as the creator and sole administrator but she soon realized that she would need help if the page was to grow into the type of fan page that she envisioned. She stated that in the beginning "..it was a hobby. I didn't feel any pressure to be on 24/7. When I went on I was on, and when I wasn't there I wasn't. But after a while I realized that I needed help, even if it was just to have a second pair of eyes on the page to take care of the 'crazy' people who would post."

She went on to add, "It was a big deal for me to add the first other administrator to the page. By that time I'd already put a lot of effort into the brand and what's scary is that when you add someone as an administrator you're giving them the same powers that you have. They can go in and, if they want, they can delete the page."

Lisa has carefully added administrators for the fan page until she has a total of eight additional YoVille players working on the page. One of the crucial elements that she looks for in picking a new administrator is finding someone who has a balance in their life. She says that she doesn't want anyone who lives their entire life online or playing YoVille. "I want to build relationships while playing this game and I want to meet real people."

Using her background in marketing and event management Lisa has divided the duties of the volunteers to include: events; contests; op-ed; and has a photographer to shoot pictures of players houses and events and parties. She says that she's always thinking of ways to expand the page. Her co-administrators of the page agree with her saying, "She's always surprising us."

None of the Yo Junkies administrators have ever met in real life but they're planning to meet in the Autumn 2011.

4.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this research project was to examine gamers' view of friendship between players of both asynchronous (viral) and synchronous (social) Facebook social networking games. Results showed that gamers expressed a closer bond of friendship with gamer friends when they played games that had higher social elements embedded in the game. Respondents liked the decorating aspects of all the games examined but they became bored and frustrated when player interaction was concentrated on viral out of game elements. Games with a high social interaction level, such as YoVille and Farm Town, also have a greater 'sticky factor' of Daily Active Users compared to its number of Monthly Active Users as demonstrated in data generated from App Data.

Developers of social networking games who wish to increase the 'sticky factor' of their games should add more social elements in game play to retain players over a longer period of time and reduce the heavy churn rate of some popular games. Further research should also be conducted examining the relationship of 'sticky factor' of game titles and the amount of money that players spend playing the game.

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