

FINAL PROJECT: Principles Mass Communication

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Words with Friends Mobile Device App

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Words With Friends Mobile App Device

I decided to write my final project on an electronic word game application that I have been playing for approximately 9 years. Initially I located this game on my kindle tablet. I started playing solo, against the computer. I thought it would be a good way to keep my brain working and I could also learn new words and enjoy myself during some free time.

Words With Friends (Words or WWF) is a multiplayer, crossword game that is played on an electronic mobile device, like a mobile smartphone or tablet, or other electronic equipment such as a laptop or a personal computer. It is similar to the classic Hasbro Scrabble word game. Some major differences between the original board game and the electronic Words game is the fact that you no longer have to be physically present to play with friends and family. You can even play all day and all night if you really want to. The person you are playing against can move whenever time permits them to move. Depending on how you have your phone alert system set up, your phone can send you an alert to let you know when your opponent moved. There were times when I forgot to shut my alerts off at night and I would get an alert in the middle of the night from my sister.

Words only allows you to play against one other player at a time, but you can play up to 40 different games at one time. You can play against a friend, a family member, a complete stranger or you can even play against the computer. You can also play multiple games against the same players.

Another major difference between the two games are advertisements. Scrabble doesn't have any **hypercommercialism** (Baran, 2019 p.218) and well, there are now a ton of ads on

Words. The WWF game is free to download and play. When I first started playing this game several years ago there were hardly any ads at all. Now they flash **banner** ads across the top and bottom of the game page while you are on the playing screen (Baran, 2019 p.300).

Originally I did not know anyone else who also played this game. Eventually I invited my sisters to play a few friendly games. After all, we usually played board games when we were together. I found out my friend from high school also was an online player so I connected with her too. There were a few times I connected with other players who I did not know at all and played them for additional rewards that were offered by the game. Eventually I noticed that playing the game 24/7 with my 2 sisters and friend was enough and now I decline to play with anyone else and I no longer care about getting extra coins or rewards. I noticed that it was becoming addictive and it was taking up a lot of my time. Words is definitely a **sticky** game, it has many features to encourage players to stay and play longer (Baran, 2019 p. 218).

The App Store preview from apps.apple.com states in the WWF description that the game is an “addictive multiplayer game.” and it claims to also train your brain and sharpen your mind, “build your vocabulary by yourself.” The game now offers additional ways to remain in the game by offering in-game chat (making it more **sticky**). The game offers additional weekly game challenges to score more points, buy additional features such as color tiles or multiple other game features to trade tiles, see missed plays, or suggested help. These additional features can be accumulated by playing more games, beating fictional characters or buying more in-game currency through the in-app purchases. The game offers 10 different types of purchases that ranges from \$.99 to \$99.99. This game is a clear definition of a **freemium game** (Baran, 2019 p. 219), users can progress through the game by consuming more ads or making additional

purchases for in-game coins. The game has daily goals and additional solo challenges that offers more game currency when you play them; these features were not in the original game when I first started playing; the game has become more **sticky**.

Words is offered in five different languages (zynga.com), it is global. It is sold from Zynga Mobile. This game was released in 2009 for Android systems, Windows phones, iOS, Facebook, Kindle Fire, and Nook Tablets (en.wikipedia.org). It was the top ranking downloaded game from 2010 and 2011. Players can play a free ad-supported version or purchase no “third party ads between turns”. In 2017 Words was the most popular mobile game in the United States with 13 million users (en.wikipedia.org). According to this same source there were 218 million WWF game accounts. The Atlantic reported in 2011 that Zynga paid Newtoy Inc. (a video game developer made up of 2 brothers and a cousin) \$44.3 million in cash and \$8.9 million in stock to purchase WWF (theatlantic.com). The entire Newtoy Inc. company was purchased by Zynga along with 14 other companies as Zynga expanded it’s mobile gaming.

In conclusion, this artifact, WWF, fits the Mass Media profile. There are over 200 million people around the world using the WWF application. It is entertaining, it is delightful and it is annoying. It challenges our intellect while at the same time it treats all the game users as a mere commodity to sell non-stop ad space to companies in order to reach millions of users. While the users are trying to enjoy a friendly game there are multiple messages that are being transmitted on the top or bottom of the screen from various companies. Sometimes the game will switch to ads after someone plays a tile; especially when you are playing the computer during the solo challenges. Players can also elect to watch ads to obtain more in-game currency. Zynga is using this popular electronic game on our electronic devices as their **medium** (Baran, 2019 p.6) for

mass communication for hypercommercialism. The users only want to play a game and in my opinion the ads have become a **noise** distraction from the game being communicated and played. Ultimately the game players (users/consumers) have become the product for Zynga to sell ad space in order to generate a revenue stream for Zynga. Zynga also generates revenue from the user through in-app purchases for special features. Zynga has become a major **conglomerate** in the mobile game industry; they made numerous purchases of other games from other game developers and they are projecting over \$1 billion in sales revenue.