Technology and Tomorrow's In-Person Social Experiences

For most of us, spending time with screens — phones, computers, tablets, tvs — has become second nature. In fact, many people have an easier time forging social connections through these screens than they do through face-to-face interactions. And it's no wonder that's the case, as the average consumer spends a great deal of time plugged in; American teenagers, for example, spend an average of nine hours a day in front of a screen.[1]

It's become a social norm to be as (if not more) engaged and connected to our online communities than to the people we come across in the real world.

Still, no matter how many hours we spend immersing ourselves in virtual realities and tapping away on screens, we crave real-life connections with other human beings, and rely upon interpersonal relationships to inform our understanding of societal norms, build social capital, and generally help us navigate our day-to-day lives. For this reason, it is important to distinguish between the types of social connectedness we seek out, and the different ways in which they do — or do not — fulfill our fundamental needs as social creatures.

The juxtaposition of these two types of social fulfillment piqued our curiosities: How might we design and build more experiences (with digital products like games or apps) that better transition across the online and offline spheres? How can we better build experiences that bring together the best of both worlds?

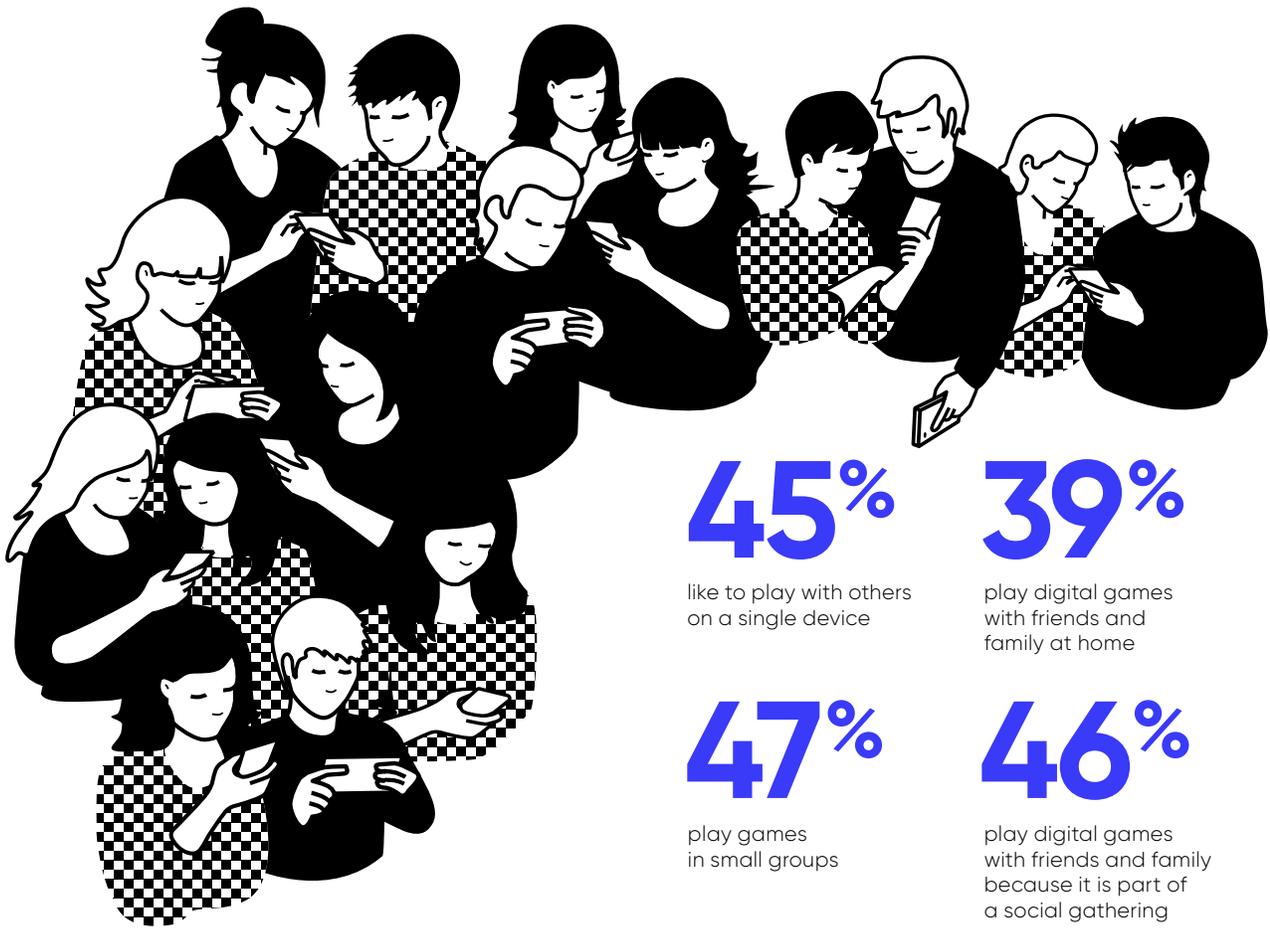**66%** wish more digital games were designed to bring friends and families together

53% feel that video games help them connect with friends[2]

52% prefer bite-sized games with friends

46% play at social gatherings

42% feel that games help them spend time with family[3]

" The majority of people appreciate and seek out games that connect them to others in a meaningful way.

45%

like to play with others
on a single device

39%

play digital games
with friends and
family at home

47%

play games
in small groups

46%

play digital games
with friends and family
because it is part of
a social gathering

To explore these questions, we conducted a survey that inquired about people's current digital gaming behaviors and how they are — or aren't — satiating people's desires for that person-to-person connection.

> ❝ ...two out of three consumers wish that more digital games were designed to bring friends and family together.

Our survey's findings reinforced some assumptions we had and also illuminated new food for thought. We found that the majority of people appreciate and seek out games that connect them to others in a meaningful way; **two out of three consumers wish that more digital games were designed to bring friends and family together.** Additionally, Entertainment Software Association's 2016 survey found that the most frequent gamers value the social aspect of digital games highly, with 54 percent of them playing with others. And while we often see headlines about millennials' preference for interacting with screens over humans, our survey found that 81 percent of the millennials who participated in our survey wanted digital games to do more to merge their passion for digital games with their natural desire to spend time with their friends and family.

Our hope is that these insights spark a dialogue on the ubiquity of technology and the nature of humans as social beings. The more we can understand where these two worlds diverge and where they converge, the better we can design and develop new, compelling solutions that take a more "heads up" than "heads down" approach to the connected experiences.
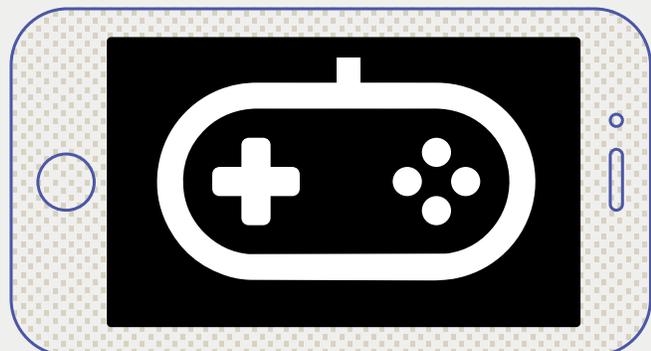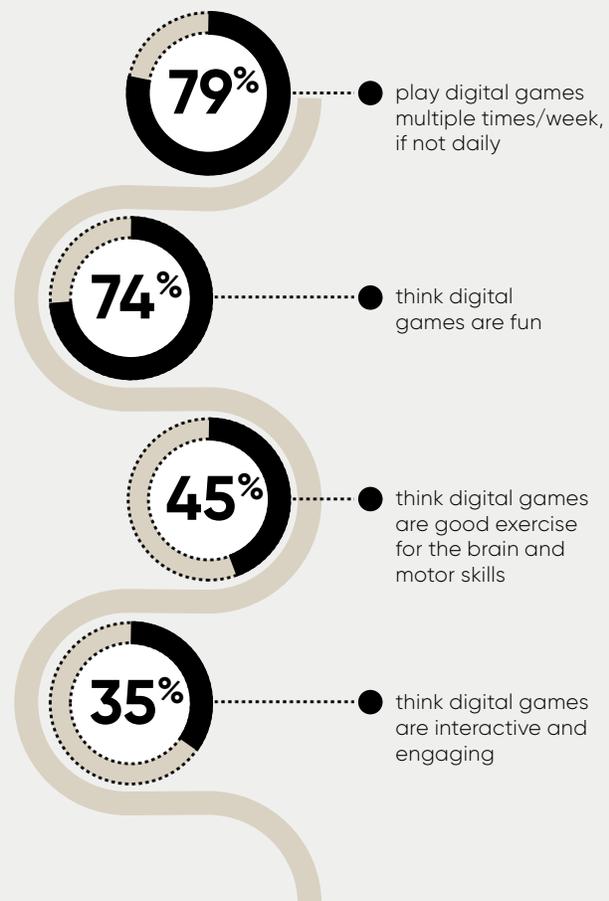
Digital Games Are Already Social Activities

Designing these types of connected experiences involves shifting the consumer mindset around the role of digital games as they relate to our social lives. Up until now, we haven't really thought of digital games as an effective way to bring people together; many gamers (75%, to be exact) are used to, and often enjoy, playing games alone. Only 12% consider digital games as social, so before looking at how to design more socially dynamic digital game experiences, we wanted to understand the ways in which people were already experiencing them as social activities.

A "New Social" Opportunity

Technology plays a key role in our society, but that doesn't mean it replaces the desire for human interaction. Sure, digital games are fun, but they are often more enjoyable when played with others, in person. This deep-rooted desire for social interaction represents a big opportunity for designers, developers, and brands to build games that bring people together.

Game Experiences Are Here to Stay

79% play digital games multiple times/week, if not daily

74% think digital games are fun

45% think digital games are good exercise for the brain and motor skills

35% think digital games are interactive and engaging

Millennials will lead the charge towards digital togetherness

We also wanted to gain more insight into how people's attitudes and gaming behaviors differed cross-generationally. Our survey results suggest that Millennials are excited about digital games that bring friends and family together, while Baby Boomers may be less receptive to the idea. And if the staggering popularity of Pokémon Go is any indication, the younger demographics — millennials and Generation X — will likely have the easiest time adapting to new game play behaviors, whereas baby boomers may take longer to adjust.

Millennials

81% of millennials wish that more digital games are designed to bring friends and family together

Millennials are **2x** more likely than Baby Boomers to play digital games with friends and family as part of a social gathering

Millennials are **5x** more likely than Baby Boomers to play games with friends and family at a restaurant/bar trivia night

Millennials are **75%** more likely than Generation X to play games with a group

1 out of **4** millennials like to play digital games with others in-person using multiple devices

Generation X

More than **50%** of Generation X play digital games daily

Generation X are **42%** more likely than millennials to enjoy playing a digital game with others online
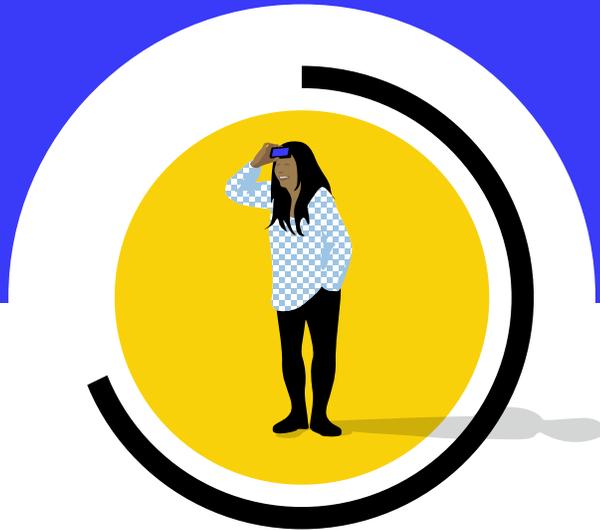
Baby Boomers

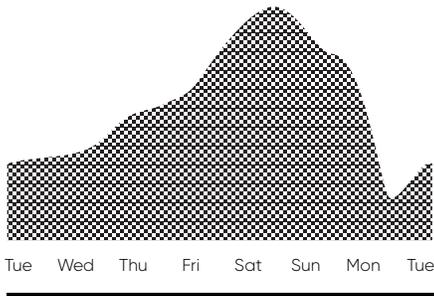**64%** of Baby Boomers play digital games daily

Baby Boomers are **33%** more likely than Generation X to feel excluded from digital games

> **"** **Sequence has seen the usage of social multi-player games spike by 110 percent on weekends.**

The Weekend is Time for Being Together

Tue   Wed   Thu   Fri   Sat   Sun   Mon   Tue

Similar to other social activities enjoyed during free time, like going out to dinner or shopping, digital game usage spikes on Friday and Saturday. Free from the confines of 9 to 5 jobs, or school, there is more time for gaming. In fact, Sequence has seen a 110 percent spike in usage on weekends of the social, parlor games it has designed and launched for multiple-player, in-person gameplay. In learning more about when people tend to find time for gaming, we were particularly intrigued by the 49 percent of people who reported that they don't play digital games because they don't have the time: how might these people feel differently if they could game and socialize at the same time? Can we design a game or an experience that provides a more holistic sense of social connectedness by better understanding when people want to be together?

> **"** **Can we design a game or an experience that provides a more holistic sense of social connectedness by better understanding when people want to be together?**

Pokémon Go Is Just The Beginning of Social Digital Games
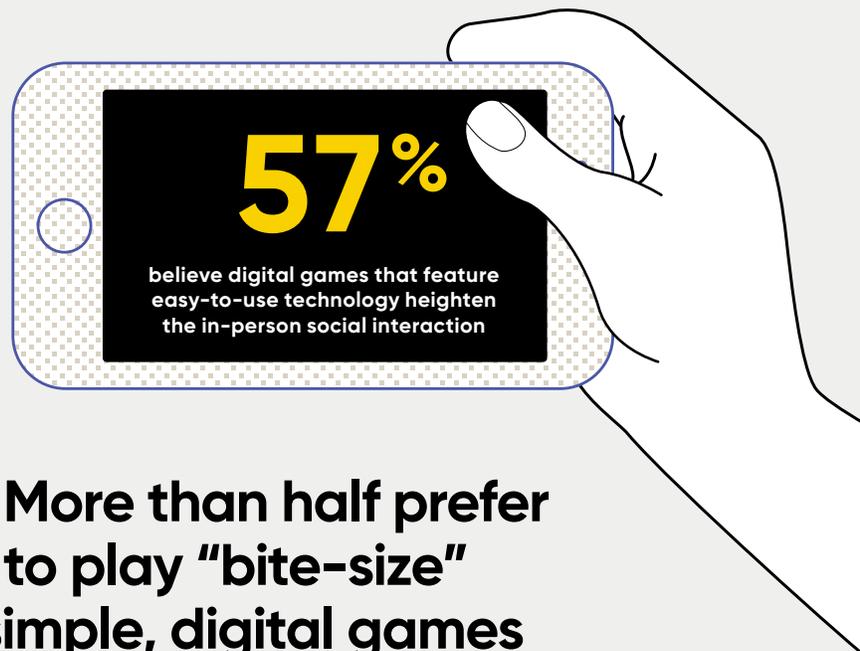
1 out of **3**
play Pokémon Go

97%of Pokémon Go players play in a group

Nearly **1** in **5**
play Pokémon Go for the social interaction or because it gets them out of the house

More than **15,000**[4]
people gathered together for a Pokémon Go meetup in Jacksonville, FL

Multiple devices, multiple complexities

In order to design successful game experiences that feel accessible to multiple audience members, simplicity is the most critical — and often most elusive — component. Highly-connected, multi-user digital experiences often introduce interaction complexities that can drive cost and feasibility upwards, but these are also the experiences where users desire the least complexity and most togetherness. To rethink the simplicity problem, we must take a cue from mobile-first principles and return to a 'human-first" way of thinking; the rising availability of Artificial Intelligence, Context Awareness and Conversational and Voice Interfaces will give us more tools to streamline these same-room experiences, allowing users to focus more on each other and less on the digital complexities that make it all possible.

57%
believe digital games that feature easy-to-use technology heighten the in-person social interaction

## " More than half prefer to play "bite-size" or simple, digital games when playing with friends and family

Sources

1.   Shapiro, J. (November 3, 2015). *Teenagers In The U.S. Spend About Nine Hours A Day In Front Of A Screen.* Retrieved from http://www.forbes.com/sites/ jordanshapiro/2015/11/03/teenagers-in-the-u-s-spend-about-nine-hours-a- day-in-front-of-a-screen/#46c280587c34

2.   *Essential Facts About The Computer And Video Game Industry* (2016). Retrieved from http://essentialfacts.theesa.com/Essential-Facts-2016.pdf

3.   *Essential Facts About The Computer And Video Game Industry* (2016). Retrieved from http://essentialfacts.theesa.com/Essential-Facts-2016.pdf

4.   DiRocco, M. (July 25, 2016). *Jacksonville Jaguars open EverBank field to 15,000.* Retrieved from http://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/17143513/ jacksonville-jaguars-open-everbank-field-15000-pokemon-go-fans

This survey — and the overwhelming success of games like Pokémon Go, for example — point to a widely untapped potential in creating more experiences that make social connection a priority. This is, of course, not without its own set of challenges, from the simple adoption hurdle of utilizing our devices in new ways, to the more entrenched challenge of adapting social norms and our collective presumptions around what it means to be social. Still, we're seeing more and more that it is possible to reimagine the role that games play in bringing people together and introduce more opportunities for social connectedness into the digital tools and experiences we create.

Brands that naturally align with this shift will help push innovation along. Pokémon Go's virality was in large part thanks to its long-standing brand power and cultural relevance (among other factors). However, its ability to disrupt and re-pattern over 20 million users' gaming behaviors in its first two weeks proves that people are ready to start playing games that connect them to others in deeper, more substantial ways.

In the 10 years since the iPhone ushered in our new relationship to devices, the changes to our society and our daily lives has been dramatic. Our devices are not going away, but there are opportunities to push beyond the screen — to appreciate the power of social connectedness by turning an exclusive medium into an inclusive one.
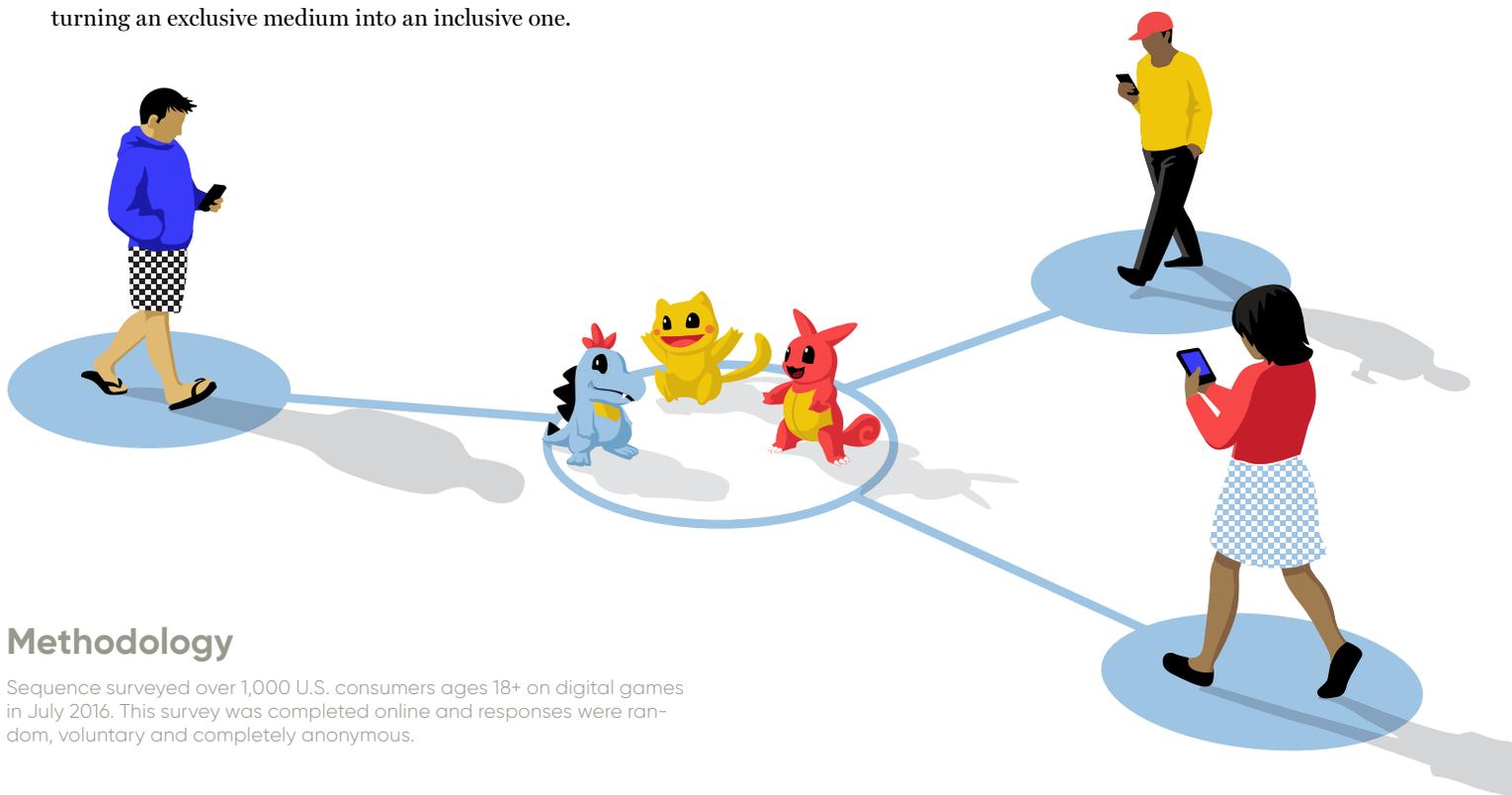
Methodology

Sequence surveyed over 1,000 U.S. consumers ages 18+ on digital games in July 2016. This survey was completed online and responses were random, voluntary and completely anonymous.