Social gaming in online games
Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to provide a clearer picture of how gamers view gaming as a social construct and how social interaction changes the gaming experience. Social interaction in games brings people together. Online games have been researched from many points of view. However, the research done from social perspective is relatively new and this is why I wanted to write my thesis from the social interaction perspective.

Games are created more and more social. Gaming culture has changed from single player games to games where gamers interact with the world and each other with the help of different technologies. Social contacts from games extend outside the game world. Social media and gaming communities in the internet bring people together to share their experiences and find company to play with. The world of online games is not just playing games. Gaming has become a way of life and a culture. Gamers converse in their own communities about games, gaming related affairs and everything else. Even though most conversations in the communities relate to games, gamers exchange a lot of information about themselves and things related to them.

The research utilizes scientific articles as a base for the theory and a questionnaire that has been distributed among Finnish gamers.

Keywords
Gaming, social communities, social gaming, social interaction, online games

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Foreword

This thesis is a product of my passion. I chose this thesis because I have been a gamer from a very young age, and I have always wondered about the goings on in the gaming culture. I have spent hours combing through results of this thesis and designing the questionnaire. In the end it has all been worth it. Time spent on pondering these matters are countless.

I want to thank my supervisor Mikko Rajanen for his enthusiasm during the process of producing this thesis. I also want to thank my parents for the support they have given me during my studies and lastly I want to thank my girlfriend Annika for the support she has given me and the interest and insightful thoughts she has provided me during the writing of this thesis and other endeavours.

I also want to acknowledge the staff of Vectorama LAN-party who have taken an interest in my thesis. I am proud to call them my friends, with whom I have spent many years on how to advance the gaming culture here in Oulu.

Aleksi Pöyhtäri

Oulu, April 28, 2016
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1. Introduction

Online video games have gained massive popularity in recent years. Video gaming has become a sport, a pastime and a hobby for many. Online gamers develop many social contacts through games. Many of these contacts develop into lasting friendships.

Video games have become one of the most popular entertainment mediums alongside the movie and music industries during the last decade. A few years ago video games became the most popular media by overtaking movies in consumer spending on entertainment media (EGDF 2011). Video game industry includes gaming hardware and games in both physical and electronic form for PC, consoles, smartphones and other gaming devices. The industry was estimated to be worth 67 billion dollars in 2012 and it has been projected to grow to 82 billion dollars by 2017 (Gaudiosi 2012).

The social communities in games do not limit themselves only to the internet. LAN-parties are also very popular among gamers. In LAN-parties the gamers bring their own computer to the event venue where they engage in gaming and socialising with other gamers. In many of these events there are also E-sports (electronic sports) tournaments where the gamers compete against each other. LAN-parties have integrated deeply into the youth- and popular culture. (Taylor & Witkowski, 2010.)

Contrary to this popular opinion, studies show that online games actually encourage social behavior and can benefit the players socially (Yee 2006b) (Cole & Griffiths 2007). One example of this would be the various situations playing a game where players are pushed into forming groups to overcome challenges that are impossible for an individual player (Ducheneaut & Moore 2004). These situations lead to the formation of social relationships, some of which can evolve into meaningful real-life relationships with time (Cole & Griffiths 2007). On the other hand, MMORPGs can also provide a channel for maintaining or even enhancing existing real-life relationships (Herodotou 2010.)

Games have evolved to be more and more interactive experiences. The players do not move in the game’s world alone anymore. Instead they interact with a game world that is full of other players. Playing the game is not anymore about interacting with game, but it is also about interacting with other players in that game. The players game experience changes when they play it with other players. The research into games has also demonstrated that even though the physical space opens the players senses to new levels, the players do not necessarily pay attention to each other, but communicate within the game itself. (Kort, Ijsselteijn, & Gajadhar, 2007.)

1.1 Research questions

In the world of games here might be thousands or tens of thousands of players online at the same time. The game does not actively remind us of this, and we may forget it sometimes. We may choose to play alone, but if we wish to interact with someone, there is almost always someone there to interact with you.

The purpose of this thesis is to bring light to the questions: RQ1: How do social communities and friendships form around games? RQ2: How these social contacts
influence gamer's lives outside of games? RQ3: Do gamers perceive playing video games as social interaction?

The research has been carried out as quantitative web-survey. The survey was spread through online communities that involve gaming and people who are interested in games. There were 450 participants in the survey. The participants consisted of a wide variety of gamers from different age groups.

1.2 Relation to prior research

The social side of gaming is mundane nowadays. Especially MMO-games (massive multiplayer online) are designed to encourage social interaction between players. Games have opened a new route to social interaction. The games and gamers have also started LAN-parties in the first place. Most of LAN-parties have started from active social communities around games, where players have wanted to meet the people they play with outside the game. This has become one of the ways to bring gaming and social interaction together. Social skills are important in the Internet, and in real life. Without social skills, the player cannot get the most satisfying experience from a game. Gaming has made its way to popular culture, and it is there to stay.

This research connects prior research by combing through the research that has been done on social side of gaming and also tries to connect the existing knowledge to shed new light into the social structures of social communities associated with online video games. The research also aims to show that gaming is a social activity and has many related activities regarding the social interaction between gamers online and offline.

1.3 Threats to validity

The research focuses primarily on Finnish gamers. However due to the international nature of online games the results can be generalized. The results of this research must be treated with certain caution as the area of social interaction and social structures within gaming communities are a fairly new area of research. This research aims to provide new insights into the existing pool of knowledge and raise new questions that can be answered by future research.

1.4 Composition of the research

The research was carried out as a questionnaire and the results have been examined using quantitative methods reflecting the previous research done on social aspects of online video games. The questionnaire was distributed among gamers via Facebook and other gaming communities.

The results of the questionnaire are backed with literature review on social communities in video games. The thesis answers the same questions that are proposed in the questionnaire.

The thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical background of social gaming. Chapter 3 contains the research method. The results are discussed in chapter 4. The discussion in chapter 5 discusses the theoretical and empirical implications of the research and chapter 6 is the conclusion of this thesis.
2. Prior research

The social communities within games are very different. Online game is a game where players play the game via the internet or local area network (LAN). Online games are designed to be played as a team. Players form teams and try to beat the other team or reach a specific goal. Most online gaming communities form in the games or around the games in general. Most communities focus on information about the game. In these communities there is a supply of strategies, tips and mods for the game in question. These communities gather in the gamers that share the same interests.

Gaming on the internet has become more and more popular. The advances in technology have had significant effect on games. Most of the games are meant to be played on the internet and the distribution channels have changed from the traditional cds and dvds to electronic forms of distribution. Due to the advancement of the internet, it has become easier for players to keep in touch with each other. This, of course applies to other things also. The game companies also have noticed that the internet has a huge potential for keeping in touch with the players. Many game development companies have made community hubs for the players. These hubs include chat forums, fan-stores, and content that expands the game’s universe. For example, the World of Warcraft site has a big database of Warcraft universe’s history and historical characters.

2.1 Gaming as a part of social community

Gaming has been studied from many points of view quite extensively. While investigating the research I noticed, that the old stereotype of a lonely nerd has started to crumble. Gamers are actually very social in their own way. Gaming is seen as a way of spending time together with someone and things that interests us. Gaming on- and offline has become mundane to us (Trepte, Reinecke, & Juechems 2012). Online games have evolved to more and more towards team games, where the best result is achieved when everyone works together. The social communities that have formed around games help to share their own experiences and to find company. A classic example of online social community comes from World of Warcraft (WoW). World of Warcraft has around 5 million active subscriptions and around 8 million players. Within the game you can find many different communities. The goal of WoW is to form a guild and fight many powerful enemies. In the first part of the game the raids where designed for 40 people. In the later iterations of the game the raids were designed for 10 or 25 people. In these games the researchers have observed that people who have leadership skill, have been able to practise these skills and also employ them in real life and become better leaders. (Mysirlaki & Paraskeva, 2012.)

Gamers also communicate outside of the games. Most of the communication had something to with the game itself that they were playing. The gamers however also communicated on things that were not game related. The two most common ways of communicating outside games were e-mail and forums. Most of the time the gamers communicated about the times they were going to play together. The researchers noticed that the players were more committed to their community if they communicated...
with the other players outside of the game and played to keep in contact with their online-friends. (Seay, Jerome, Lee, & Kraut, 2004.)

A guilds life span is commonly short. The research covered 3537 guilds. 54% of the guilds were not in existence after two months. The larger the community grows, the harder it is to control its own members. However, the more even the distribution of skills and experience the better chance the guild had for survival. If the guild had even distribution of class and experience between members, the more likely it was for the guild to still be in existence after two months. (Duchenaut, Yee, Nickell, & Moore, 2007.)

Online games form their own communities within the game. MMO-games (Multi Million online) are based on the idea that the player joins a community and share their adventure. The communities are called guilds or clans. When the players join a community, their communication is aimed more and more toward the community. The players focus on their own community and their communication towards outside of the community diminishes radically. MMO-games encourage players to join communities. In World of Warcraft the guilds offer players, game company, tips, and items that they can trade within the game. Of course these things are available without joining the community, but the games encourage joining communities. The games form their own in-game communities. (Duchenaut & Moore, 2004.)

The guilds within games are normally large and they have their own social structures. Every community has their own leader and sub leaders. The community may have a guild leader, who is the center of the community. However, the official rank of leader does not mean necessarily that the leader has any power. In many guilds the “guild master” is the leader in name only. The other people who are lower in rank are the centre of the community. (Pisan, 2007).

In MMO-games, the players can join a guild and that way, create new social contacts. However, the player can belong to only one guild at one time. This of course does not mean that the player cannot create contacts with players outside the guild. (Hsiao & Chiou, 2012). In games, social contacts focus on their own community. The community can be a guild or some other community that the player belongs to.

World of Warcraft is a classic example of game design where players are encouraged. Duchenaut et al. (2005) told that the popularity of WoW stems from the fact that in the game world there is always someone present. The players don’t necessarily communicate with other players when they play. But when the player is logged in, the community is strongly present. This gives the player a feeling that they are in a world that is inhabited with other people. The player can socialize whenever they want. MMO-games are clearly social environments. Guilds play a crucial role with the social platforms for tips, and social interaction. The players are able to communicate with their guild directly with the chat function. (Duchenaut, Yee, Nickell, & Moore, 2005.)

The reach of social communities outside of games supports that social interaction within games forms new friendships between players. Especially in MMO-games, the social interaction creates the sense of unity. Joining a community acts as a catalyst for bringing players together. The relationships formed in these communities work as a motivator to keep playing and play longer periods of time in one sitting. Duchenaut et al. (2005) noticed that belonging to a guild and the level of the player increased the weekly playtime of a player. The higher the players level, the longer the weekly playtime.
Figure 1. Time spend gaming when in a guild and when in not a guild depending on the level of character (adapted from Duchenaut et. al., 2005).

2.2 LAN-Parties

Gaming is not constricted to the home of the players. Consoles and the internet have made gaming together much more common. (Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006). LAN-parties (Local Area Network) have also contributed to playing together. In LAN-parties, the gamers bring their own computers to the same place and play together in local area network. Originally LAN-parties did not have internet, but the games were played in local area network. However nowadays most parties do have internet connection. However, gathering together and socializing have not changed. LAN-parties are in fact one way of meeting and socializing with their friends from the games in the social context of real life. (Taylor & Witkowsk, 2010.) LAN-parties have also widened their scope from socializing the competitive gaming and expos of companies and their products. Especially Finland’s biggest gaming events (Assembly, Vectorama, Insomnia) have widened their offerings. In most LAN-parties you can find, competitions, companies, associations and other gaming related activities.

The social side of gaming is well presented in these events when the gamers are given a chance to meet their friends and a chance to make new ones with people who share their interests. According to Kort, Ijssellsteijn and Gajadhar (2007) the research has proven that games are enjoyed more when they are played together. The research has also proven that the enjoyment is even bigger when the players are able to communicate, exchange ideas and able to see other players’ performance.

Taylor and Witkowski noticed that players are not stereotypical sweaty geeks, with hanging clothes. The attendees of gaming events are a mix of people who already know each other or players who attend the events to meet their friends from game-world for
the first time. According to Taylor and Witkowski’s article the player take part in a myriad of activities during these events. “DreamHack gives us a glimpse into the kind of transitional state we are in with regard to both game and geek culture. What we see at the event is actually a growing seamless integration of network/pop/youth/game culture into, simply, a slice of the mainstream.” (Taylor & Witkowski, 2010.)

Playing games together is not a simple term. Games are played at home and in the internet. However, in LAN-parties the social side of gaming really shows. The players leave their homes and sometimes travel hundreds of kilometres just so that they could meet other gamers face to face. There can be hundreds of attendees in a LAN-event, and in through different medias they make new friends and socialize with other players. Sometimes the players might attend the event just so that they could meet their long-time friends face to face for the first time. Socializing is very important to players. (Jansz & Martens, 2008).

In their research Jansz & Martens found four motives for players to attend LAN-parties. These four are: Competition, socializing, interest and relaxing. Out of these four socializing was the biggest motivator for players to attend LAN-parties. Attendees of the events are not stereotypical geeks, who drop out of social context and immerse themselves in the game world. They attend the events because they are interested in gaming, meeting other people and competing. Players are also often active in their respective gaming communities. (Jansz & Martens, 2008)

Jeroen Jansz and Lonneke Martens (2008) defined a typical attendee of a LAN-event to be 11-35 years of age, with a median of 19,5 years. Most of the attendees were male. Also most of the attendees used 2,6 hours a day to play games on average. This is a somewhat large amount of time spent on playing games. The biggest motivation for attending a LAN-event was socializing. Thus attendees of LAN-events are social people who value social contacts. The second biggest motivation was exchanging information. Players exchanged information about new games, strategies and techniques. Over 50% of the attendees played games online. In a social context 54,5% of attendees belonged to a social gaming community. Approximately 40% of attendees had participated in a LAN-event 6 times or more and around 20% (21,1%) of attendees participated for the first time. In the research, the authors stated that most of the attendees that participated the event were young single men. However, the older attendees were in a relationship. Most of the participants owned a computer and some other gaming platform.

In big LAN-event you notice how colourful the crowd of attendees can be. In these events the games are the common element. In such a big group of game enthusiasts there are also a lot of different activities for gaming and gaming related activities. (Taylor & Witkowski, 2010). Games are a unifying element that bring together hundreds and thousands of people.

### 2.3 Social Gaming

Games have evolved to be more and more interactive during the years. Gamers no longer adventure in the game world alone. The game they are playing is filled with other players. Playing video games is not only interacting with the game, but also social interaction with other players. The gamer’s experience of the game changes when the game is played with other players. Research in to games has demonstrated that even though the physical space opens the players’ senses to new levels, the players do not
necessarily communicate with each other outside the game, but through the game. (Kort, Ijsselsteijn & Gajadhar, 2007.)

Gaming is now a part of pop-culture. Young people play more and more video games and new video games are produced more than ever. Gaming has also spread to the social life. In most video games, there is a multiplayer mode in addition to the single player mode. Gamers communicate with each other while playing and exchange information about the game, the surroundings among mundane things with other players. Gaming has always been a social event when we consider games as part of sports or board games. Video games were at first single player games. However, gaming has turned into a social event, even though the players might not occupy the same physical space. Thus playing video games have turned into social interactions. (Taylor & Witkowski, 2010.)

In all cultures, ones that break the rules are considered bad. In gaming world cheaters, who use different kinds of software to break the rules of the game are punished. The punishment can be for example losing their friends. Many game companies use different techniques to prevent cheating in their games. For example, Steam protects their servers with Valve Anti-Cheat (VAC) software. Game servers protected with VAC do not allow players who are flagged as cheaters to join games and thus punish people who break the rules. (Blackburn, Simha, & Kourtellis, 2012.)

The social relations of gamers change their experience on the game. Research shows that the enjoyment of a game is much larger when the game is played with a friend. Video games have evolved into a new to keep up and create new relationships. (Xu, Cao, & Sellen, 2011). In many modern games, players can add people they have met during a play session as their friends. When the player opens their game, they can see who of their friends is playing at the same time and join them to play.

The social communities in the internet are loosely formed. In a discussion forum there may not be more than a few moderators, who serve as judge in the most obvious argument cases and maintain the forums. There are however different clan- and guild-communities. In these communities the clan or guild in question form their own closed community where the regular players can exchange information and talk about with each other outside the game. Some famous players also have fan-sites who in turn form their own community. Clans and guilds are mostly more tightly formed communities. The gamers might be a part of the bigger community, but in turn they are also a part of a smaller community with who they play the game. (Hsiao & Chiou, 2012.)

Achievements create social equity for the players. A player who is experienced is a role model for other players. Also experienced players usually help out new players to learn the games mechanics and the ways of the community. Especially in MMORPG (Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game)-games the players are encouraged to seek help from more experienced players. (Hau & Kim, 2011). The experience players accumulate create social equity for the players which in turn strengthens their position in their guild.

2.4 Gaming and Social skills

In many games, there is a multiplayer mode. In multiplayer mode, the players form teams and try to reach a common objective. In multiplayer mode communication skills are vital. Games are also designed considering the community. The game companies
focus on the question “what the players can learn from this game, what they can utilize outside the game?” Social skills are vital especially in MMO (Multi Million Online)-games, where there are millions of players. MMORPG-games are designed to work as communities. The players can also play alone but that way the experience is seriously lacking. In the age of internet game companies have also noticed that if a healthy community can help the developers to improve their games, and give them new ideas for their games. The communities coexist side by side with the games, but also have their own life. The players increase their social equity within the community. The players might upload videos of the game they have made or help new players and gain acceptance in the game community. (Trepte et al., 2012.)

In MMO (Multi Million Online)-games it is imperative for the player to have social skills, because the games require that a big group of people work together to achieve a common goal. Helena Cole and Mark Griffiths researched the social interaction of gamers. In their research Cole and Griffiths found out that 76.2% of men and 74.7% of women had made new friends with people who they played with in the internet. The results also showed that female players (55.4%) where more likely than men (37.6%) to have met their friends from the game outside of the game. Older research has showed that 76.2% of men and 74.7% of women had made good friends in their gaming communities. (Cole & Griffiths, 2007.)

Cole and Griffiths mentioned in their research that the average age of MMO-players is 23.6 years and most of the players are between 20-28 years of age. Most of the players are male but the amount of women has been rising in recent years. (Cole & Griffiths, 2007).

Gaming communities are helpful. Helping others by giving tips to others is considered part of the gaming culture. “I help because I have been helped.” Helping others is a way for more experienced players to gain acceptance in the community. Social acceptance is one of the reasons why people share information about the games they play. Small fragments of information are mundane. The most experienced players can publish walkthroughs of the games they have played extensively. This helps them to gain visibility, idolizing and thankfulness. Small favours like helping out other players are common in multiplayer games. (Sun, Lin & Ho, 2006.)

Gamers who share their knowledge gain respect from their trouble. However, the thanks and the joy from sharing knowledge can be harmful to innovation-conducive knowledge. This shows in the way that gamers only satisfy their own natural motivators. The favours players do for each other strengthen their community. When a player is helped, he or she in turn wants to help others in turn. Multiplayer games have a strong social component. Gamers usually play with their friends. Communication outside of the game is also very common and future gaming session can be planned face to face. (Hau & Kim, 2011).

According to old stereotype players are lonely and are in contact only with a computer when they are playing. However, modern MMO:s have changed this thought. Playing a video game is no longer an interaction between man and machine. There is a strong social component incorporated to gaming. Playing online games is more related to playing poker with a group of friends. (Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006.) Online games have demonstrated with their popularity, how the gamers are in interaction with each other. Without social skills and teamwork, the players cannot progress further in the game. Online games have been designed so that the players can communicate with each other. (Duchenaut & Moore, 2004).
VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol)- software and integrated communication methods also help players to get to know each other. The player makes new friends with greater probability with other players, if they engage in some form of communication and achieve their goals together. Without communication it is likely that the shared gaming experience well stay in one or few sessions. (Xu, et al., 2001). There is also an effect on the player’s manner when people play together. An arrogant, irritating player, who acts offensively can’t necessarily find people who want to play with them. Social skills are highlighted especially in team-games, where a team of players will have to work together to achieve a certain goal. Communicating with voice can deepen the relationship with the players. The anonymity of the players is removed when they communicate by speaking to each other. Speaking also strengthens groups of players significantly when compared to the traditional text-based communication. (Williams, Caplan, & Xiong, 2007).

MMO-games are only one of so called “third places” where social interaction happens. However, they are unique in the way that the people who gather in these places have same goals in a 3-dimensional world. Williams et al. took a look at social life of guilds inside World of Warcraft. In their research they stated that even though the social contacts and relationships were remarkably similar to the relationships and contacts outside the games, the rules of the game had an effect on the player’s actions, how and why they communicated with other players. Around 60% of the players felt that they belonged in to a social guild. The goal of a social guild is to socialize with others and the goals of the game were secondary. The research shows that in modern MMO-games social interaction acts as a catalyst for players to keep in contact with their friends even if they are a long distance from each other or friends they have met while playing. (Williams, Dmitri Duchenaut, Nicolas Li, Xiong, Yuanyuan, Zhang, Yee, Nick Nickell, 2006).
3. Research methods

The research is a quantitative study. I distributed the research questionnaire via social media to gamers. In total there were 450 people who answered to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was purposely distributed amongst gamers because I wanted to research how gamers view their relationships and how they keep in contact with their social relationships and friends who they have made while gaming.

The answers from the questionnaire are analysed using IBM SPSS analytics 23. The answers were analysed using cross tabulations and correlations (Pearson’s correlation coefficient) to reveal links between the answers. The variables were compared separately and individually. The variables were compared keeping the social aspect of gaming in mind. The themes were analysed individually. Each theme had a specific set of variables and were analysed within that theme to find links between socializing and gaming in each theme.

The results of the questionnaire are backed with literature review on social communities in video games. The literature review will answer the same questions that are proposed in the questionnaire. Moreover, the questionnaire also backs up the findings from the literature review.

The two usual distinctions between research methods is dividing them into qualitative and quantitative research. Quantitative research is common in natural sciences where the research is something that is measured in a laboratory or survey. As the name states, quantitative research relies on numerical data. Qualitative instead has its roots in social sciences and it helps us to understand the social context, examples of qualitative research are case studies and interviews. The research in this thesis is quantitative in nature. (Myers & Avison, 2002)

Based on the research done in the literature review, I pondered between qualitative and quantitative research. After weighing the options. I decided that quantitative research would suit the purpose of this study, which is to provide more info into the pool of knowledge about social gaming. Also qualitative study would be more appropriate when considering a more detailed research question. Qualitative study does have its roots in social sciences, but in this study the scope is of a broader nature where numerical data was warranted, I chose to conduct this study as quantitative. The variables analysed were within a theme. Also all themes were analysed separately as all questions within the theme were meant to find links within the themes.

The questionnaire consisted of six parts. All people who participated in the questionnaire answered questions, which in the first part ask about general information about gaming. The last questions of the first part ask the participant whether or not they play video games online. Based on this question the participant is redirected to different parts. If the participant answered yes, they are redirected to the part about online games, if no to the part where they answer questions about what kind of games they play offline. The questionnaire also includes parts about e-sports and LAN-parties. I decided to include questions of LAN-parties and e-sports to the questionnaire because they are integral part of social interaction when we talk about social gaming. The themes in the questionnaire were designed to cover as much ground as possible.
The questionnaire’s themes were identified from literature review. Gaming, Gaming with friends and Gaming events were all integral part of the literature review when I considered the themes and what data I wanted to gather. E-sports and Gaming related news was included in the questionnaire as a niche to find out what other gaming related activities players engaged in besides playing themselves in an event or at home.

The research was conducted as a questionnaire. The research utilizes quantitative methods to describe the data and answers the participants have provided. The participants were asked question in an online form that was hosted in Google forms. The answers were analyzed using cross tabulation and correlations. The data was gathered in January and February of 2016.

The questions have been categorized in 5 categories. Introductory questions, Online games, playing with friends, Gaming related events and E-sports and gaming news. There was also a part, which was shown to people who answered that they did not play online video games. The questions were categorized in order to gain maximum knowledge of how the participants viewed online games as social places.

The data gathered by the questionnaire was analyzed using SPSS-software utilizing quantitative and statistical analysis methods. This data is presented in this research to present the relationship between the literature review and real world data.

The questionnaire was distributed among gamers via the internet to gaming communities. One of the biggest of them was Vectorama LAN-party’s Facebook page, which yielded a major part of the answers.

The questionnaire consisted of 450 answers in total. Of these 450 people 94.2% answered that they played online games and 5.8% answered that they did not play online games. The results are discussed in detail in chapter 4.
4. Results

The questionnaire tried to map out as extensively as possible the social aspects of playing video games online. The questions were designed to map out how gamers perceive playing video games in context of social activities. Initial glance of the answers reflects the hypothesis that gaming is a very social activity. The participants in the survey were presented 46 questions about games, gaming events and the social side of gaming.

The questionnaire consisted of 450 answers in total. Of these 450 people 94.2% answered that they played online games and 5.8% answered that they did not play online games. When asked how much the participants played on average in a week, 37.6% of participants told that they play over 16 hours a week on average. Respectively 19.2% played 12-16 hours a week and 22.7% played 8-12 hours per week.

The people who answered the questionnaire 59 percent were between 14-30 years of age. However, the data shows that there were answers in all available categories. Interestingly the least answers were in the 35-38-age range. However, this is not statistically significant as the questionnaire was aimed at players between the ages of 10-30. However, I should note that as previous research suggests, playing video games encompasses people from all ages.

The largest group of people who answered the questionnaire was between 14-18 years of age (24.6%). The second largest was 27-30 (14.1%) and third 23-26 (11.8%) years of age. The answers clearly show that players come from a very wide range of ages.

Players spend varied amounts of time playing games. 37.6% percent spent over 16 hours a week on average playing games. 22.9% spend 8-12 hours gaming. These were the two most common categories in the answers. However other categories (4-8 hours and 12-16) were also common with 16.2% (4-8 hours) and 19.1% (12-16) of the answers.

Players consider playing games as a hobby almost half of the people who answered the survey (49.7%) considered gaming as their hobby. The gamers also considered gaming as a pastime. In the scale from 1-7 358 people (79.7%) out of 450 participants answered that they 5 or higher when asked if they considered gaming as a way to pass time. Also 431 people out of 450 people answered 5 or higher when asked if they enjoy gaming.

Gaming is also considered is regarded very much as a social activity. 56.1% of the answers reflect this. 56.1% of the people agreed strongly with the question “Playing video games is a good way to spend time with friends.” This shows that people consider playing video as a good way to spend time with friends. Also the participants agreed that playing video games is a very good way to meet new people. 143 (33.7%) people agreed with a value of 7 in the scale of 1 to 7.

Most of the players owned at least a PC computer. 96.7% of the participants answered that they play with a PC. However, many also answered that they own a gaming console also.
The questionnaire showed that most players play between 10-20 hours a week on average. The results also show that most of that or all of that time is spent playing online games. Figure 2. Shows that if a player answered that they played on average 10-20 hours a week, they also spent over 16 hours playing online games. This means that a significant amount of time spent playing games is spent playing online games.

Major part of the respondents stated that they enjoy gaming very much. 51.1% (230 people) of the participants answered the question “I enjoy gaming” with a value of 7 in a likert scale of 1-7.

The gamers also played a variety of games. The answers of the questionnaire showed that players rarely indulged in only one genre of gaming, but played a variety of games from widely different genres.

The research also showed that 54.4% (231 people) played 10-20 hours a week on average 27.6 (117) played 5-10 hours a week on average and only 17.7% (75 people) played 0-5 hours a week on average online.

Figure 2. Cross tabulation of the answers where players estimated how much they in a week on average online and in general.
4.1 Gaming as a social activity

Players view gaming as social activity. Cross tabulation of the question “I play to spend time.” And “Gaming is social activity to me.” Reveals that the players view their spending time playing video games as social activity. (Figure 3.)

Gamers view gaming as social activity. The results of the questionnaire show that much of the time spent gaming, is also spent gaming online with friends. The time spent in games with friends is also important to players. Many players also answered that one of the important reasons for them to attend LAN-events is to play with their friends and spend time together. This shows that there is a strong social component attached to gaming.

![Bar Chart](image)

**Figure 3.** Cross tabulation of questions “I play to spend time.” and “Gaming is social activity for me.”

The players who answered the question “Gaming is social activity for me.” Also answered the question “Gaming with my friends is important for me.” There is a significant correlation between the importance of playing with friends and social gaming. (Figure 4.) This shows that social gaming is very important for players. The results also show that players view gaming as a hobby when they play with their friends.
When asked how much the respondents played with their friends. There is a significant increase in hours played when the players agreed that gaming is social activity for them.

The respondents of the survey revealed that gaming is a popular way to keep in touch with friends and that increases the enjoyment of the game. So this can be interpreted that gamers enjoy gaming with friends. Also this shows that gamers enjoy the company of their friends and keeping up with these social contacts is enjoyable and important to players.

![Bar Chart](image)

**Figure 4.** Cross tabulation of questions: "Gaming with my friends is important for me." and "Gaming is social activity for me."

The results show that socializing is important for players. The results clearly show that social relationships and social gaming is important to gamers. Also the results reveal that social contacts are important for people who participate in gaming related events. The gamers consider that gaming is a hobby that they enjoy with their friends. There is a distinct correlation when the participants were asked if they enjoyed playing games and whether they considered gaming as a hobby for them and their friends. (Table 1).

The results showed that there is a significant link between the enjoyment of a game and whether or not they played it with their friends. (Table 2). The players who enjoyed gaming very much with their friends also answered more likely that they enjoy gaming very much also. This shows that enjoyment of gaming is also dependent on the people
we play with. Also playing with friends as a hobby increases as the enjoyment of playing the game. The results show that people who answered that they enjoy gaming also enjoy gaming with their friends very much. A significant amount of participants answered that they consider gaming as their hobby and also that they consider playing with friends as a hobby that they enjoy together.

There is a relatively strong correlation between enjoying gaming and enjoying gaming in company. The Pearson correlation coefficient for the questions covered about the enjoyment was .437 (table 2). Which shows that gamers enjoy gaming with their friends and that there is a distinct link between enjoying gaming and gaming in company.

![Bar Chart](image)

**Figure 5.** Cross tabulation of the questions “I play online games to keep in touch with my friends.” And “I enjoy gaming with my friends.”

The gamers viewed gaming as a hobby. 49.6% of the participants strongly agreed when they were asked whether they viewed gaming as a hobby. The correlation shown in Table 1 Clearly demonstrates that gamers consider gaming a hobby and also they consider it a very important part of socializing. The Pearson correlation for the questions “Gaming is a hobby for me.” and “Gaming is a hobby for me and my friends.” Was .508 (table 1). Which is a clear positive correlation when considering social gaming and gaming as a hobby.
Table 1. Correlation between “Gaming is a hobby for me.” and “Gaming is a hobby for me and my friends.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>Gaming is a hobby for me and my friends</th>
<th>Gaming is a hobby for me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gaming is a hobby for me and my friends</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>392</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2. Correlations of questions “I enjoy gaming with my friends.” And “Gaming is a common hobby for me and my friends.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>I enjoy gaming with my friends</th>
<th>Gaming is a hobby for me and my friends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy gaming with my friends</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>392</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Most participants (87.8%) also answered that they had made new friends playing games online. The participants presented many ways of communicating with their friends from games. Two most popular means of communication listed is Facebook and TeamSpeak VOIP-program. Also 90.1% of people who answered reported that they had met friends whom they play with outside of the game. This suggests that they knew the people they play with before they started playing together and also that they had met people during their online gaming sessions that they wanted to meet outside the game world.

The results indicate that there is a very strong social component attached to today’s games. Players not only play games together but, also participate in gaming related events together. The correlation for enjoying a game with friends and enjoying gaming suggests that gaming is social activity for players and that there is a lot of social interaction between gamers.
4.2 LAN-parties and gaming events.

Lan-parties were important for people who answered the questionnaire. There is correlation between attending a LAN-party and socializing. The strongest correlation in the questions related to LAN-parties was between “I participate in LAN-events because I want to play with my friends” and “I participate in LAN-events because I want to meet my friends from the game in the real world also.” (Table 4). However, when asked if they had participated in LAN-events to play with their friends, the results show a slight deviation. More people answered yes to question where they had participated in LAN-events to play with their friends, but there is also a significant amount where people answered that they did not participate in LAN-events to play with their friends. (Figure 6.)

![Bar Chart](chart.png)

**Figure 6.** Cross tabulation of the questions “I participate in LAN-events because I want to meet my friends also offline.” And “Do no keep in touch your friends outside gaming?”
Figure 7. shows that players who play online games as a way to keep in touch with their friends, also participate in LAN-events to meet their friends outside the game world. This can be interpreted as a strong motivator for players to participate in LAN-events. However, it must be noted that there is not a very high correlation between keeping in touch with friends and participating in LAN-events. The Pearson correlation coefficient for keeping in touch with friends and participating in LAN-events because of a want for meeting friends outside of the game was .384 which is a low positive correlation. (table 3).

Most gamers who had participated in LAN-events also ranked the social reasons for participating important. However, there was one significant exception. When players were asked if they participated in LAN-events to meet new people there were no one value that stood out in the likert scale of 1-7. This shows that players do not consider participating in LAN-events to meet new people as a strong motivator for them.

The results also show that the players wanted to meet new people online, and also had met new people while playing a game, but did not consider meeting new people offline a priority. 87.8% (344 people) of the participants in the survey stated that they had made new friends playing online games. Also 91.1% (357 people) stated that they keep in touch with their friends who they play with outside the game world also.
Table 3. represents the correlation of participating in LAN-events with social motives. There is medium correlation when the participants were asked if they considered playing games with their friends to keep in touch with them. The players also agreed strongly that LAN-events are an opportunity for them to meet new people that are interested in same things as them. 31.6% (134 people) agreed fully (7 in likert scale of 1-7) to the statement “LAN-events are a good opportunity for me to meet people who share my interests.” 17.7% (75 people) and 16.5% (70 people) did not agree fully but still agreed strongly with this statement. (6 and 5 in likert scale of 1-7)

**Table 3.** Correlation for the keeping in touch with friends and participating in LAN-events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>I participate in LAN events because I want to meet my friends from outside the game.</th>
<th>I play online games to keep in touch with my friends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I participate in LAN events because I want to meet my friends from outside the game.</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation 0.384** 1.000 424 392</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation 0.384** 1.000 392 392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I play online games to keep in touch with my friends</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation 0.384** 1.000 392 392</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation 0.384** 1.000 392 392</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**
When it comes to LAN-events, the gamers who participated in the survey showed distinct leaning towards social reasons for attending. The survey presented five questions, which asked the participants about social reasons for attending LAN-events and 2 questions about general interests for attending LAN-events. The data showed that the questions, which listed social reasons for attending scored more values 6 or 7 on a likert scale of 1-7. However, the question “I participate in LAN-events because I want to meet new people.” Which had 105 (24.8%) answers with a value of 4. The two questions for general interest in gaming in these events had more answers with values 4 and 5.

The respondents listed many reasons for participating in LAN-events. However, the most significant motivation for participating in LAN-events was so that they can play with their friends. The Pearson correlation was .788 for the question “I participate in LAN-events because I want to play with my friends.” The correlations for the questions about LAN-events are presented in Table 3. There is also a strong correlation between all motives listed as questions in Table 4. However, “I participate in LAN-events because I want to play with my friends.” Has the highest Pearson correlation coefficient.

All questions that covered participating in LAN-events showed that gamers rank to the higher values of the scale. The questions “I participate in LAN-events because I want to play with my friends.” did have a highest number of people (153 answers) who answered with the value of 7 in a likert scale of 1-7, the second highest number of very
important answers was in the question “I participate in LAN-events because I am interested in gaming.” with 141 answers with a value of 7.

Table 4. Correlations table for LAN-events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I participate in LAN-events because I am interested in gaming</th>
<th>I participate in LAN-events because I want to play together with my friends</th>
<th>I participate in LAN-events because I want to meet new people</th>
<th>I participate in LAN-events because I want to meet my friends from outside the game.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I participate in LAN-events</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.788**</td>
<td>.550**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>events because I am interested in gaming</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I participate in LAN-events</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.788**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.535**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>events because I want to play together with my friends</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I participate in LAN-events</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.550**</td>
<td>.535**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>events because I want to meet new people</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I participate in LAN-events</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
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<td>.701**</td>
<td>.607**</td>
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<tr>
<td>events because I want to meet my friends from outside the game.</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>424</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.3 Gaming and media

Electronic media has had an impact to gaming. Game news are spread from all around the world and internet streams produce hundreds of hours of video every day. The respondents in the questionnaire were asked they followed any media that had something to do with games. 91% of the respondents answered yes to this question.
The most popular way of following games and gaming related news was gaming sites (82%). The second most popular way was news with (64.9%). However, all choices had a fairly high percentage of answers from the participants.

When asked if the respondents followed electronic sports (E-sports) 307 people (72.4%) of the participants answered yes. Most participants answered that they mostly followed different tournaments and Internet streams. However, when asked how many hours they spend following electronic sports in a week, 204 (52.4%) of the respondents answered 0-2 hours a week and only 23 people (5.9%) followed e-sports 11-12 hours a week.

When asked if they considered following e-sports as a hobby. The survey did not provide a clear answer. The responses were divided among all the available options in the likert scale of 1-7. (Figure 9).

Even though the participants were of mixed mind whether or not they considered following e-sports as a hobby, there was a clear trend when the participants were asked if they considered participating in e-sports a hobby. 143 (37.3%) stated clearly that they did not partake in e-sports as a hobby. However, most people agreed that e-sports is entertaining. Also the results indicate that the participants enjoy e-sports.

Figure 9. Division of numbers in the question “Following electronic sports is hobby for me.”
5. Discussion

This research wants to find out how social communities in video games form and how players view their social life in these communities. In earlier research there have been focus on how video games affect the social interaction between players. My thesis aims to shed light to what brings people together with video games and how the gaming experience changes with social interaction. This study has been done as a quantitative research and literature review in video game social communities.

The social communities in video games are very interesting research subject. Video games have evolved in the last few years. Video games have transformed more and more into a social activity, and players no longer sit in dark rooms playing alone. Also there has been a significant increase in activities outside the games and the Internet. LAN-parties and professional gaming tournaments and game events are more and more open to everyone. The gamers are interested not just in gaming but also on the strides in game technology. The gamers who attend LAN-parties are active gamers who participate in the events as a part of their hobby. Participating in LAN-parties can also be a way for people who do not play actively to experience the gaming culture and its parts. In bigger events the gaming itself is not the main activity. Socializing is part of modern gaming. Most games are made with the gamer and their social communities in mind.

My thesis focuses on how the gaming experience changes when there is a social component added in to the mix. Prior research has showed that gamers are very social people. Especially in MMO-games the game is very hard or even impossible to play without social skills. With the help of social communities, the players can find people who they can trust. The more intimate the players’ relation is the easier it is to work together. Players who know each other also know the weaknesses and strong points of their team than players who do not know each other. Players get to know each other easier while gaming and this way they learn to know their gaming friends outside the game as well. The more people spend time together in the game world as well as outside it, the better they are to work together.

The results also showed that there is a significant link between the enjoyment of a game and whether or not they played it with their friends. (Figure 5). The players who enjoyed gaming very much with their friends also answered more likely that they enjoy gaming very much also. This shows that enjoyment of gaming is also dependent on the people we play with.

5.1 Many faces of sociality

LAN-parties have increased their popularity since their conception. Nowadays LAN-parties do not concentrate solely on gaming, but there are also other activities that are designed for the participants of these events. For example, in Assembly Summer there is a demo-competition. In this demo-competition the participants are given rules that need to be followed. The criteria for these demos can be the size of source code or the aesthetic side of the program. Gamers also make modifications to their computers. In my own experience LAN-parties have always been a social event. These events bring
together gamers to spend time with each other and of course, to play. Gaming can be considered as a part of pop-culture. The unifying effect of games can be seen especially in LAN-parties. Gamers come together to meet friends they have met while playing, show their skills and to see people demonstrate their skills in a wide array of competitions. E-sports or electronic sports have risen tremendously in recent years all around the world, although the sport has been around from the late 1990’s in South-Korea. The data demonstrates that there is a significant interest in e-sports, but not very many people consider e-sports as a hobby, even though the engage in the games that are played competitively. (Figure 9).

Gaming has become a means for young people to spend time together. Taylor & Witkowski (2010) state that in LAN-parties gaming is only one part of the experience. I agree with this statement, as I am myself an active participant and organizer of LAN-events here in Finland. In Finland large events such as Assembly, Vectorama, Insomnia and LanTrek gather a big crowd of gamers, who do not necessarily bring their computer with them, but participate in the event to socialize and see other activities. In these events there are typically booths from other clubs and companies from the area, where they showcase their own activities and organize events for the participants. A very popular part of these events are small competitions, product-showcases, music and the general atmosphere. However, LAN-parties are still shadowed by the old misconception that people bring their computers and do not move from their seat at all for the duration of the event. Social gaming has not yet become so widely known as a phenomenon that it should be.

The respondents listed many reasons for participating in LAN-events. However, the most significant motivation for participating in LAN-events was so that they can play with their friends. The Pearson correlation was .788 for the question “I participate in LAN-events because I want to play with my friends.” The correlations for the questions about LAN-events are presented in table 4. There is also a strong correlation between all motives listed as questions in table 4. However, “I participate in LAN-events because I want to play with my friends.” Has the highest Pearson correlation coefficient.

All questions that covered participating in LAN-events showed that gamers rank to the higher values of the scale. The questions “I participate in LAN-events because I want to play with my friends.” did have a highest number of people (153 answers) who answered with the value of 7 in a likert scale of 1-7, the second highest number of very important answers was in the question “I participate in LAN-events because I am interested in gaming.” with 141 answers with a value of 7.

In many games the players gain achievements when playing by themselves. These achievements are recorded in to the database of the game and this way the players can compare their achievements with other players. A good example of these achievements implemented in games is World of Warcraft. Every achievement is recorded and players gain titles and new equipment from completing these achievements. The players can then compare themselves with other players. Players also compare achievements when they are forming bigger groups or “raids”. If a player has not completed a certain achievement, they might not get invited to the group.

In LAN-parties the mean age of participants is around 20 (Jansz & Martens 2008) The age of players however ranges between 11 and 35 years of age. Jansz and martens are correct in this. Most of the people who participate in LAN-events are between 14-17 years of age, but there are also older and younger people who attend. Participating in these events is very rewarding in my experience. In LAN-parties the players leave aside
the age difference and get to know each other face-to-face. Without LAN-parties, players could possibly know each other only by their screen name. The popularity of LAN-parties has grown significantly in recent years. The tournaments in the events also bring fans not only players with their computers. Here in Finland the events have a good amount of audience. Also the media has taken an interest in the E-sports tournaments in these events. E-sports also known as electronic sports means playing video games competitively and also following the goings on in the community. For example, the national Finnish television company YLE has broadcast E-sports competitions in their YLE Areena-service.

LAN-parties are not however only events where gamers gather. Gaming expos have raised their popularity amongst gamers. These expos also provide additional content to the gaming community. In these events there can be gaming related cosplay events and lectures by gaming companies. Also e-sports tournaments are really popular gatherings among gamers. E-sports is also widely followed via IPTV (Internet Protocol television) that has enabled following other people playing via the internet. The major tournaments are also televised in the Internet. (Edge, 2013).

Around these games there has developed many types of additional content. This additional content such as gaming expos, LAN-parties and E-sports tournaments bring people together physically. In prior research there has been established that the main motivator for gamers to participate in these events is to socialize with other gamers. Games and gaming are only one of the activities that gamers participate in because they have a chance to meet their friends who live in other cities or even other countries. Games have been developed to more interactive so that the player’s interest would not diminish. The online communities around games have a direct correlation with how the players retain their interest in the game. Games also market themselves with their communities. Players within a general gaming community usually try new games and the word of mouth spreads through the community.

The popularity of these events can be explained by the fact that many times the organizers of these events gamers themselves. The organizers understand the players and want to bring their own culture in to these events. The organizers also want the players to join in on the fun. In LAN-parties gaming is not necessarily the main event to the gamers. The time of the players is not consumed on games but rather in socializing with other players. In the events there is also many different additional events in which the participants can partake, like company booths or seminars. Participating in LAN-event is also one the ways for gamers to meet other players who do not live nearby.

In LAN-events there are usually held different kinds of competitions in games. The participants in these competitions do not claim the prize unless they can work as a team and communicate with other players well enough. However, LAN-events are not anymore just about playing games. Only a decade ago LAN meant that a few people gathers together for a weekend to play games. Modern LAN-events are interactive events where gaming is only one part of the event along with everything else. These events are more than just gaming for the participants. The events gather into one place a wide array of pop- and youth culture. This additional content is more at display than the gaming itself. Although in Finland most LAN-events are still associated more with the gaming.

These communities are closely knit around gaming and games. The communities are born out of need. Gamers share information and also want to get to know other players. This way they create their own community where they interact and keep in touch with
each other. The word travels fast around the Internet and this way new players find their way into the community. The communities also create the feeling of togetherness for the players. The social relationships created through these communities have an effect on the players in the way that if they create strong relationships with their gaming associates he spends more time with the game and also on the social interaction outside of the game. As a gamer myself I can attest to this. I have been a part of many gaming communities where gamers keep in touch outside of the game also. Gaming is a social interaction for many of the players and a place where they form new social contacts with people all around the world. Without these social relationships gaming would surely be a dull activity to many. I have also noticed that gaming is a universal activity that does not consider the age of the players and that the hobbies of gamers can be very similar. This has also been noted by research done by Cole and Griffiths (2007) where the median age of the players was 23.6 years.

When it comes to LAN-events, the gamers who participated in the survey showed distinct leaning towards social reasons for attending. The survey presented five questions, which asked the participants about social reasons for attending LAN-events and 2 questions about general interests for attending LAN-events. The data showed that the questions, which listed social reasons for attending scored more values 6 or 7 on a likert scale of 1-7. However, the question “I participate in LAN-events because I want to meet new people.” Which had 105 (24.8%) answers with a value of 4. The two questions for general interest in gaming in these events had more answers with values 4 and 5.

In my own experience every player has access to the bigger communities, but the smaller communities are more cautious about who they let in. This is because the guilds and clans do not want some things in their community for the whole world to know. This is very common especially in competitive gaming where players plan out their strategies against other players. If their community were open to all they would lose their competitive edge.

Most participants (87.8%) also answered that they had made new friends playing games online. The participants presented many ways of communicating with their friends with their friends from games. Two most popular means of communication listed is Facebook and TeamSpeak VOIP-program. Also 90.1% of people who answered reported that they had met friends whom they play with outside of the game. This suggests that they knew the people they play with before they started playing together and also that they had met people during their online gaming sessions that they wanted to meet outside the game world.

The results show that socializing is important for players. The results clearly show that social relationships and social gaming is important to gamers. Also the results reveal that social contacts are important for people who participate in gaming related events. The gamers consider that gaming is a hobby that they enjoy with their friends. There is a distinct correlation when the participants were asked if they enjoyed playing games and whether they considered gaming as a hobby for them and their friends. (Figure 4.)

In the answers that the participants provided in the survey, social motives for attending LAN-events were clearly seen. The gamers that participated stated that they want to also spend time offline with their friends and also that they attended LAN-events to meet people who share the same interests as them. There is an interesting conundrum in the data, which states that the gamers did not consider meeting new people a strong motivator to participate in LAN-events, but they still stated that they had made new
friends through gaming and that they wanted to meet people who they had shared the gaming experience with.

5.2 Social Gaming

The notions about gaming have changed over the years. Once the gamer was a lonely nerd. Nowadays games are played by people of all ages. The social side of gaming has been highlighted and game developers have noticed that if the players do not communicate with each other the game might die. If the players do not find people to play with, the time spent in the game diminished noticeably or might stop completely. The larger the community, the easier it is for people to find others to play with, exchange thoughts and other themes associated with the game. One of the biggest myths is that games are played only by children and teenagers.

The gamers viewed gaming as a hobby. 49.6% of the participants strongly agreed when they were asked whether they viewed gaming as a hobby. The correlation shown in table 1. clearly demonstrates that gamers consider gaming a hobby and also they consider it a very important part of socializing. The Pearson correlation for the questions “Gaming is a hobby for me.” and “Gaming is a hobby for me and my friends.” Was .508 which is a clear positive correlation when considering social gaming and gaming as a hobby.

I think that a large community does not mean that everyone enjoys the game. It is important to remember that a game is not only good and that is not necessarily enjoyable to all. A large community however can increase the enjoyment, because the gaming experience can be shared with others. The move of games to the Internet has made its way to being a pastime. Gaming has its own social context. Gaming has made its way from the computer to peoples living room and internet. The Internet has also made possible that the players do not necessarily need to be in the same room, but they can still communicate with each other.

In my own viewpoint gaming has changed dramatically in the last few years. Gaming has changed during the age of Internet. The gamers communicate with each other in the game and outside of the game. The social communities strive to offer the players something that these games do not offer the players. Games develop all the time, but they cannot offer everything for the players. This is why the social communities form around games. The players can develop their social skills by playing. However, I think that you can’t forget that these social skills that develop in games cannot make up for real life social skills entirely. MMO-games are designed so that the game world is interactive. In the game the players are constantly in contact with each other by chats, where they can socialize and exchange information about the game. The games have also implemented systems where the players can converse one on one. For example, in World of Warcraft the players can “whisper” to each other. The internal chats of the game make them fun and interactive. Games have created a new way for people to spend time with others, even if they are not in the same country or even on the same continent.

The results also showed that there is a significant link between the enjoyment of a game and whether or not they played it with their friends. (Table 2.) The players who enjoyed gaming very much with their friends also answered more likely that they enjoy gaming very much also. This shows that enjoyment of gaming is also dependent on the people we play with. Also playing with friends as a hobby increases as the enjoyment of
playing the game. The results show that people who answered that they enjoy gaming also enjoy gaming with their friends very much. A significant amount of participants answered that they consider gaming as their hobby and also that they consider playing with friends as a hobby that they enjoy together.

MMO-games are substantial cultural and social spaces for gamers. The players spend on average 22 hours a week playing games. (Pisan, 2006.) This shows how easily time goes by in good company. Games have transformed into a “third place” where players can create and maintain new friendships. The game world is a space where the players can meet even though they are physically a long way from each other. Meeting someone in the game can result to a longtime friendship, which in turn have an effect on the time spent playing the game. The game companies have also noticed this and they actively create places for players to meet and socialize with each other. The gamers are not lonely. Games have their own culture gaming culture has their own rules. People who break the rules is shunned by the community. However, the community does not shut them out. The interesting thing about gaming culture is that it is a mix of different cultures from around the world. The gamers meet other people from different cultures, yet they have a mutual interest.

One of the reasons why people spend so much time playing games is friends. The players may not have met face to face, but still they spend together several hours a day. Players communicate with each other outside the game also. Social media has created new possibilities to keep in touch over the Internet. Sense of community is important to players. If a player does not consider themselves part of the group, the threshold for quitting is much lower. (Hsiao & Chiou, 2012.) Games are played among family more and more. The parents play with their children more and more. I have myself befriended a few families where a parent gaming is a hobby for the whole family. Gaming is not just passive pastime, but it has become a hobby for people of all ages. Also gaming related activities have risen in popularity. Many players who I know follow Internet streams of games, gaming related news and news about new technologies related to gaming. There are also collector’s editions where the players can get their hands on replica items or posters drawn by the original artists of the game.

The study I conducted is backing up the literature. The study showed that gamers are very sociable. Most gamers answered that they enjoy playing with their friends. The study also confirms that players spend a significant amount of time gaming with their friends online. Also the players regarded the time spent gaming with their friends as important for them. When the players were asked how much they play in a week on average the result was congruent with the answer they provided when they were asked how much they played online in a week on average.

5.3 Communication of players

Most gaming communities communicate through images and text. Players write on discussion forums and upload images and or themselves. VOIP-technology (Voice Over Internet Protocol) has enabled players to employ more of different kinds of messaging applications where they communicate through speech. Popular VOIP-programs include TeamSpeak 3, Mumble and Ventrilo. These programs enable players to communicate in other ways than writing text messages to each other. VOIP-programs are popular also because in high-speed gaming situations it is easier to react by speaking than writing.
Giving commands and tips to other players is also much easier by talking than writing them in text.

Gamers communicate outside the game mainly by text. Forums and websites exist for the sole reason so that players can create their own content there. However, players can also communicate with their team with through a VOIP-program even though they are not necessarily playing the game at the same time. Many guilds and clans usually host a VOIP-server so that the players can join in on the discussion even outside the game. The players can for example discuss different things with their friends while doing chores at the same time.

Players also keep in touch with other players via the social media. Facebook is a great resource for players to communicate outside the game. Gamers have made gotten to know each other through games. However even outside the game the players uphold their social contacts that have risen from gaming. The discussion that has started while playing continues in social media. Social media and different ways of communicating strengthen the gamers bond outside the game. (Park, Han, Won & Na, 2006) This way the relationship of a teammate may transition into a real friendship. (Cole & Griffiths, 2007.) The Internet has also helped the players to meet people who are not from the same country.

From the answers the players provided I found out how they communicate with their friends online and offline. The most popular text-based way of communication for the participants was Facebook and the most popular sound-based method of communication was TeamSpeak VOIP program.

5.4 From a hobby to a profession

E-sport or electronic sports means playing games and following games with the intention of competing. Gamers compete against each other in tournaments in the hopes of winning money or item prizes. For some players the hobby has transitioned into a profession. E-sports has also sprung its own fandom, for players and leagues. Gamers travel around to follow their own idol within the gaming circuit. Also in the Internet gaming communities follow closely the performance of their rivals and the target of their adoration.

For some tournament organizers gaming has become a profession. Some of the organizers have been professional gamers. E-sports is an example of a manifestation where the sport has transitioned from small halls into huge arenas and how universal pastime gaming is. Gaming is entertaining which is comparable to traditional sports. There is even special gear developed just for gamers. Gaming as a profession has its roots in social gaming. The gamers wanted to compete against each other and see who is better, this has given birth to e-sports. (Edge, 2013.)

Gamers who compete against each other spend a lot of time among games. In social communities these gamers exchange information and tactics with each other. This way they are researching the competitive edge where they can beat their rivals. Players also spend their time in these social communities so they can gain more social capital. (Schuch, Fritchs, Kerssenfischer & Steinfeld, 2011) Professional gamers also want to display their skill to gain social capital. The gamers who travel around the world playing in tournaments have established a steady fan-base. Active players also actively
follow tournaments from Internet streams. Internet has many social services like Twitch TV who has created a new media through from the players can follow their favorite players and chat with other players. E-sports has become a pastime which is been followed around the world in homes. I think this also dictates that e-sports can be compared to traditional sports where the sweat of the players is not the main thing, but the quick thinking and tactical mastery are revered.
6. Conclusion

This research aimed to answer how social interaction affects the gaming experience and what constitutes social gaming. The literature review tells a tale that is reflected in the results of the questionnaire. Social interaction in games is mundane. Most of today’s games are designed with players and the gaming communities in mind. My research focused on how gaming experience changes when there is an added social component to games and gaming. Previous research reflects my findings that players are in fact social in their interaction while playing games with other people. Especially in MMO-games where there is a strong social component added when the players share the game world with large of other players at the same time.

The results show that players view that gaming with friends is important to them. Social interaction is important to players. The players also value social contacts. Games provide players with new social contacts that extend outside of the game world also.

Previous research has proven that there is a strong social component present in online games today. Social interaction stretches also outside these games. However, it must be noted that games are played for enjoyment, but also for the social contact. Online gaming communities work in conjunction with online games. These communities also create social contact between players. Communities are very strongly present especially in MMO-games, where most of the games objectives are not possible to achieve without social interaction and skills to work together as a team.

Gaming is a social activity and players regard it as such. The results show that social motivators are strongly present when it comes to social interaction both online and offline. Players choose to participate in LAN-events because they want to spend time with people who they play with and who share their interests in gaming.

Digital gaming has made its way into our lives. More gamers spend time online playing with their friends. Sociality and social interaction has been studied copiously. However, the social effect of gaming should be studied more. Gaming has evolved from single player games to multiplayer games that require also social skills. Gamers regard gaming as a social activity that is important to them.

Playing games is not a new pastime. Games have been played for centuries. The form of games has changed from physical to digital but that has not diminished the value and social interaction games provide for us. Games are a way to spend time with friends and a way to meet new friends. The interaction of online games has enabled us to make friends from all around the world as we the context of playing is universal.

6.1 Limitations

The questionnaire for this thesis proves and adds to the existing pool of knowledge. However, the effect of this research is limited for two main reasons. First the questionnaire was distributed only to Finnish gamers, who mostly reside in northern Ostrobothnia region. Secondly the sample size of 450 people is sufficient for the
purposes of this thesis. Because of these two reasons the research is limited, but can still provide useful data for future research as it still has some very clear implications about gamers and their social activity and how they view gaming from a social perspective.

The research focuses primarily on Finnish gamers. However due to the international nature of online games the results can be generalized. The results of this research must be treated with certain caution as the area of social interaction and social structures within gaming communities are a fairly new area of research. This research aims to provide new insights into the existing pool of knowledge and raise new questions that can be answered by future research.

The questionnaire describes the Finnish gaming culture well, and similar results have been found in previous research also. However, when considering this study, it must be noted that the people who participated in the questionnaire were all Finnish.

6.2 Future research

The results of this research show that there is a strong social component present in online games. The results also show that socializing is important to gamers. The gaming culture has taken tremendous strides in the past few years.

One potential research angle could be gaming culture and how players view themselves in the social context through games. It has been established that games today are interactive in the sense that the players communicate and interact with other players as well as the game itself.

Also one potential research aspect could be the social dynamics in online games. There is research done that states that the players who are adept leaders in games are also adept leaders in real life also.

There has been research done on both proposed topics but still I think that these research aspects should be researched more as the games are evolving and are a great source for players to learn social skills and social dynamics.
References


Appendix 1. Questionnaire distributed to the gamers. (Translated from Finnish)

General questions:

1. Sex (man/woman)
2. Age (multiple choice)
3. How many hours do you approximately play in a week? (Multiple choice)
4. I play video games to spend time (Likert 1-7)
5. Gaming is a hobby for me (Likert 1-7)
6. Gaming is important for me (Likert 1-7)
7. What kind of machines do you use for playing (Multiple choice)
8. Do you play online games? (Yes/no)

Online games:

1. What kind of games do you play online? (Multiple choice by genre)
2. How many hours approximately do you play in a week?
3. Playing online games is fun (Likert 1-7)
4. By playing online games you get to meet new people (Likert 1-7)
5. Playing games online is a good way to spend time with your friends (Likert 1-7)
6. Do you play online games with your friends? (Yes/no)

Gaming with friends:

1. How many hours do you play in a week with your friends? (Multiple choice)
2. Have you made any friends playing online games? (Yes/no)
3. Do you keep in touch with your gaming friends? (Yes/no)
4. What platform do you use to keep in touch with your friends (Multiple Choice with various platforms and “other:”-field)
5. Have you met your friends from video games face to face?
6. How and where do you meet your friends from the games? (Multiple choice)
7. I enjoy gaming with my friends (Likert 1-7)
8. I play video games with my friends because I want to spend time with them (Likert 1-7)
9. I play online games to keep in touch with my friends (Likert 1-7)
10. Gaming is a common hobby for me and my friends (Likert 1-7)
11. Gaming is a social activity for me (Likert 1-7)
12. Gaming with my friends is important to me (Likert 1-7)

Gaming events:

1. Have you participated in LAN-events? (Yes/no)
2. Have you participated in gaming events to meet your friends from games? (Yes/no)
3. Have you made any new friends in these events? (Yes/no)
4. I participate in LAN-events because I am interested in gaming (Likert 1-7)
5. I participate in LAN-events because I want to play together with my friends (Likert 1-7)
6. I participate in LAN-events because I want to meet new people (Likert 1-7)
7. I participate in LAN-events because I want to meet my friends from games outside of the games also (Likert 1-7)
8. Gaming events are a chance for me to meet people who are interested in same things that I am (Likert 1-7)
9. I focus on playing games in gaming events (Likert 1-7)
10. People who are interested in games are important for me in gaming events (1-7)

Electronic sports and gaming news:

1. Do you follow gaming related media? (Yes/no)
2. What platforms do you use to follow gaming related news? (Multiple choice)
3. Do you follow electronic sports (Esports) (Yes/no)
4. What kind of media of electronic sports do you follow? (Multiple choice)
5. How many hours of electronic sports do you follow a week? (Multiple choice)
6. Following electronic sports is a hobby for me (Likert 1-7)
7. Electronic sports is a hobby for me (Likert 1-7)
8. Electronic sports is entertaining (Likert 1-7)
9. I enjoy following electronic sports (Likert 1-7)

Gaming at home:

1. What kind of games do you play at home? (Multiple choice)
2. I like gaming alone (Likert 1-7)
3. I play different games alone than I would play online (Likert 1-7)
4. I do not like gaming online (Likert 1-7)
5. I cannot find people who I want to play with in online games (Likert 1-7)
6. Gaming online does not interest me (Likert 1-7)