

BUILDING BRIDGES THROUGH PLAY: AN INVESTIGATION INTO MONOPOLY GO! AS CATALYST FOR YOUTH SOCIAL INTERACTION

Joana Jaya^{1*}, Low, A.N.¹, Asokan Vasudevan¹, Haryati Hasyim¹

¹ Faculty of Business and Communication, INTI International University, Malaysia*

Email: joana.jaya@newinti.edu.my

¹ Faculty of Business and Communication, INTI International University, Malaysia

Email: I21020500@student.newinti.edu.my

¹ Faculty of Business and Communication, INTI International University, Malaysia

Email: asokan.vasudevan@newinti.edu.my

¹ Faculty of Business and Communication, INTI International University, Malaysia

Email: haryati.hashim@newinti.edu.my

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how young people's social life are impacted by Monopoly Go! in the context of digital gaming. With the goal of analysing the game's communication elements, engagement reasons, and social repercussions, it fills knowledge gaps about the societal ramifications of digital games on social interaction. The literature study examines the evolution of Monopoly Go! from a classic board game to a mobile app, emphasising the game's ability to foster social connections even when players are separated by great distances. Through qualitative techniques including content analysis and in-depth interviews, the study looks into how the game affects young people's social connections. The game's ability to start talks, bring friends back together after the pandemic, and encourage peer influence and teamwork motivations is demonstrated by the findings. On the other hand, disputes that occur during in-game exchanges and the impact of in-game item commercialization on fair play are causes for concern. Future study should diversify its participant pool, ethical norms for community behaviour should be put in place, and the effects of commercialization on social dynamics inside gaming communities should be investigated. These revelations provide light on the intricate social dynamics, interpersonal relationships, and moral dilemmas present in online gaming environments.

Keywords: Monopoly Go!, Social Interaction, Communication, Youths, Gaming Community

1. INTRODUCTION

"Pass Go! And collect \$200", a phrase engraved in the minds of Monopoly enthusiasts for generations is now bringing its game into the digital world with Monopoly Go! While most of us grew up playing the board game Monopoly with our friends and family, nowadays the younger generation are enjoying its modern digital version created by Scopely Studios. With characters based on the traditional board game, Monopoly Go! is a free-to-play strategic casual board game with stylized visuals of the classic Monopoly Board for players to experience the gameplay of the tabletop original through their devices (MobileMatters, 2023).

Similar to the board game, it features recognisable imagery such as Mr. Monopoly and tokens like the top hat where you roll the dice to move your piece across the board, collecting cash or paying taxes as you go (Destructoid, 2023). The Players' mission throughout the game will be to get rich by conquering different empires and enhancing their landmarks to increase their prizes to move onto the next level (Meehan, 2023).

However, the rules are different in Monopoly Go!. The game contains modes such as "Empire Building", in which players develop their real estate empires to unlock over 100 new boards with famous landmarks. Players will be able to compete against others more ruthlessly in "Railroads" as it will perform one of two actions: (1) Shutdown or (2) Bank Heist (Destructoid, 2023). Players in (1) "Shutdown" mode can tear down other players' landmarks and gain money from it. The targeted players can block the attack but only for a certain amount of time. If players land on (2) "Bank Heist", they will be able to steal money from them by playing a match-3 mini-game to fund their own empires (Meehan, 2023).

The game is designed to be highly social. Players will be able to communicate with their friends daily by playing mini-games such as Community Chest and daily contests, where they can team up to win cash and prizes. Players also have the opportunity to collect various sets of stickers, each of which tells a unique story. They can trade these stickers with their friends, adding an engaging social element to the game.

Interaction can be in the form of verbal or non-verbal communication. It can take place in person or by technologically mediated means such as texting, skyping, or messaging (Little and Little, 2016). And, according to Merrill and Eldregde, cooperation is a type of social interaction in which two or more people work together to achieve a common goal (Dr. Priya, n.d.). Based on the introduction of Monopoly Go!, its daily mini-games like "Community Chest" and "Partner Events" provide opportunities for players to come together, collaborate, and reap the rewards. Compared to the board game version, the digital game has evolved into a dynamic platform that facilitates social interactions, connecting players from around the globe.

In this research, the researcher would like to focus on how Monopoly Go! could encourage collaboration and the effectiveness of the game in catalysing social interaction among youths. Monopoly Go! is more than just rolling dice and winning virtual money; it's a bridge between the past and the present that brings together players from all over the world in a collaborative digital playground. While the old Monopoly board game usually brings friends and family together, the current digital game has become a virtual gathering spot for all Monopoly players. So, its gameplay is not just about competing, it's also about connecting. Hence, based on the discussion, this would be the reasons the researcher would like to do the research.

Problem Statement

As we move further into the digital age, traditional forms of social interaction are evolving especially among the younger generation. While the traditional board game Monopoly has long been a favourite among friends and family, the release of Monopoly Go! represents a fundamental shift in how young people interact socially.

The shifting dynamics of social interaction within Monopoly Go! brings up various concerns. There is a worry that the game's highly competitive "Railroads" mode, characterised by ruthless actions like "Shutdown" and "Bank Heist," may deliberately foster an environment of cutthroat competition, which could possibly damage the spirit of collaboration and friendly interaction that has been the trademark of traditional Monopoly. Furthermore, while Monopoly Go! provides multiple opportunities for connection, but there is still a lack of empirical study on how these digital interactions convert into elements of real social bonds among youths.

For years, people have debated these worries that online gaming may lead to isolation from reality. Because Monopoly Go! is a notable combination of conventional board games and digital gaming, it provides a unique chance to evaluate if these concerns are valid in this setting. It is also important to highlight that Monopoly Go! is very fresh to the digital gaming industry, and no considerable study has been undertaken to analyse its societal effects. This obvious knowledge gap emphasises the importance of investigating the game's impact on the social lives of the younger generation. Hence, these problems highlight the necessity for complete research to give evidence-based insights to understand the game's role as a catalyst for youth's social interaction.

Objective

This study aims to analyse the effect of Monopoly Go! on social interaction among the younger generation. These are the objectives of this research that the researcher wants to understand:

- a) To find out the communication element for social interaction in Monopoly Go!.
- b) To explore the motivation for youth engagement in Monopoly Go!.
- c) To analyse whether Monopoly Go! affects people's social interaction.

Scope of the paper

The research will focus on Monopoly Go! players from Nilai and Kuala Lumpur areas in Malaysia. It will primarily target youths aged 18 to 30 who are active players regardless if they are Android or IOS users. The research will use a qualitative method, which involves interviews to gather information about the way youths interact with one another while playing the game as well as their motives and experiences in the game. Furthermore, the research will investigate the communication elements in Monopoly Go! using content analysis to understand their structure and impact on social interaction. It will investigate both in-game and external communication platforms utilised by players, such as the Facebook and Little Red Book Monopoly Community.

Significance of the paper

Digital gaming has become an increasingly important aspect of today's youth's lives. Monopoly Go! exemplifies this trend, in which people play games not just for entertainment but also for social interaction. As gaming platforms nowadays provide a platform for interaction among players, this motivates learners to communicate, negotiate, and engage in collaborative planning for them to progress in the game (Bheal MKitani et al., 2023). Understanding how games such as Monopoly Go! influence their relationships with others is crucial since it could provide significant insights for both game designers and people looking to expand social engagement with digital platforms. By studying the game's impact, we gain insight into the evolving role of digital games as social platforms. It's a chance to study what facilitates meaningful interactions and relationships in virtual places.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that classic board games like Monopoly are known for captivating individuals at first sight as players feel more intimacy, vivid imagery, and sympathetic responses while playing the game face-to-face (Fang, Chen, and Huang, 2016). Nonetheless, past research on these areas was primarily undertaken before COVID-19. With the paradigm shifting towards a more digitally-driven mode of social connection, this research will shed light on whether the pandemic has had any detectable influence on how individuals interact in the world of mobile games.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The researcher will conduct in-depth interviews with a selected group of youth Monopoly Go! players. These interviews will be semi-structured, allowing open-ended questions and probing to capture rich contextual information. Participants will be chosen from Nilai and Kuala Lumpur areas to ensure a diverse range of gaming experiences is represented.

Additionally, the content analysis method will be used to collect evidence to complement the interview data. This approach involves a thorough examination of the game to inductively identify elements related to communication for social interaction within Monopoly Go!

Apart from the gameplay itself, the analysis will extend to user-generated content associated with Monopoly Go!, including social media posts and contributions on online communities. This analysis will provide valuable insights into the broader discourse surrounding the game, encompassing player interactions, strategies, and sentiments.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

RQ1: What communication elements are integrated into Monopoly Go! to facilitate social interaction among players?

The responses from participants shed light on various communication elements integrated into Monopoly Go! to foster social interaction. Each participant highlighted specific features like card collections, Partner events, and Facebook integration, emphasising their role in initiating conversations and spending time with friends. These findings align with the multifaceted approach Monopoly Go! takes to facilitate communication, supporting the idea that game involvement is shaped by multiple factors. Moreover, the game serves as a conversation starter among friends and nurtures relationships by providing shared contexts for interaction as mentioned in the experiences shared by participants. The findings are in line with the idea that gaming contexts facilitate social relationships, as highlighted in the Digital Gaming Relationship theory.

The participants also showcased diverse approaches in strategic discussions and social interactions within Monopoly Go!. While some avoided direct conflicts with friends, others strategically planned to safeguard their assets. This blurs the boundary between player and game elements, creating immersive subject-subject interaction within the game. One feature stood out as a notably social aspect of the game, the Partner Events. All participants highlighted the collaborative nature of the event with emphasis on the need to work together with friends to accomplish tasks, fostering communication and collaboration between them.

Furthermore, the participants shared memorable experiences mostly centred around social interactions within the game. Exchanging cards with strangers, using gaming hacks, and sharing moments with friends were highlighted as memorable experiences. This indicates the game's social nature and significance of interactions with strangers or friends within the game.

Finally, participants characterised Monopoly Go! as a versatile game that fulfils various needs. For some, it offers comfort and companionship during solitary moments, while for others, it serves as a platform for socialising and strategic gameplay during gatherings. These varied perspectives

align neatly with the Users and Gratifications theory, illustrating how individuals engage with games based on their unique preferences and needs. These diverse experiences underline the game's capacity to cater to different preferences while emphasising social interactions as a core aspect of the game.

RQ2: What is the motivation for youth engagement in Monopoly Go!?

The motivation for youth engagement in Monopoly Go! stems from peer influence and the desire for shared experiences. As mentioned by Adri Khalis et al (2022), participants joined the game to fulfil specific needs (in this case, to seek a common ground for discussions and shared activities) which is often influenced by social connections or peer influence (in this case, due to friends' involvement).

The factors influencing their choice include accessibility, game design, and the gratification derived from accomplishment within the game. Hence, it can be concluded that individuals choose media or activities based on factors like convenience, enjoyment, or fulfilling a sense of achievement (Adri Khalis et al., 2022). While these motivations focus on individual enjoyment, the game also acts as a conversational hub among friends that fosters social connections. However, the depth and longevity of these interactions might vary as they range from casual exchanges to more engaged conversations around game-related activities.

Overall, Monopoly Go! is perceived as a tool for enhancing social connections. Whether it is solidifying existing relationships, reconnecting with distant friends, or fostering new ones. However, the depth of these connections may vary among individuals.

RQ 3: Does Monopoly Go! affect people's social interaction?

The findings underscore the collaborative aspects of Monopoly Go! that foster friendships and positive interactions while also acknowledging occasional intense emotions (e.g., Frustration, Competitiveness) triggered during competitive moments. This aligns with Mikko Meriläinen's study that suggests gaming can trigger a wide range of emotions. The emotional experiences in gaming correlates with these fluctuations where highs and lows contribute to the overall engagement and enjoyment derived from gaming.

Responses also pointed out that the game's continuous communication and scalability offered a more accessible platform for social interaction compared to the traditional board game. The findings highlighted Monopoly Go!'s ease of play regardless of location compared to the traditional board game that is limited by physical presence. The game's ability to connect players despite physical distances resonates with the "Covid boom" that boosted mobile gaming.

Furthermore, the addictive tendencies associated with Monopoly Go! are acknowledged in prior literature about changes in youth gaming habits. Despite its immersive nature, Monopoly Go! appears to have limited impact on offline social interactions, yet even non-players indirectly engage in game-related conversations within their social circles. The finding aligns with Qin, Cho, and Zhang (2021)'s research that suggests casual games like Monopoly Go! may not significantly disrupt face-to-face interactions compared to more absorbing games like MMOGs. In fact, this study supports the idea from Qin, Cho, and Zhang where the effects of gaming on social aspects

are more tied to how players interact within the game compared to analysing the time spent playing.

The Monopoly Community showcased both positive engagement like warm interactions during card trading; and negative engagement, including toxic elements on digital platforms. Concerns were raised about potential negative impacts on youths' social interactions due to heightened aggression and emotional responses triggered by Monopoly Go! Nevertheless, the game seemed to foster deeper connections among friends, acting as a catalyst for more engaging conversations offline. These observations reflect the complexity of gaming communities, encompassing both positive and contentious interactions.

Content Analysis

The analysis on Social Systems showcases how Monopoly Go! employs a range of social features like "Daily Treats" and social events to bolster player engagement and interactions. This exemplifies how community building and engagement has become the trend of contemporary gaming. The establishment of multiple Facebook Monopoly Community Groups and the extensive membership numbers underscore the game's popularity and the strong community it has fostered. This aligns with Meehan's (2023) description of gaming communities as vibrant spaces for social interaction.

Within these groups, card trading events represent both collaborative and competitive interactions. Memes as well emerged as cultural artefacts, playing a role in strengthening community bonds. The positive trading environments resonate with research findings on how collaborative interactions foster social connections, while negative environments underscore the varied social effects stemming from differing interaction dynamics.

The observed commercialization of in-game items on platforms such as Little Red Book deviates from norms of positive social interaction. This monetization shift disrupts the cooperative spirit of the game, potentially creating an unfair playing field and raising ethical concerns about interaction standards within the online community. . However, the problem presented within the negative trading environments would require broader findings about the diversity of interactions within gaming groups.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The objectives of this study were well pursued in order to gain a thorough understanding of the impact of Monopoly Go! on social interaction among the younger generation. The first objective was to discover the communication elements embedded within the game that promote social interaction. A rich variety of features emerged from participant responses, including card collections, Partner events, and Facebook integration, demonstrating their pivotal role as catalysts for conversations and shared experiences among players. The emergence of vibrant Facebook groups, card trading events, and cultural artefacts such as memes demonstrated the game's ability to foster a robust and interactive gaming community.

The findings echoed Monopoly Go!'s multifaceted approach, highlighting its ability to serve as an ice breaker for social interactions.

The second objective was to investigate the motivations for youth participation in Monopoly Go!. Peer influence and a desire for shared experiences emerged as the primary motivators for youth's active participation. These motivations echoed the principles of the Users and Gratifications theory, which is connected with the accessibility, game design, and satisfaction derived from in-game accomplishments. Furthermore, the game not only satisfied individual entertainment needs, but it also served as a common topic for conversations among friends, nurturing and reinforcing social bonds.

The third objective was to examine the game's impact on people's social interactions. The research revealed a complex landscape in which Monopoly Go! both influenced and reflected real-life social interactions. It promoted positive interactions, fostering friendships, and connecting people across distances. This situation mirrors the societal shift towards digital connectivity as seen during the "Covid boom". Furthermore, the immersive nature of the game and possibility to heighten emotions raised concerns about potential consequences, such as aggression and toxicity within digital platforms. The greatest discovery was that Monopoly Go! appeared to have little impact on people's offline social interactions, in fact, it has increased the likelihood of interaction offline. This finding is consistent with Kirsch Kirschner's (2014) research suggesting that casual games may not significantly disrupt face-to-face engagements when compared to more immersive gaming experiences of MMOGs.

In conclusion, this study successfully achieved its objectives by delving into the communication elements, motivations for engagement, and the impact of Monopoly Go! on social interaction among the younger generation. However, within these findings significant gaps remain unexplored. While the research acknowledges relationship formation, it lacks depth in understanding the quality and consistency of these connections. Furthermore, the toxic behaviour of communities on digital platforms is acknowledged but the study falls short of fully analysing its prevalence, effects, and possible solutions. Additionally, while the research raises concerns about the commercialization of in-game items, particularly on platforms such as Little Red Book, it fails to thoroughly investigate the broader implications and consequences of this trend on gameplay experience and community dynamics. Addressing these gaps could provide deeper understanding and constructive recommendations for cultivating a healthier and more positive social interactions within gaming communities such as Monopoly Go!.

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