

UNDERSTANDING USER MOTIVATIONS FOR PLAYING ONLINE SOCIAL  
NETWORK GAMES

By

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To my parents for their constant encouragement, and to my sister, who has always  
looked out for me

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SNG Social network games

SNS Social network sites

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This exploratory study into user motivations for playing online social network games utilized a uses and gratifications approach for conducting an online survey of Facebook™ groups dedicated to social network games. Several motivations for playing social network games were derived from prior studies on using social network sites and on playing video games. The findings showed participants were motivated to play social network games for entertainment and diversion purposes, and that the more traditional uses for social networking sites were not as important for them in the context of these games. Facebook™ groups were found to be a reliable source for recruiting a specific population, but a limited sample size suggests that they should be used in tandem with other sources.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

In 2009, online social network game (SNG) publisher Zynga® was described as being the “third-largest U.S. video-game publisher by market capitalization” (Satariano & Levy, 2009). For a small company specializing in web browser-based games, and which has been in operation only since 2007, this success is noteworthy (<http://www.zynga.com/about/facts.php>). *FarmVille*, one of the company’s more popular SNG titles, has brought in more than 75 million players a month (Kohler, 2010). A Google® search for Zynga® results in more than 13 billion hits.

As the success of Zynga® has shown, there is a target audience among social network users who enjoys playing these SNGs. This has led to a number of other companies investing time and resources into starting their own SNG sites. For instance, Disney purchased the SNG developer Playdom for approximately \$563 million (Bailey, 2010). Google® has made similar developer acquisitions, as well as making large investments in Zynga® itself (Watts, 2010a; Watts, 2010c). PopCap Games, maker of the popular puzzle game *Bejeweled Blitz*, has begun work on the creation of PopCap World, its own SNG site for Korea (Fahey, 2010).

With the rise of these new social network gaming platforms, understanding user motivations behind playing SNGs has become important. SNGs appear to be a unique medium in that they incorporate the qualities of both social networks and traditional video games. As such, they can potentially provide gratifications from both mediums. No academic research on the primary motivations behind SNG usage has been published to date. However, gratifications have been identified for using social networks

and for playing video games in several studies (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007; Li, 2008; Limperos, 2007; Lucas & Sherry, 2004; Urinsta, Dong, & Kay, 2009).

### **Social Network Sites**

Facebook™, one of the most popular social networking sites in the world, reported on its site (<http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>) that more than 400 million users utilize their accounts on a regular basis. Perhaps even more striking is the statement that about half that number log in to Facebook™ every day. Twitter, the popular microblogging site, has a user base that exceeds 145 million accounts (Williams, 2010). Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, and Zickuhr (2010) found that “73% of wired American teens now use social networking sites” (p. 2).

These numbers suggest that online social networks are becoming an integral part of how members of our society interact with one another. While each individual user may have only a small amount of contacts within their social networks, they can communicate with everyone within that network easily and efficiently. Shirky (2008) discussed how these social networks can also expand through the use of mutual acquaintances, or “friend-of-a-friend networking” (p. 219). As the population of social network users continues to grow, it can be expected that the gaming space found on these networks will also continue to grow in size and scope to attract more users. Facebook™ has signed a five-year contract with Zynga®, possibly to draw more SNG players to its site as well as keep current players content (The Associated Press, 2010).

### **Video Games**

Video games have grown from what was once considered a niche hobby into a significant category of media that has surpassed the movie industry in profits and audience (Chattfield, 2009). About 80% of teens have some sort of video gaming

console in their homes. (Lenhart et al., 2010). Nearly 8% of teens have stated they also “visit virtual worlds like Gaia, Second Life or Habbo Hotel” (p. 22). However, gaming has also been found to be a significant source of entertainment for adults, with 51% of adults between the ages of 20 and 49 owning a gaming console (Lenhart et al., 2010).

### **User Motivations for Playing SNGs**

Both online social network sites and video games have been fixtures in our society long enough to have inspired researchers to study user motivations. However, despite their rapidly growing success and user base, SNGs are a fairly new area of communications research that need more exploration. Referencing the two sets of existing research on social networks and on video game gratifications, this study examined the similarities and differences between SNG motivations and the motivations of social media and video games usage.

By conducting an online survey of SNG players, this study asked respondents to indicate what motivations were important to them for three types of media: social networks, SNGs, and video games. It then determined, through mean comparisons, if respondents played SNGs to derive similar gratifications as from using social networks or from playing traditional video games.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### An Overview of Social Networking Sites

While social networking sites have grown considerably in the last few years by adding new features and applications with which to perform a myriad of tasks, their primary focus of networked communication remains the same. Boyd and Ellison (2007) defined social networks as:

Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile with a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site. (para. 4).

These sites are designed for individuals to have simple and immediate access to others within their networks. While communication channels may vary from site to site, with common methods being private messages, public comments, text chat, or group messages, contact is nevertheless a fundamental part of the social network experience (Lenhart & Madden, 2007).

In terms of users, research has shown that people from a wide variety of backgrounds and educational levels use online social networks. Hargittai (2007) surveyed 18-to 19-year-old college students and found that race, ethnicity, and parental schooling levels did not indicate whether an individual would use social network sites. Boyd (2006) argued that social network users are actually assisted in culturally identifying themselves through participating in the online communities that exist on these sites. Nearly half the adult population of the United States has an account on a social network site (Lenhart et al., 2010).

There are distinct differences between the network of connections an individual constructs in an online setting and those constructed offline. Acar (2008) found that the size of one's online network tends to be much larger than that of the offline network. One explanation for this could be the abundance of weak ties that tend to proliferate rapidly on social networks. Van Cleemput (2010) surveyed secondary school students and found that those who classified themselves as having weak ties with another student were still "very often also friends on a social network site" (p. 81). Ellison et al. (2007) stated that the connection between weak ties and social networks lay solely in the idea that such ties can be maintained with a minimum amount of effort from both sides. Thus, the size of one's online network can accommodate those individuals for whom the user otherwise would not have time in an offline setting.

Gender has also proven to be a factor in exploring differences between online and offline social networks. Hargittai (2007) determined that females tended to use online SNS more than males. This was corroborated by Lenhart and Madden (2007), whose survey on teen usage of SNS also showed a higher rate of female implementation. Acar (2008) stated that "females were found to have more members in their online social networks than males and spend more time on the internet for social networking compared with the opposite gender" (p. 77). This indicates that females are more open to using SNS features to enhance both their online and offline networks, and place a higher degree of importance on cultivating online networks than males.

Psychosocial motivators, such as social anxiety, can play a role in online and offline social network variation. Acar (2008) determined that extroverted individuals tended to have very large networks online. However, Spraggins (2009) found that

loneliness, as a link between social anxiety and problematic internet use (PIU), or internet addiction, contributed to SNS usage. She stated that “PIU users note that they use the communicative functions of the internet over non-communicative functions” (p. 22-23). Ancu and Cozma (2009) had a similar finding, stating that “every time a medium with interactive features allows person-to-person communication, people will use that medium primarily for social interaction needs rather than for other types of needs” (p. 579). This awareness suggests that lonely individuals with a propensity toward internet use actively seek to address their social needs via online SNS. Caplan (2003) elucidated this point by stating that this conscious choice of medium is “characterized by beliefs that one is safe, more efficacious, more confident, and more comfortable with online interpersonal interactions and relationships than with traditional (face to face) social activities” (p. 629). This idea of comfortable communication was corroborated by Ellison et al. (2007), who found that Facebook™ use was higher with students who reported having lower self-esteem.

This comfort with online usage ties into the subject of internet efficacy, which has also been found to play a role in discrepancies between an individual’s online and offline social networks. Hargittai (2007) stated that a person’s knowledge of the internet, and their experience with using it, does not predict social network usage. Rather, it is how much time an individual devotes to online activities that is a stronger sign of whether he or she will employ SNS as a part of the social communicative process. Spraggins (2009) found that 69% of SNS users check their accounts daily. Of those users, nearly 15% reported upwards of 10 or more visits per day. Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) discovered that college student SNS users spent about 1.46 hours on

their accounts daily and had an average network size of about 236. Social network users seem to spend a large amount of time on the internet, and may be in the habit of continually monitoring their online networks throughout the day. While this pattern of use may lead to greater internet efficacy over time, it does not necessarily mean that a user must have a great understanding of the internet to use social networks.

### **Social Network Site User Motivations**

Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) declared the five main motivations for internet use to be interpersonal utility, passing the time, information seeking, convenience, and entertainment. Several of these perceived internet gratifications have been identified for SNS usage through a number of studies (Ancu & Cozma, 2009; Baltaretu & Balaban, 2010; Dunne & Lawlor, 2010; Ellison et al., 2007; Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Li, 2008; Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). As such, people may approach SNS as an extension of what they primarily use the internet for. Among the highest ranked motivations for SNS are relationship maintenance, interactivity, information sharing, and diversion, all of which have direct analogues to the original internet motives listed by Papacharissi and Rubin (2000).

### **Relationship Maintenance**

Li (2008) stated that relationship maintenance as a motivation could be understood by the fact that “keeping in touch with old friends and family members is easy, fast, convenient and more fun in a social networking site” (p. 52). In her survey of American and Chinese university students’ use of SNS, relationship maintenance had a mean score of 6.18 on a 7-point Likert scale, marking it as the highest ranked motivation. An overwhelming 96% of Raacke and Bonds-Raacke’s (2008) survey participants indicated they used SNS to remain connected with old friends. Additionally,

Uriza et al. (2009) found that focus group participants “noted the capacity to stay in touch with friends was one of the most attractive features for using SNS” (p. 222). Baltarutu and Balaban (2010) added to this finding by stating that users “believed SNS strengthened friendship relationships” (p. 71).

Social networks contain a variety of features that make them conducive to keeping connected with others. For example, Facebook™ allows users to invite people they know to their network, exchange messages, and post on one another’s walls. Ellison et al. (2007) cited that one of the main features of SNS is the ability to “maintain existing offline relationships or to solidify what would otherwise be ephemeral, temporary acquaintanceships” (para. 36). As showcased by these studies, users are continually drawn to use social networks as an easy method of communicating with ever-growing and loosely connected online and offline networks. Even as social networks continue to add a multitude of new features, it seems that users have not lost sight of their original purpose.

### **Interactivity**

Social networks offer a variety of ways for users to set up and modify their networks and the information that they share, as well as provide feedback to others. These can be described as interactive features, and they contribute substantially to user motivations for using SNS. According to Baltarutu and Balaban (2010), individuals identified as being frequent SNS users stated that discovering new information about others was a main gratification to the SNS experience. Madge et al. (2009) found that students “specifically joined Facebook pre-registration as a means of making new face-to-face friends at university” (p. 143-144). This ability to communicate with strangers is an important distinction from the relationship maintenance gratification, because there is

no pre-defined relationship. Users are using SNS to help establish new connections or learn information for future decision making. Li (2008) described these interactive features as allowing users to “connect to those who share the same interests or values, without being restricted by geographical or other limits” (p. 52).

Urista et al. (2009) mentioned that SNS “empower individuals to communicate with others at a rate and manner that he or she desires” (p. 222). Users recognize that there is less sense of urgency to social network communication, which they perceive to be a beneficial aspect. Individuals may post updates and respond to others at their own discretion. They also have several methods to do so, from writing out elaborate posts to simply “liking” the status of another user. More than half of the college students Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) surveyed stated when they used SNS, they liked to post pictures or look at pictures of others.

In a focus group study by Baltarutu and Balaban (2010), a participant said that in the online setting of SNS “you can open up easier in front of a person you do not know” (p. 71). Li (2008) also found that the popularity of interactive features on social networks reflects users’ intentions to engage people they otherwise might not have contacted. The present study chose to distinguish between relationship maintenance and interactivity, since the goals behind these motivations seem to be different. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the theme of communication continues to hold a great deal of importance overall in providing motivation for users to employ social networks as a part of their lives.

### **Information Sharing**

While relationship maintenance lies in upholding pre-existing social ties and interactivity is centered on searching for and creating new social ties, information

sharing motivations stem from a user's desire to actively be sought after. Urista et al. (2009) stated, as part of their uses and gratifications theory for SNS motivations, that "members use SNS ... as an ongoing way to seek the approval and support of other people" (p. 226). Given the ease with which social networks allow users to present information about themselves via user profiles, post content updates about important issues, provide links, share photos, and generate discussion threads, social networks become an avenue by which users can participate in the greater information-sharing capabilities of the World Wide Web.

Boyd and Ellison (2007) said that while SNS do allow users to search for and establish new connections, users "are primarily communicating with people who are already a part of their extended social networks" (para. 6). In other words, SNS users can be likened to private "broadcasters" to an audience that he or she creates and gives access" (Urista et al., 2009, p. 226). Unlike typical relationship maintenance motivations that are more concerned with the personal life of the user, however, information sharing often relates more to social and worldly issues. For example, Ancu and Cozma (2009) found that visitors of political candidate profiles on the social network site Myspace were concerned equally with both social interaction and information-seeking motivations. The social network site provided them with an outlet that not only allowed them to discover new facts about the candidates, but also gave them an opportunity to discuss their own viewpoints with other politically interested individuals.

This ability for information exchange, while not unique to SNS sites, has been found to be an important aspect. Li (2008) stated that "unlike traditionally looking for information online, social networking sites are used as a medium for exchange and

share [*sic*] of information” (p. 53). When used in conjunction with relationship maintenance and interactivity, it becomes clear that SNS offer a comprehensive amount of communicative ability within groups. Users can create their own groups and control who joins them, or they may seek out groups to join. Using the same array of functions, users can interact, to varying degrees of complexity, with one another to cover a range of goals. While not explicitly identified as a social network user motivation, the convenience gratification found by Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) does seem to play a role when considering the popularity of social networks, given the inherent ease of information sharing.

## **Diversion**

While the capability to undertake such a range of communicative tasks makes the social network gratifications discussed understandable, there is one final motivation that has been identified as being nearly as important to users—and it has little or nothing to do with communication whatsoever. The notion that social networks are being used as an entertainment medium stems largely from the findings of recent uses and gratifications studies on the subject. When Ancu and Cozma (2009) asked SNS users why they visited political Myspace profiles, they discovered that after social interaction and information seeking, entertainment was the next highest motivating factor. This finding was consistent with what Li (2008) found in her survey of American and Chinese college students’ uses of SNS, where diversion was ranked the second highest of all the gratifications tested. Li clarified this by stating:

Diversion in this study includes entertainment, escape and passing time, but among these aspects people are most likely to say that they use SNS because it is fun and entertaining. Since social networking sites enable users to communicate with old friends, interact with each other, share interesting things, and present and express themselves, people feel that

these sites are fun and entertaining and begin to enjoy using them. Therefore, similar to watching television, listening to the radio and other kind of media consumption, using social networking sites is also an activity that brings people enjoyment and release. (p. 53).

Users seem to be spending an increasing amount of time utilizing SNS due to the sites' intuitiveness and multitude of features. Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) found SNS users spent an average of nearly two hours of their time online at these sites every day. It would be difficult to imagine that they would be visiting these sites at such a rate if they did not find the activities present there to be enjoyable in some capacity.

There is an acknowledgment among both users and non-users of SNS that a great deal of time can be invested in them. When Baltarutu and Balaban (2010) asked focus group participants who used social networks only sparingly (about twice a week) to define users of SNS, the phrases "young people with a lot of free time" and "young and bored" were frequently used (p. 72). Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) found that the two most popular failed gratifications (for not using social networks), as reported by SNS users who knew such individuals, were "they are too busy" and "they think it is a waste of time" (p. 171).

SNS are being identified increasingly as more than simply a communications tool. They have become a media platform unto themselves, and have developed their own set of user motivations with which to attract new participants. Among these, the ability to satisfy the diversion gratification is growing with the addition of other entertainment mediums that are working in tandem with features of SNS to cross new barriers and entice new fans. One such example of this is the introduction of online games to social networking sites.

## Social Network Games

*Mafia Wars*, an SNG developed by Zynga® for Facebook™ in which users virtually enact crime-themed activities, is “generating an estimated 21,218,834 monthly active uniques [individual user accounts] as they register over one billion player-vs.-player actions, 30 million tournament matches, 600 million fights, and 300 million robberies” (Ries, 2010, para. 5). The success of *Mafia Wars* reflects the increasing number of users coming to social networks for more than just communication features. With video games becoming more accessible via consoles, cell phones, smartphones, and browser applications, adapting them for use on social networks and integrating their features has proven to be not only a foregone conclusion, but a successful one as well. Kohler (2010) noted that “such ‘social games’ on Facebook have quietly turned time-waster appeal into big business: close to 100 of them boast more than a million active users each, and Facebook says 100 million unique people play just the top 10 games on the site every month” (para. 12).

Lenhart et al. (2010) found evidence that nearly half of all adults in the United States age 20 to 49 play console video games, and that 73% of adults have Facebook™ accounts. There has been little, if any, academic research published that examines user motivations for playing SNGs. Anecdotal evidence from news stories on the success of SNGs has given some insight into the gratifications sought by players (Kohler, 2010; Ries, 2010). However, more research is needed on SNG player motives.

Researchers have examined motivations for playing video games on a variety of platforms such as the Sony PlayStation®, Microsoft Xbox®, and on personal computers (Green & McNeese, 2008; Greenberg, Sherry, Lachlan, Lucas, & Holmstrom, 2010; Jansz, Avis, & Vosmeer, 2010; Limperos, 2007; Lucas & Sherry, 2004; Sherry, Lucas,

Greenberg, & Lachlan, 2006). The lines between platforms have blurred in recent times, with modern consoles having access to online play and many games having multi-platform releases, including computers. Lucas and Sherry (2004) explained the advantages of video games by stating:

First, video games can serve as a central activity for interpersonal interaction, providing an activity for friends to share (similar to playing cards, board games, or engaging in physical recreation). Second, online video gamers, who may appear to others to be playing alone, can interact with others across the game network and establish new friendships (and in some cases, romantic relationships) through the computer-mediated communication offered by the game. Third, similar to the personal connections that some people feel toward television characters, video games and their characters can provide a source of parasocial relationships for the game player. (p. 501).

Through the identification of user motives for playing video games, the present study explored similar motives for social network games.

### **Video Game Player Backgrounds and Motivations**

Green and McNeese (2008) conducted a secondary analysis of the Education Longitudinal Study, which looks at the progression of individuals from high school to college or the workforce, to identify indicators of video game usage. They found that gender, race, and a desire for social gratification were directly linked with the amount of time users spent playing video games. In regards to gender, male users tended to play games more often than females. Greenberg et al. (2010) looked at the differences in video game use between both age and gender, and reported that “overall, males average 18.6 hours per week, more than twice the weekly average of 8.2 for females” (p. 246). Sherry et al. (2006) found that the average amount of time 18- to 22-year olds spent playing video games was about 11 hours a week “with boys reporting playing more than twice as many hours per week as girls reported playing” (p. 220). Jansz et al.

(2010) found *The Sims 2* players also spent about 11 hours a week with the game, but the authors also reported that 84% of the respondents were female, indicating that gender may not be as strict an indication of time spent with games as much as the game's genre. However, it is important to note that playtime "amounted to about 35 per cent of their leisure time" (Jansz et al., 2010, p. 244).

Prominent video game gratifications include entertainment, social interaction, diversion, challenge, arousal, and competition (Greenberg et al., 2010; Jansz et al., 2010; Limperos, 2007; Lucas & Sherry, 2004; Sherry et al., 2006). From a cursory examination of these motivations, players of video games seem to be drawn towards stimulation (arousal and challenge), ability to pass the time (diversion and entertainment), and the capacity of the platform to be used for social activities (social interaction and competition). Several of these gratifications are notable for their similarities to user motivations for using social networks; however, the interpretations of them tend towards different conclusions.

Another important note that can be made is that researchers have found that gender can affect the way an individual rates any given motivation. For example, Lucas and Sherry (2004) stated that "social interaction was the lowest gratification for young women but the second highest gratification for young men" (p. 514). Greenberg et al. (2010) noted that challenge, arousal, diversion, and social interaction all ranked higher on the gratifications scale for males than they did for females. The competition gratification was discovered to hold equal importance across gender, suggesting that certain elements of games may appeal equally to males and females.

## **Stimulation motivations**

Video games can employ a variety of visual and auditory stimuli designed to capture the attention of players. These features can range from colorful, vibrant, and playful landscapes like those found in *Super Mario Galaxy* to the gritty, realistic, and scarred battlegrounds of the *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* series. The player's ability to traverse and experience these worlds while pursuing the goals of the game have been found to be a primary motivation in playing video games (Lucas & Sherry, 2004).

Sherry et al. (2006) defined the arousal gratification as the way games "stimulate emotions as a result of fast action and high-quality graphics" (p. 217). In other words, people who found that playing video games satisfied arousal gratifications felt they did so because "the game is exciting" (Lucas & Sherry, 2004, p. 503). Greenberg et al. (2010) noted that arousal was found to be more important to males than females. This ties in with their findings that males also tended to prefer "physical games (e.g., action, racing, sports)" (p. 247). As such, it appears that games that provide a more visceral experience, require more reflex-based timing, and rely on advanced graphics and sound are more appealing to a male audience looking to satisfy arousal gratifications. These same players were also found to spend more time each week, on average, playing video games than those seeking other gratifications. Sherry et al. (2006) listed arousal as one of the three gratifications that could best be used to predict a person's total time spent playing games. Essentially, the more a player sought to fulfill arousal gratifications through the playing of video games, the more time they were willing to spend with the medium doing so.

Challenge, a distinctive gratification to gaming media, has also been found to be one of its primary motivations for use. Whether the goal is to complete the current

stage, achieve a high score, solve a puzzle, defeat an opponent, or complete some task a player sets out to master, there is always some goal to accomplish in a game. Sherry et al. (2006) stated that users “enjoy playing video games to push themselves to a higher level of skill or personal accomplishment” (p. 217). The researchers found that players often play games from a specific genre they feel comfortable with in order to hone their capabilities and push themselves. Limperos (2007) stated that “it is likely that individuals are purposeful in their selection of certain video games (like other media) because they have the opportunity to choose which type of game they play” (p. 4). For example, someone who plays a racing game to a level of mastery is likely to try playing another racing game. This gives them the opportunity to continue to use the skills they acquired, but in a game that offers different challenges for them.

Continuing the theme of gender differences in motivations for video game use, Jansz et al. (2010) found in their study of *The Sims 2* that challenge was less of a concern for female players than male players. Regardless of this discrepancy between genders, it is still worth noting that while females reported challenge as being less important, it was still ranked highly and considered an important motivation overall (p. 245). However, Lucas and Sherry (2004), who did not measure motivations for any specific game, found challenge to be ranked the highest of all motivations for gamers between the age of 18 and 24, regardless of gender. This finding was corroborated by Greenberg et al. (2010), who stated that challenge was a “primary gratification for both sexes” (p. 246). Therefore, the importance of challenge as a motivation may have closer ties to game genre than to player gender.

The importance of challenge and arousal motivations was found to differ according to the age of the player. Arousal was found to be more important the younger the user was, with 5th grade survey respondents stating it to be a primary focus as compared to 8th grade, 11th grade, and college students (Greenberg et al., 2010). While still holding relevance among older users, the prominence of arousal as a motivation lost place over time. Challenge, however, was rated as a top gratification consistently among all age groups surveyed. This indicates that, while more flashy and technically impressive effects will catch the eye of certain video game players, it is the ability to overcome obstacles that matters most. It also suggests that a game with simple graphics and sound, such as browser-based and phone-based games, will not necessarily detract from its user base if targeted towards older gamers.

### **Pastime motivations**

As an entertainment medium, video games are not surprisingly a source of amusement-based motivations for users. Limperos (2007) stated that “individuals who played for longer amounts of time were doing so primarily for arousing entertainment, social inclusion, and relaxation” (p. 18). Jansz et al. (2010) found that enjoyment was ranked as the highest motivation for *The Sims 2* players for both male and female players. Some players seem to identify video games to be mainly a fun pastime that provides an avenue of escape from daily concerns. This link between entertainment and diversion suggests that users who are motivated by one will also be motivated by the other.

Sherry et al. (2006) stated that users motivated by the diversion gratification will play video games “to fill time, relax, escape from stress, or because there is nothing else to do” (p. 217). Video games are widely accessible in today’s world. They can be

played on the computer, on cell phones, through video game consoles and handhelds, and even in basic internet browsers online. This makes them an attractive option for those who have spare time on their hands, regardless of their physical location.

Greenberg et al. (2010) found that diversion was one of four primary gratifications sought by male players, beating out lesser motivations such as realism, hi-tech, and ego. Sherry et al. (2006) stated that diversion was one of “the most important predictors of time spent playing video games per hour” (p. 221). Greenberg et al. (2010) confirmed this with their finding of diversion being the most “common motivator contributing to playing time” across both genders and multiple age groups (pp. 248-249).

Directly related to the users’ capacity for viewing games as a diversionary pastime is how much entertainment value players derive from the experience of playing video games. Matsuba (2006) remarked on how some internet users will play games online specifically for the reason of entertainment and not for any social benefits. Limperos (2007) surveyed video game players to test game motivations, including entertainment, that were derived from “interpersonal, media, and sport viewing motivation measures” (p. 17). Entertainment was not only discovered to be a highly rated motivation but, like diversion, was also an indicator for how long a user played video games. Jansz et al. (2010) did not test subjects for an entertainment gratification, but their use of the enjoyment motivation covered similar ground as a “non-specific motivation” that could be “applicable to different kinds of games” (p. 245). The enjoyment motivation was discovered to be the primary reason that respondents played the video game *The Sims* 2.

## **Social activity motivations**

Since their inception, video games have had the capacity to be used as a social medium. Sherry et al. (2006) found that social interaction was “the main reason many individuals got involved in playing video games as a child” (p. 218). In addition to being a common focal point that users can gather around for conversation, the gaming medium has often encouraged play among multiple users. Modern consoles such as the Xbox 360™, PlayStation® 3, and the Nintendo Wii™ all have multiple controller inputs. Even the original *Pong* video game consoles were meant to be played with a minimum of two people. Online capabilities have allowed users to transcend the limitations of having everyone under one roof, and games can now be played nearly anywhere and at any time. Lucas and Sherry (2004) stated that “online video gamers, who may appear to others to be playing alone, can interact with others across the game network and establish new friendships” (p. 501). This online connectivity, in turn, has added to the competitive value of video games as users can seek and play against new opponents of various skill levels. However, while social interaction and competition have been found to be important motivations for video game use, there is evidence to suggest that they do not appeal to all game players (Greenberg et al., 2010; Jansz et al., 2010; Limperos, 2007; Lucas & Sherry, 2004; Sherry et al., 2006).

Social interaction refers to the way in which games can be played with other users. Sherry et al. (2006) said that “many now use video games to interact with friends and learn about the personalities of others” (p. 218). This communal gaming motivation can lead users to play games for longer lengths of time than other gratifications (Limperos, 2007; Sherry et al., 2006). However, social interaction as a motivation can differ with gender and game genre. Lucas and Sherry (2004) noted that while males seemed to

value the social nature of gaming as an activity, females viewed it as considerably less important. Greenberg et al. (2010) also found the magnitude of social gratification was much higher for men than it was for women. In addition, game genre was found to be a determining factor for the importance of social interaction among users. Jansz et al. (2010) stated that social interaction ranked as the lowest gratification sought for players of *The Sims 2*, a single-player simulation game. As such, it can be expected that games of a more solitary nature would preclude social interaction as being a primary gratification. It should also be noted that the majority of the Jansz et al. (2010) respondent base was female, leading them to state that “female gamers were far less driven by social motives” (p. 246).

Competition has been described as the desire “to be the best player of the game” (Lucas & Sherry, 2004, p. 503). Greenberg et al. (2010) found that the importance of competition did vary by age, with 5th grade students rating it lower than 8th, 11th, and college students. Sherry et al. (2006) found that competition was ranked the second most important gratification sought among users. The authors found that “players enjoyed the challenge of ‘beating the game,’ but also of beating friends” (p. 221). This finding indicates an important distinction between challenge and competition motivations, since one is indicative of a more single-player experience while the other has more social connotations. Limperos (2007) observed that those who played games for competition motivations tended to play “for extended amounts of time” (p. 18). Greenberg et al. (2010) noted that “more avid game players become more competitive in other social activities, and that winning becomes an even more important social goal for them” (p. 253).

## **A Comparison of SNS and Video Game Gratifications**

Between the gratifications examined in the literature for users of both video games and social networks, several key points stand out. Social network gratifications revolve around socializing and gathering information. Motivations such as information sharing, interactivity, and relationship maintenance all showcase that users enjoy being able to learn about and communicate with others on their own time and at their own pace. Many SNGs, given their presence on social network platforms, have features that allow users to share their activities, check on the progress of friends, and send messages throughout the games. Given these similarities, the author proposes the following question:

RQ1: How similar or different are the motives for using social network sites and playing social network games?

While SNGs tend to be more simplistic than console and computer-based video games, and are limited to being played on social networks, they do have many characteristics in common. According to the literature reviewed, video game gratifications center largely on the pursuit of active and engaging entertainment. Players can seek to be aroused by the medium, with a focus on graphics and sound, or to have their skills within the game tested. There are social elements to gaming as well, with the medium allowing for interaction among players in both competitive and cooperative ways. SNGs are still a young medium, and since they are often played through Web browsers and utilize comparably simple programming (compared with console game counterparts), it cannot be said for certain that they are played for the same reasons.

Therefore, the author seeks to answer the question:

RQ2: How similar or different are the motives for playing video games and playing social network games?

Diversion is a unique motivation in that has been found to be a top motivation for users of both social network sites and video games. This finding suggests that some users see playing video games and spending time on social networks as free-time activities. Given the prominence of this motivation throughout the research, it should be included in determining the uses for social network games. Therefore, diversion will be tested as a motivation for social networks, video games, and SNGs to determine whether it can be classified as a shared motivation among the three media.

While users may find themselves going to social networks increasingly because of applications like SNGs, they must have an account on these sites to play the games to begin with. While not everyone on a social network plays SNGs, everyone who plays SNGs is on a social network. This would lead one to believe that while users may have different motivations for playing SNGs, they may have had similar motivations for joining the social network in the first place. This leads the author to make the following hypothesis:

H1: Users' motives for playing social network games will be more similar to social network site motives than video game motives.

### **Uses and Gratifications Theory**

Studies on social network sites and video games mostly use the uses and gratifications approach as the framework to studying uses (Anzu & Cozma, 2009; Baltaretu & Balaban, 2010; Dunne & Rowley, 2010; Jansz & Vosmeer, 2010; Li, 2008; Limperos, 2007; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Sherry et al., 2006; Urista et al., 2009). Since uses and gratifications has been shown to be an effective approach to

studying both social network sites and video game motivations, the present study also used the uses and gratifications approach to understand users motivations for playing SNGs.

Uses and gratifications theory came about in response to researchers looking to fill in the gaps of early communication studies. Instead of perceiving media users as being passive participants, Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973) stated that “audience needs ... deserved as much attention in their own right as the persuasive aims of communicators with which so many of the early ‘effects’ studies had been preoccupied” (p. 518). Rather than focusing directly on the effects or goals of the media, uses and gratifications is concerned with the active selection of media by the consumer. Limperos (2007) made the point that “individual characteristics influence needs, which moderate media selection” (p. 3). It is this particular notion of the active user that is integral to the uses and gratifications theoretical background, since it aids researchers in determining why people use certain media. Uses and gratifications recognizes that users consciously choose media, not the other way around, and as such focuses on that important distinction. Dunne and Lawlor (2010) noted the theory’s adaptability to “match the dominant or emerging media of the day” (p. 47). This, in part, explains its popularity in exploring new media and their audiences. Swanson (1979) stated that “the uses and gratifications approach is, in part, a repudiation of ... assumptions about persons as essentially passive receivers of powerful media messages” (p. 4).

McQuail (2005) defined uses and gratifications as “a version of individualistic functional theory and research that seeks to explain the uses of media and the satisfactions derived from them in terms of the motives and self-perceived needs of

audience members” (p. 569). The idea that these gratifications are recognized by the user is what allows uses and gratifications research to make headway in discovering user motivations. Katz et al. (1973) discussed the five elements required of a uses and gratifications model. These consist of: an active audience; the audience choosing a particular medium to satisfy need gratification; a variety of media choices that compete for the user’s attention; an audience that is acutely aware of their needs and gratifications and can report them; and a neutral perspective when discussing the “cultural significance of mass communication while audience orientations are explored on their own terms” (p. 511). When these requirements are met, reliable research through the user’s own reports can be collected to determine what the user perceives to be the reasons for consciously choosing certain types of features over others. Essentially, uses and gratifications “has always been a model of consumer choice of new media innovations” (Stafford, Stafford, & Schkade, 2004, p. 265).

Uses and gratifications has received some criticism from research scholars in regards to the legitimacy of its identity as a theoretical background. O’Donohoe (1993) had concerns about “the validity of self-reports on the uses or gratifications obtained from the media” (p. 54). Ruggiero (2000) noted several problems with the uses and gratifications approach, which included its focus on the individual, the compartmentalization of studies that produce their own sets of motives, unclear central concepts, researchers with different perspectives on user motives and needs, and the assumption of an active and aware audience. There is also the concern about the relationship between a medium and content, and how controlling for one without the other can affect whether the results can truly be universally applied. Bantz (1982) stated

that without considering these factors, a researcher could not know “whether the pattern of uses found is a consequence of the medium, its content, or their interaction” (p. 354).

Communication researchers have used uses and gratifications to study almost every communication technology, including the internet. Li (2008) noted how uses and gratifications has been applied to find the differences in audience motivations for internet use, given its need for active participation from the user to “click and search to have access to certain content” (p. 17). In this instance, the characteristics of the internet guarantees the prerequisites of an active audience. This idea was also confirmed by Dunne and Lawlor (2010), who stated that “while one could argue over the degree to which a user is active in relation to media such as television or radio, the internet as a media form negates this criticism” (p. 54).

Furthermore, Dunne and Lawlor (2010) commented on how “there is a meager body of empirical research pertaining to an exploration of the possible application of U and G in an online context” (p. 53). This showcases a need for further uses and gratifications research in the realm of internet usage. Ruggiero (2000) stated that “a typology of uses, although not providing what some scholars would consider a refined theoretical perspective, furnishes a benchmark base of data for other studies to further examine media use” (p. 12). By examining prior uses and gratifications research, dominant motivations can be identified and used for future studies.

McQuail (2005) declared that the goal of utilizing the uses and gratifications premise “was to reach some general theoretical framework within which to place the many particular findings about audience motivations” (p. 425). As such, uses and gratifications continues to be a popular choice for structuring exploratory studies into

determining audience aims for media consumption. Ruggiero (2000) stated that “as new technologies present people with more and more media choices, motivation and satisfaction become even more crucial components of audience analysis” (p. 14). By allowing users to identify and discuss their motivations for themselves, uses and gratifications gives researchers the opportunity to learn why people choose and engage with media. The present study adopted the uses and gratifications approach to give SNG players the ability to identify the motivations that they deemed important for their continued use of this new media format.

## CHAPTER 3 METHODS

### **Online Survey Research and Target Population**

Babbie (2010) wrote that “survey research is probably the best method available to the social researcher who is interested in collecting original data for describing a population too large to observe directly” (p. 254). For the purposes of this study, the target population was individuals who engage in moderate to heavy usage of online SNGs. This was defined as playing SNGs at least once a week. This group is a subset of the large population of social network users in the United States, who utilize sites such as Facebook™, Myspace, and LinkedIn. Given the target population’s familiarity with the online setting, as well as the use of surveys in previous social network and video game uses and gratifications research, an online survey was conducted.

Researchers have identified a number of reasons for using surveys, both online and offline, for uses and gratifications studies. Jansz et al. (2010) noted that, with online surveys, “because of the immediate interactive question-and-answer procedure, the chances of the participants actually submitting the completed questionnaire are far greater than with a traditional mail survey” (p. 240). Ancu and Cozma (2009) lauded the variety of ways in which online surveys could be dispersed to the target population, such as through “snowball and direct solicitation techniques” (p. 572). Surveys also lend themselves to the uses and gratifications prerequisite of active audience members who are cognizant of their motivations for using media, and therefore are able to select these motivations from a listed format. As such, many researchers have elected to use surveys to examine uses and gratifications (Ancu & Cozma, 2009; Greenberg et al.,

2008; Jansz et al., 2010; Li, 2008; Lucas & Sherry, 2004; Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009).

One of the main criticisms of online survey research is concern for achieving a representative sample (Babbie, 2010). Given the requirement of internet efficacy inherent to the target population of avid SNG players, this criticism is largely irrelevant to this study. To understand why users play SNGs, it is important that the survey reaches individuals who are active in their use of them. Therefore, the researcher surmised that reaching out to active SNG players through a medium they are comfortable with, the internet, would aid in collecting an accurate and representative sample. To recruit participants for the survey, a method used successfully in a previous online survey study was replicated. Li (2008) utilized Facebook™ groups to find participants who matched the criteria for her survey and posted links to the survey in those groups. Many popular SNGs, such as *FarmVille* and *Mafia Wars*, have their own Facebook™ fan pages and groups. Groups were used in a similar way to recruit participants for this survey. By posting links to the survey on these pages and groups, with the permission and aid of the moderators, members of the target population were made aware of the study and offered a way to participate.

Once a link to the survey was posted on a Facebook™ group, with a small description of the survey and its purpose attached, the link was monitored to make sure it was not removed by group moderators. When the posted link scrolled down to a point where it was no longer displayed on the main Facebook™ group page, reminders were posted to encourage participation and raise the response rate. A total of 39 Facebook™ groups, representing 13 SNGs, were contacted and had the survey posted. The survey

was posted on a noticeable part of each group page for a two-week period in January 2011. A total of 104 responses were collected, and the  $n$  total used was 89. A total of 15 responses were eliminated due to individuals either not meeting the minimum age requirement of 18 or not completing the entire survey.

### **Motivation Testing**

A selection of nine motivations identified from previous social network and video game studies were changed to be more applicable to SNGs and tested using a Likert scale. The Likert scale used for the survey went from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with 3 (neither agree nor disagree) showcasing neutrality. Participants were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed/disagreed with these motivation statements. In addition, participants were also asked to rate these motivations as they pertain to their social network habits and, if applicable, their video gaming habits.

These statements, which have been adapted from similar uses and gratifications surveys, were then analyzed and compared (Li, 2008; Lucas & Sherry, 2004). This analysis was performed using a statistical analysis software program (SPSS) as well as the Qualtrics survey software through which the survey was distributed. A chi-square test could not be performed since an  $n$  of 89 was found to be too small, even with collapsed categories. Pearson's correlation coefficient could not be performed because of the small sample size. Therefore, by comparing the means, it was determined which motivations for SNGs were most important to the sample population. The nine motivations are as follows:

- **Relationship maintenance:** This social network motivation is concerned with the use of SNGs as a way to maintain ties with others. “I play social network games to keep in touch with people I don’t see frequently.”

- **Interactivity:** This social network motivation focuses on the use of interactive features, such as searching for gaming communities, providing comments, or receiving comments from other players. “I play social network games to receive comments on my progress; I play social network games to comment on other players’ progress.”
- **Information sharing:** This social network motivation identifies the ability to share one’s accomplishments, activities, strategies, tips, and other information in the games. “I play social network games to share my progress in the game; I play social network games to observe the status of other players; I play social network games to connect with people who share the same interests.”
- **Competition:** This video game motivation highlights the struggle between two or more players of the same game in determining who is the best. “I play social network games to prove to my friends that I am the best at a certain game; I play social network games to beat my friends’ scores.”
- **Challenge:** This video game motivation focuses on the user’s attempts to accomplish particular goals, such as solving puzzles or attaining personal best scores. “I play social network games to achieve a goal within the game; I play social network games to get a high score.”
- **Social interaction:** This video game motivation describes the use of SNGs as a way to spend time with others. Rather than relationship maintenance, which focuses on communication between players within the game, social interaction focuses on the actual act of playing the game with others. “I play social network games to meet new people online; I play social network games to play with my friends.”
- **Entertainment:** This video game motivation showcases the use of SNG as an enjoyable pastime. “I play social network games to have fun.”
- **Arousal:** This video game motivation presents the way SNGs can stimulate users into feeling strong emotions such as excitement, tension, and anger. “I play social network games to feel excitement.”
- **Diversion:** This shared motivation derived from both social networks and video game studies highlights the use of SNGs as a way for users to alleviate boredom or take up free time. “I play social network games to pass the time.”

## Demographics

For the purposes of collecting data to aid in identifying some of the characteristics of the average SNG user, several demographic questions were asked in the survey. These included gender, age, race, and education level. In addition, participants were

also asked several questions pertaining to their SNG usage habits. These questions aided in identifying exactly how active the users were in playing these games by asking how many days they played during a typical week, and for how many minutes or hours a given session typically lasted. This was important for filtering out nonusers. Users were also asked “where do you mostly play social network games” to identify their physical location when playing, as well as “on what social network site(s) do you play social network games” for their virtual location. Finally, a question asking users to state which SNGs they liked to play was added to aid in determining not only what are the most popular types of SNGs, but also whether a specific group of players participated in the survey over others.

### **Pretesting**

The survey was pretested over the period of a week before officially being launched. A total of 30 individuals completed the survey and were asked to report any problems they had with understanding, clarity, grammar, and the survey software. Some small grammatical changes were made between the pretest and actual survey launch, but the content of the questions remained the same.

## CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

### Survey Demographics

The Facebook™ groups contacted had varying membership sizes, with the largest, “Zoo World,” having a total of 29,237 members, while the smallest, “Treasure Island Friends,” had only 32 members. Groups were chosen by looking up the most popular SNG titles, and then finding public groups on Facebook™ dedicated to them (<http://www.appdata.com/leaderboard/apps>).

The majority of SNG players (n=89) surveyed identified themselves as female (85%), and the three age groupings of 26-30, 31-35, and 36-40 made up 47% of the total survey population, with 26-30 and 31-35 tying for largest group at 17% each. The majority of participants were White/Caucasian (78%). In terms of education, 29% stated “some college” as the highest level completed, followed by a high school degree or GED (19%) and bachelor’s degree (18%).

Respondents (n=89) all selected Facebook™ as an avenue for playing SNGs, which was not surprising given the method of recruitment. No participants stated that they played SNGs on Myspace, and only seven (8%) indicated they played SNGs on other platforms.

When asked “in a typical week, how often do you play social network games,” the majority of respondents stated “every day” (72%). The next most popular selection was “5 to 6 days a week,” which was chosen by 15 participants out of 89 (17%). In response to the question “how much time do you spend playing social network games on an average day when you play,” 32 (36%) indicated that they play for “3 or more hours.” In terms of how many games participants played, 18 (20%) stated they played at least five

SNGs. A total of 66% of participants had been playing SNGs for longer than one year.

As for the physical location where SNGs are most commonly played, 84 participants (94%) stated they play at home, while work ranked second with 15%.

### **Comparison of SNS and SNG Motives**

RQ1 dealt with comparing how similar or different the motives for using social networks and playing SNGs are to each other. To fulfill this goal, respondents were presented with motivation statements for both social networks and SNGs and asked to rate their agreement via a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). It was found that diversion was the only shared motivation to score above a four (agree) when respondents were asked their motivations for using social networks and SNGs. Since an *n* of 89 was deemed too small to reliably perform a *chi-square* statistical analysis, even with collapsed categories, total means were compared to derive a possible understanding into what SNG players' motivations are (Table A-1).

In terms of social network usage, participants (*n*=89) responded positively towards relationship maintenance and diversion. More than three-fourths, or 79%, of individuals agreed ( $M=4.12$ ,  $SD=1.05$ ) using social networks is a way "to connect with people I don't see often." Diversion scored the next highest, with 76% of individuals agreeing ( $M=4.02$ ,  $SD=0.97$ ) with the statement that they use social networks "to pass the time." There was a slightly positive inclination (49%) toward the use of information sharing "to search for people" ( $M=3.25$ ,  $SD=1.13$ ).

Diversion ( $M=4.18$ ,  $SD=0.90$ ) and the information sharing aspect of connecting "with people who share the same interests" ( $M=3.38$ ,  $SD=1.20$ ) were rated positively. All other social network motivation statements were rated negatively for SNGs, with the least agreement showed toward commenting "on other players' progress" ( $M=2.38$ ,  $SD=1.00$ ).

1.09), classified as an interactive motivation. Relationship maintenance was rated positively for social networks ( $M=4.12$ ,  $SD=1.05$ ), but negatively for SNGs ( $M=2.94$ ,  $SD=1.31$ ). Given these findings, respondents were not strongly driven by social network motivations to play SNGs, with the exception of diversion.

### **Comparison of Video Game and SNG Motives**

RQ2 compared how similar or different the motives for playing video games and playing SNGs are to one another (Table A-2). Entertainment ( $M=4.73$ ,  $SD=0.45$ ) was rated the highest, followed by diversion ( $M=4.23$ ,  $SD=0.99$ ), arousal ( $M=4.12$ ,  $SD=0.91$ ) and the challenge statement motivation of reaching “the next level of a game” ( $M=4.04$ ,  $SD=0.96$ ). Only 26 participants (29%) out of 89 identified themselves as individuals who “regularly play console video games” in response to the question “do you regularly play console video games, such as on the Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Wii, or Personal Computer platforms.” Those participants were asked to rate seven video game motivation statements using a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). None of the seven statements received a mean score of less than three.

When these motivations were applied toward playing SNGs, all participants ( $n=89$ ) were asked to rate them, regardless of whether they identified themselves as video game players or not. The entertainment statement of playing “to have fun” ( $M=4.45$ ,  $SD=0.71$ ) was the highest rated of these motivations, with 96% of respondents indicating agreement. Entertainment was followed by the diversion statement of playing “to pass the time” ( $M=4.18$ ,  $SD=0.90$ ) which 85% of respondents agreed with, and the “achieve a goal within the game” aspect of challenge ( $M=3.94$ ,  $SD=0.87$ ) which 79% of respondents agreed with. Both statements involving competition—“to prove I am the best at a certain game” ( $M=2.11$ ,  $SD=0.93$ ) and “to beat my friends’ scores” ( $M=2.60$ ,

$SD=1.20$ )—were rated the lowest and were the only ones to receive a majority of negative agreement. A difference of over one in the mean score was shown between the competition motivation for video games ( $M=3.19$ ,  $SD=1.23$ ) and SNGs “to prove I am the best” ( $M=2.11$ ,  $SD=0.93$ ).

H1 stated that users’ motives for playing social network games would be more similar to social network site motives than video game motives. However, upon examining the mean scores, users agreed with more video game motivations than social network motivations for playing SNGs. Entertainment, a video game motivation, was the highest rated of all the motivations measured ( $M=4.45$ ,  $SD=0.71$ ). Diversion, a motivation shared by both social networks and video games, was the second-highest rated ( $M=4.18$ ,  $SD= 0.90$ ), while achieving “a goal within the game,” a challenge motivation for video games, was third-highest ( $M=3.94$ ,  $SD=0.87$ ). Therefore, H1 was not supported by the findings.

## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore the relationships among user motivations for using social networks, playing SNGs, and playing video games. It also sought to learn about the habits of SNG players, such as how often they play these games, what social networking platforms they use, and from what physical locations they play. While a low response rate prohibits the results of this study from being able to make conclusive statements about the population of SNG players, interesting implications can still be derived from the data by comparing the mean scores and analyzing the characteristics of the sample population. In the following paragraphs, the researcher will attempt to make inferences from the data collected, with the caveat that the sample size was small and consisted of a very specific group of active SNG players who belonged to Facebook™ groups dedicated to these games.

### **Limitations**

This exploratory study developed SNG motivations for individuals who had an interest in playing these types of games. There are several factors that need to be taken into consideration when examining the results of the study. The researcher hopes that by addressing these limitations, future studies might be able to build upon the data collected and add to SNG motivation research.

The sample population in this study consisted entirely of Facebook™ users who had joined Facebook™ groups dedicated to SNGs. The survey showed very few results from individuals who played SNGs on other social network sites such as Myspace or Playdom. To achieve a more representative sample of SNG players, other site users should be taken into account. Another possible site for recruitment could be online

forums. The researcher attempted to utilize the Zynga® forums for this purpose, since Zynga® produced several of the currently most popular SNGs online (<http://www.appdata.com/leaderboard/apps>). However, due to their forum rules, the survey link could not be posted. The researcher nevertheless suggests considering this avenue for recruitment by getting in contact with SNG developers who have popular games and asking them to link the survey on their websites and forums.

Few respondents (n=26) who played both video games and SNGs participated in the study, according to their self-reporting. If future researchers are interested in exploring the connections between video games and SNGs, both populations should be separately recruited. This study did not conclusively show that players of SNGs do not play video games, but given the small overall sample size, the relationship between SNGs and video games should be explored further.

The sample size for this survey was 89 participants. More advanced statistical analysis techniques could not be used on the data collected. While the polling of Facebook™ groups did not yield a large number of participants, the researcher found evidence that those who did participate were of the population sought after. When reviewing the literature for the purposes of this study, the researcher did not find many instances of studies using Facebook™ groups to recruit survey participants. There have been indications that as social network usage increases amongst the U.S. population, the usage of other forms of communication such as e-mail is falling (Tsotsis, 2011). Facebook™ provided a readily available resource for the researcher to simultaneously locate a reliable sample of users and distribute the survey to them. It also provided an easy forum for participants to ask questions or respond with comments about the

survey. For instance, some users would comment under the survey link that they had taken the survey, or that they would be interested in hearing the results from the study. This allowed the researcher to engage with respondents in a public manner by thanking them for their participation and interest, and perhaps engendering interest in the study for observers of these social network interactions. The researcher believes that, as social network usage continues to rise, future investigators should view these sites as not only as a research area, but also as an avenue by which research can be accomplished.

### **An Overview of SNG Players**

This study sought active players of SNGs. For this purpose, Facebook™ groups dedicated to specific SNGs were used as a means to gather participants. The researcher predicted that users who were motivated enough to join Facebook™ groups dedicated to SNGs would prove to be regular players. This assumption was carried out within the results of the data collected. A total of 64 participants (72%) out of 89 stated that they played SNGs every day, 32 participants (36%) responded that they played for three or more hours in a typical session, and 59 participants (66%) had been playing SNGs for at least one year.

The sample population did not show much variety in terms of race or ethnicity, although the sample size for this study was small. A total of 68 participants (76%) out of 89 defined themselves as White/Caucasian, with the next highest group being Hispanic American (8%). Further research can be done to determine whether playing SNGs on Facebook™ has a stronger appeal to Caucasian players over those from other races.

Also of interest was the high number of female respondents in this sample. It was found that 4 out of 5 respondents were female. Traditionally, studies on gaming have

shown a higher male population of video game players than females (Green & McNeese, 2008; Lucas & Sherry, 2004). Conversely, females have been shown to have higher usage rates of social networks than males (Hargittai, 2007; Lenhart & Madden, 2007). Since there are more women on social networks, it stands to reason there are more women playing SNGs than men. It is also possible that males, who have been shown in previous studies to associate video games with socializing, may be utilizing other types of game genres such as massively multiplayer online games to fulfill these motives (Lucas & Sherry, 2004; Greenberg et al., 2010). Future studies may wish to look into whether the high number of female respondents is a consistent finding that distinguishes the SNG population from the video game population.

One final note to make about the sample population in this survey is that 94% stated that they mostly play SNGs at home, over other possible locations such as school, work, or via portable devices while on the go. Given the availability of smartphone application versions of SNG titles such as *FarmVille*, this was a surprising result. However, there are two possibilities that could explain such a finding. The first is that the sample consisted of Facebook™ users. Users who specifically prefer to use Facebook™ as a platform for playing SNGs would be unable to do so using smartphone apps. Furthermore, some workplace environments do not allow employees to access Facebook™ through company computers. A random sampling process should be used to gather participants for future research to see if this approach could lead to different findings. Another possibility is that, given that 72% (n=89) of respondents spend at least one hour during a given session of SNG playing, users may be more comfortable playing at home at their leisure rather than in an on-the-go environment.

## **SNG Player Motivations**

The uses and gratifications approach provided the framework to this study. However, rather than defining the utilized statements as “uses” or “gratifications,” the term “motivation” was used instead. The researcher believed that this term was more suited for this study, since it more accurately reflects the study’s intention to find out why users play these games. “Gratifications” would refer more to derived feelings one receives after playing a game, while “uses” did not convey the motivation behind why survey participants played these games or used social networks.

The highest rated motivations for the use of social networks by SNG players in this sample was shown to be relationship maintenance and diversion. In regards to playing traditional console video games, SNG players responded positively to challenge, entertainment, arousal, and diversion. However, when actually playing SNGs, only two factors, entertainment and diversion, had mean scores higher than four. Relationship maintenance, acknowledged as an important motivation for social network usage, was not shown to be important for SNGs. Respondents disagreed with competition being a motivation for SNGs, while they were more ambivalent towards it being a motivation for video games.

H1 for this study stated that SNG motivations would be more similar to social network motivations. This was based on a belief that, since SNGs were played on social networks, and users had to be initially attracted to social networks to make an account and utilize their services before playing, that those motivations would carry over to the games. In this exploratory survey, however, that did not seem to be the case.

Participants identified SNGs as a means of entertainment by which one could pass the time.

The next highest rated motivations, the “achieve a goal within the game” statement of challenge and social interaction, were derived from identified video game motivations. This was interesting since only 26 participants (29%, n=89) out of 89 identified themselves as video game players, which was a smaller sample than expected. One possible explanation may be that, since these active SNG players were found to spend so much time playing these games, they would have little time to engage in additional video game play through consoles. Another explanation might be that, while SNGs are predominantly free to play, video game consoles can represent a significant financial investment. This study did not ask participants to identify economic status. This may be an area future researchers may want to explore.

Regardless of why this sample showed such a low amount of active video game usage, the fact that participants identified SNG motivations more closely with video game motivations suggests several interesting interpretations. SNGs may be introducing new users to video games. Some existing video game franchises (*Final Fantasy, Assassin's Creed*) have already had SNG tie-ins with their traditional console releases. These findings may suggest that such tactics are a sound method in enticing individuals who previously had no interest in playing such games. They also seem to suggest that SNGs are being played for reasons that are associated with playing console games, in spite of their simpler methods of play. Finally, it may provide another explanation as to why such a low amount of video game players were present in the sample. If SNG players are identifying more with video game motivations, then it would stand to reason that active video game players would have no real use for SNGs, since they are already fulfilling those motivations through their consoles. This may be an area

where future uses and gratifications studies can examine whether there is actually one gaming population seeking the same motivations, but are fulfilling them through two different game mediums .

One interesting point was that, although participants were contacted through Facebook™ groups dedicated to playing SNGs, the primary motivations for playing these games were all solitary in nature. Most survey questions concerning interactions with others had mean scores indicating disagreement. These included competition ( $M=2.36$ ), and interactivity ( $M=2.41$ ). These findings indicate that the players in the sample did not seek out SNGs to fulfill social network motivations. Rather, they seemed to view SNGs as comparable to console games, with similar motivating factors for use.

It should be noted that simulation games were overwhelmingly represented when participants were asked to state which SNGs they played most frequently (see Table A-3). This was not surprising, given that eight of the twenty most popular Facebook™ apps are simulation games (<http://www.appdata.com/leaderboard/apps>, 2011, January 16). Simulation games such as *FarmVille* and *CityVille* typically involve long-term goals and daily interactions, as players can cultivate their simulated farm or city for growth. Players of puzzle games such as *Bejeweled Blitz*, which has a quantifiable score counter, or competitive card games such as *Texas HoldEm Poker* may have rated motivations such as challenge higher.

## CONCLUSION

As SNGs continue to grow in popularity and complexity, it is important to determine what motivates their audience into playing. The participants in this study identified diversion and entertainment as reasons for playing SNGs. Despite their presence on social networks, typical social network features such as commenting on

game status or searching for other players did not motivate them to play. Rather, they were influenced to use these games as a way to pass the time and have fun, with the more social aspects of the game being of less importance. More female players were also found to play SNGs than male players.

Since motivations between the two types of games were found to be more similar than motivations between SNGs and social networks, it may be that social networks simply provide an avenue for attracting new gamers. In other words, SNGs could be described as video games, with the main difference separating them from console games being the platform on which they are played. This may also account for the gender differences between players of SNGs and video games. It may be found that males are more drawn to video game console use for entertainment and diversion, while females prefer social networks for those purposes. Future researchers should explore the gender relationships between SNGs, video games, social networks, and video game consoles.

**APPENDIX A**  
**TABLES**

**Table A-1. Comparison of SNS and SNG motivations.**

Motivation	Percent Agreement (4 or 5)	Mean	SD
Relationship Maintenance			
SNS	79	4.12**	1.05
SNG	42	2.94**	1.31
Information Sharing			
SNS	49	3.25*	1.13
SNG (connect with others)	64	3.38*	1.20
SNG (observe others' status)	26	2.84	1.01
SNG (share progress)	28	2.62	1.15
Interactivity			
SNS	36	3.12	1.10
SNG (receive comments)	15	2.44	1.13
SNG (comment on others)	16	2.38	1.15
Diversion			
SNS	76	4.02*	0.97
SNG	85	4.18*	0.90

Note: N=89. Means with \* represent similar motivation strength (within .2); Means with \*\* represent different motivation strength (more than 1 point difference). 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree.

Table A-2. Comparison of VG and SNG motivations.

Motivation	Percent Agreement (4 or 5)	Mean	SD
Challenge			
VG (next level)	81	4.04*	0.96
SNG (achieve goal)	79	3.94*	0.87
VG (high score)	73	3.96	1.18
SNG (high score)	49	3.31	1.21
Competition			
VG	39	3.19**	1.23
SNG (prove I'm best)	7	2.11**	0.93
SNG (beat friends' score)	23	2.60	1.20
Social Interaction			
VG	62	3.62*	0.94
SNG (play with friends)	73	3.70*	1.07
SNG (meet new people)	48	3.08	1.28
Entertainment			
VG	100	4.73	0.45
SNG	96	4.45	0.71
Arousal			
VG	81	4.12	0.91
SNG	49	3.30	1.05
Diversion			
VG	81	4.23*	0.99
SNG	85	4.18*	0.90

Note: N=89. Means with \* represent similar motivation strength (within .2); Means with \*\* represent different motivation strength (more than 1 point difference). 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree.

Table A-3. Frequently played SNGs.

Title of SNG	Number of Mentions	Percentage of Players	Type of Game
FrontierVille	34	38	Simulation
FarmVille	31	35	Simulation
CityVille	27	30	Simulation
Mafia Wars	23	26	Simulation
Café World	14	16	Simulation
Zoo World	8	9	Simulation
Bejeweled Blitz	7	8	Puzzle
It Girl	5	6	Simulation
Treasure Isle	5	6	Simulation
YoVille	5	6	Simulation
Restaurant City	4	5	Simulation

Note: N=89. SNGs with less than four mentions not shown.

## APPENDIX B SURVEY

### SNG Motivations

The purpose of this survey is to examine the reasons why people play social network games. By participating, you will be asked to give your opinions on a range of different motivations for playing social network games. You will also be asked some questions about your own personal gaming and social network usage. This survey should take no more than 10 minutes of your time. Your participation in the survey is completely voluntary, and your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law.

### Informed Consent

Protocol Title: Social Network Gaming Study 2011

Protocol # 2010-U-1135

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Purpose of the research study: The purpose of this study is to examine the reasons why people play social network games.

What you will be asked to do in the study: You will be asked to participate in an online survey on motivations for using social networks and playing social network games.

Time required: 10 minutes

Risks and Benefits: There are no anticipated risks involved with this study. We do not anticipate that you will benefit directly by participating in this study.

Compensation: There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary.

There is no penalty for not participating.

Right to withdraw from the study: You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:

Alan Flaten

3049 Weimer Hall

PO Box 118400

University of Florida

Gainesville, FL. 32611

aflate01@ufl.edu

Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study:

UFIRB Office

Box 112250

University of Florida

Gainesville, FL. 32611-2250

352-0433

Agreement: I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the survey. I understand that I may print this page for my own records.

- I agree.
- I do not agree. I will not participate in the survey.

What are some of the social network games (SNG) you play most often? For the purposes of this survey, an SNG is a game that is played on a social networking site.

Title of SNG

In a typical week, how often do you play social network games?

- I never play SNG
- Less than one day a week
- 1 to 2 days a week
- 3 to 4 days a week
- 5 to 6 days a week
- Every day

How much time do you spend playing social network games on an average day when you play?

- 30 minutes or less
- More than 30 minutes but less than an hour
- 1 hour but less than 2 hours
- 2 hours but less than 3 hours
- 3 or more hours

Where do you mostly play social network games? (Select all that apply)

- Home
- School
- Work
- On the go (via phone, laptop, netbooks, iPad, etc.)
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been playing social network games?

- Less than 6 months
- More than 6 months, less than a year
- Between 1 and 2 years
- More than 2 years

On what social network site(s) do you play social network games? Choose all that apply.

- Facebook
- MySpace
- Other (Please enter in the field provided.) \_\_\_\_\_

Section II. Uses of social network sites. How much do you agree or disagree with the following motivations for using social network sites? Please select the circle that indicates your agreement/disagreement for why you use these sites.

I use social network sites such as Facebook and MySpace

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
To connect with people I don't see often	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To comment on other people's posts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To search for people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To pass the time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section III. Uses of social network games. How much do you agree or disagree with the following motivations for playing social network games? Please select the circle that indicates your agreement/disagreement for why you play these games.

I play social network games

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
To keep in touch with people I don't see frequently	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To have fun	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To prove to my friends that I am the best at a certain game	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To share my progress in the game	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To connect with people who share the same interests	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To meet new people online	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To pass the time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To comment on other players' progress	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To feel excitement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To get a high score	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To play with my friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To achieve a goal within the game	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To observe the status of other players	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To receive comments on my progress	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To beat my friends' scores	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

#### Section IV. Uses of video games.

Do you regularly play console video games, such as on the Xbox 360, Playstation 3, Wii, or Personal Computer platforms?

- Yes
- No

How much do you agree or disagree with the following motivations for playing console video games? Please select the circle that indicates your agreement/disagreement for why you play these games.

I play video games

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
To reach the next level of a game	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To get a higher score	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To beat my opponents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To spend time with people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To have fun	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To feel excitement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To pass the time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section V. Demographics. You are just about finished with the survey. With these last few questions, please tell us a little about yourself.

How old are you?

- Younger than 18
- 18-20
- 21-25
- 26-30
- 31-35
- 36-40
- 41-45
- 46-50
- 51-55
- 56-60
- 61-65
- 66-70
- 71-75
- 76+

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

What is your race/ethnicity?

- White/Caucasian
- Black/African American
- Hispanic American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian Indian
- Chinese
- Filipino
- Japanese
- Korean
- Vietnamese
- Native Hawaiian
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Less than high school
- High school degree / GED
- Some college
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree
- Professional degree (JD, MD)
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Alan Flaten was born and raised in Miami, Florida. He graduated high school from Dade Christian School in Miami in 2000. He obtained a B.A. in English and a B.A. in Asian Studies, with a certificate in Japanese Studies, from Florida International University in 2004. He received his Master of Arts in Mass Communication from the University of Florida in the spring of 2011.