Viral Mechanics Uncovered

- Aki Järvinen, Ph.D., Lead Social Designer

Speaker Background

Aki's 10 years of experience includes:

- Mobile game design
- Online & Social game design
- Online gambling design
- Board game design
- User experience design
- Product Management
- Business development
- Academic Research & Development

Caveat:
Viral is 1/3 of the Answer

- The reality of acquiring customers in Facebook at present, roughly:

  1/3 of players come from advertising

  1/3 of players come from cross-promotion

  ...and...

  1/3 of players come from viral

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Menu of the day

- Viral Concepts
- Principles for Viral Design
- Viral Mechanics Analyzed

Viral Concepts

- Viral Marketing
- Viral Substrate
- Viral Loop
- Viral Actors: The Host & The Infected
- Viral Mechanics vs. Game Mechanics
- Viral Coefficient
- Viral Metrics

Viral?

- ‘The act of content on the web being spread by users sharing it, bringing new users to the original content and therefore adding additional utility.’

Viral Marketing Defined

- "Viral marketing can be understood as a communication and distribution concept that relies on **customers to transmit digital products** via electronic mail **to other potential customers in their social sphere** and **to animate these contacts to also transmit the products**."

  - Helm, S. (2000). Viral Marketing – Establishing Customer Relationships by "Word of Mouse". *Electronic markets* 10(3), 158-161.

The Question of Viral in Social Games

- How do the principles of viral marketing change, when the product – through it's use – constantly creates stories to share?
- I.e. what happens when viral mechanics become intertwined with game mechanics?
- Let's explore!

Aki Järvinen

Aki found a sad Ugly Duckling on their farm. Oh no!
Aki was farming when a sad, Ugly Duckling wandered onto their farm in FarmVille. This poor ducky ran away from his old home because the other ducklings made fun of him. He feels very sad and could use a new home.

4 hours ago · Comment · Like · Adopt the Duckling!

Publish to your Wall and your friends' home pages?

Give him a nickname.

I just bought **Gonzalo** as my newest pet on **Friends For Sale.**
$110,000, Cristian

Not Published Yet

Publish Skip

Aki Järvinen

Aki just shot themselves in Wild Ones!
They chose a weapon and talked some smack in this live-action, multi-player game where beating their opponents gave them serious bragging rights!

34 minutes ago via Wild Ones · Comment · Like · Play Wild Ones

Aki Järvinen Pet behaviours as viral, social objects.

Aki's pet, Kiki, ate a Musical Treat and did an awesome Splits trick in PetVille!
Aki was surprised to see their pet do a super trick! Kiki will need more Treats to try again!

20 minutes ago via PetVille · Comment · Like · Play PetVille now!

Aki Järvinen Captain Stubing welcomes you on board!

A Tour is Boarding in Happy Island!
Aki has chartered a tour for friends!
You can board once per day until it sails.

11 seconds ago via Happy Island · Comment · Like · Come aboard

Notifications

See All

Tom Båssar helped out on your farm in FarmVille! Click here to repay the favor! 48 minutes ago

Jessica Enevold and 1 others helped out on your farm in FarmVille! Click here to repay the favor! about an hour ago

A poisonous pet: [give a black widow spider to a friend for Halloween!] about an hour ago

Create your own "How well do you know me" quiz! We'll help with questions and tons of your friends will take it. Make my quiz >> 4 hours ago

Earthbound Immortal Wiraqocha Rasca just tried to assassinate you! View Earthbound Immortal Wiraqocha Rasca's profile 7 hours ago

Kirsi Saukonsaari just ate at your cafe and left you a tip! Click here to see how much they left! 7 hours ago

Kurt Ristniemi has traded with you in Restaurant City. 8 hours ago

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Viral Growth

- Myth debunked: no viral growth is exponential; the rate of reproduction and the carrying capacity limit viral growth.
- Viral growth is also a function of the **viral substrate, i.e the underlying communication medium**

Social Games' Viral Substrate

- 'The easier it is to communicate with other people the more likely something is to go viral.' (Jesse Farmer)

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Viral Coefficient = K-Factor

- *k* = *e* times *i*
- “e” = response rate, efficiency of your loop
- “i” = messaging rate, the average number of invites per user

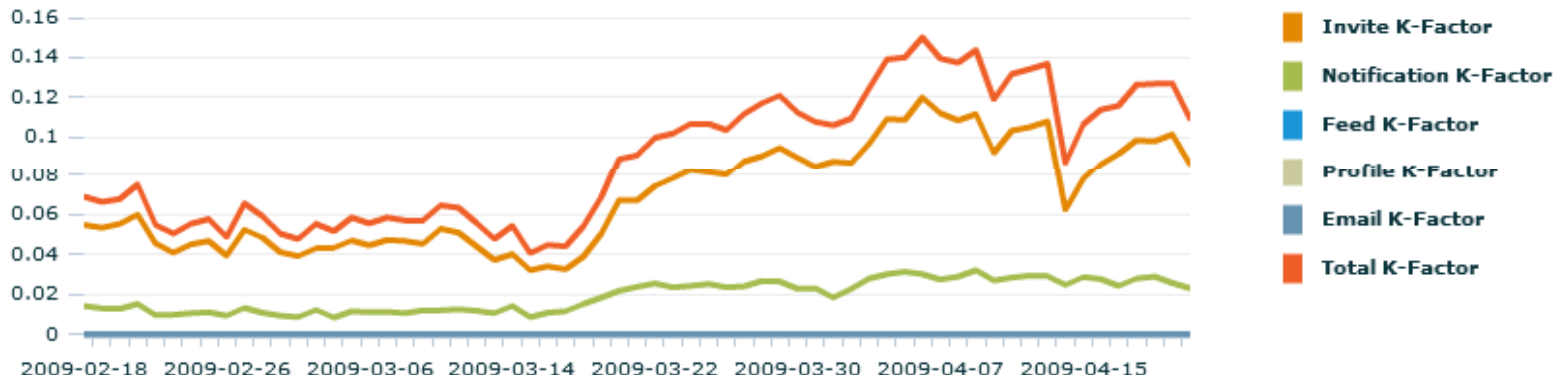
- *k* = the ratio of converting invites to new users
- If *k* > 1 you will see self-sustaining, viral growth
- If *k* is <1 than one each user will bring in a fixed number of new users, but the application’s growth is still linear.

- For more, see Jesse Farmer’s essays:
  http://20bits.com/articles/almost-viral-a-hybrid-acquisition-strategy/
  http://20bits.com/articles/three-myths-of-viral-growth/

Viral Metrics

Growth Sources ?

Virality Contribution | Non-viral Contribution



Virality Channel	K-Factor	% of Total
Invites	0.07	78.354%
Notifications	0.019	21.646%
Feeds	0	0%
Profiles	0	0%
Emails	0	0%
Totals	**0.089**	**100%**

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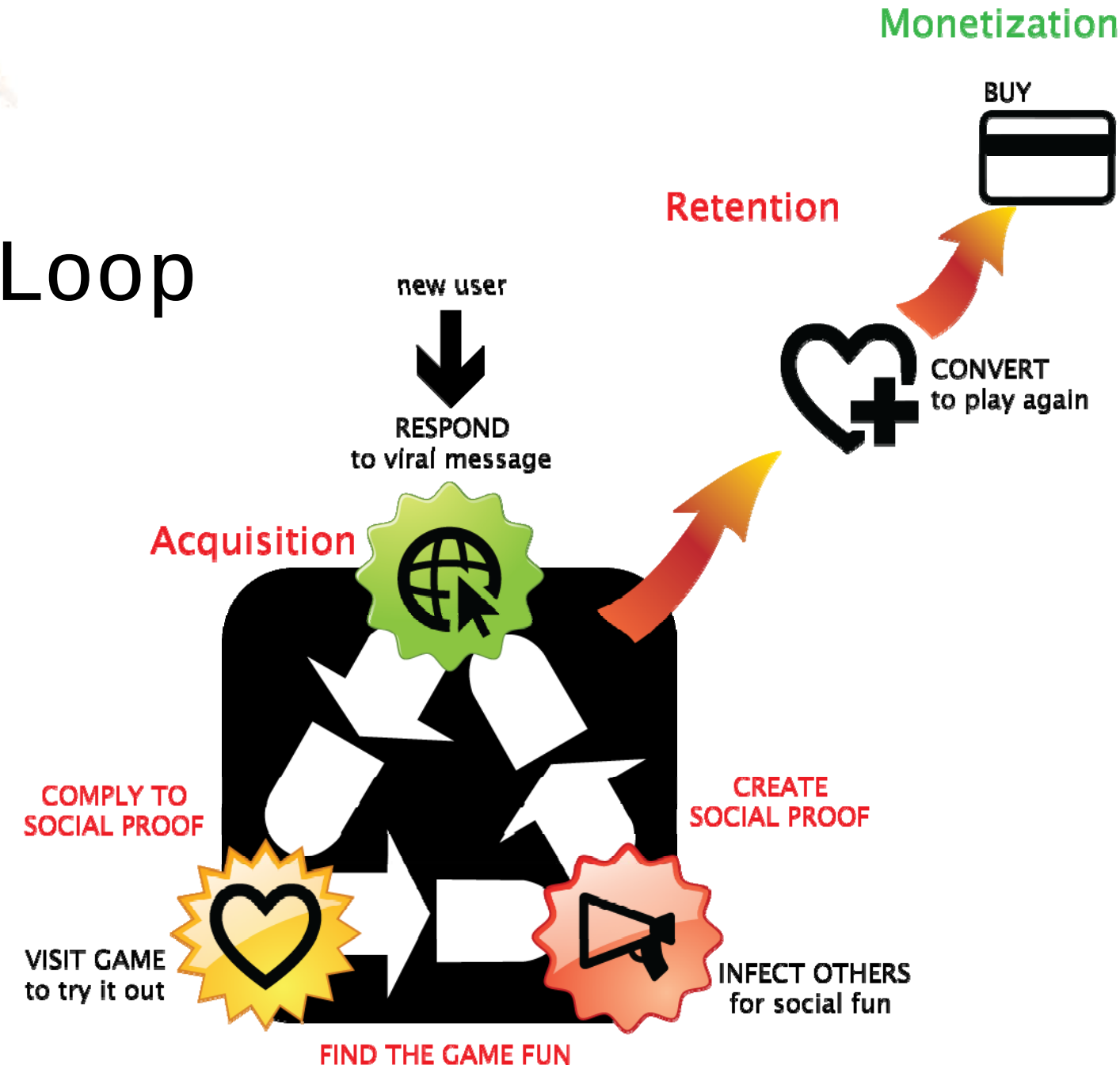
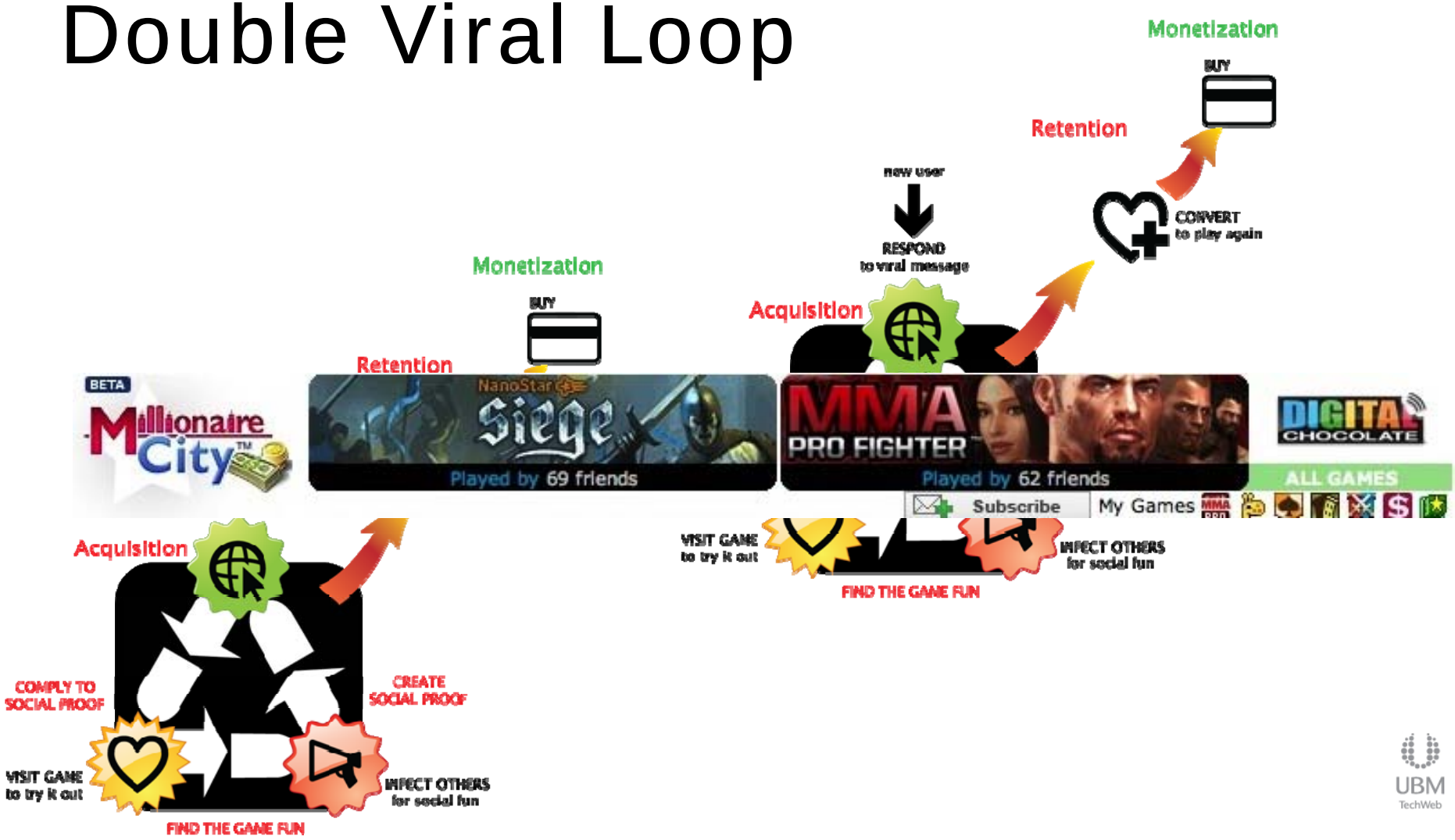
Viral Loop


Monetization
BUY
Retention
new user
CONVERT
to play again
RESPOND
to viral message
Acquisition
COMPLY TO
SOCIAL PROOF
CREATE
SOCIAL PROOF
VISIT GAME
to try it out
INFECT OTHERS
for social fun
FIND THE GAME FUN

Double Viral Loop



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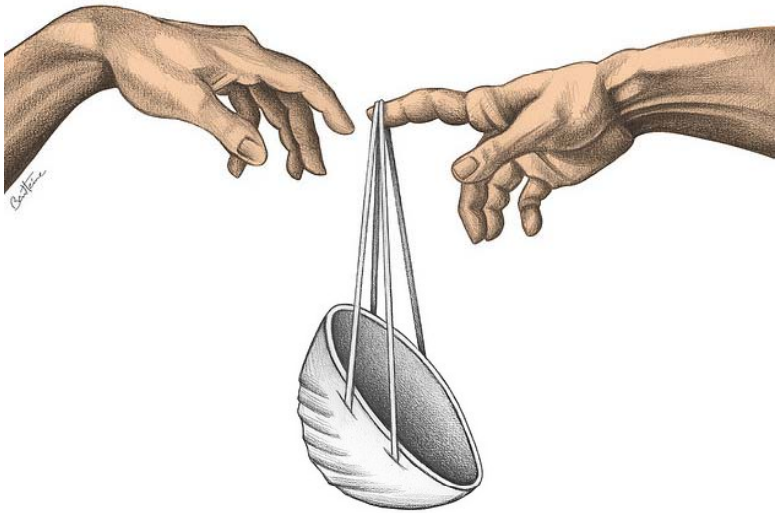
Principles for Viral Design



PANDEMIC

(c) Ben Heine - http://www.flickr.com/photos/benheine

- Your task: Design an asynchronous, persistent Tupperware online party

Actors in a Viral Loop

- The Host: Player initiating viral feed
- Infectee: Target player(s) of the feed
- Infected: Acquired new player

- The game design needs to treat viral feeds as another way for the players to express their motives – getting help, gaining tools, showing off, etc.

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Virality embedded into core mechanics

- Game mechanics have two dimensions:

  The *player dimension* accounts for the verbs with which the player can interact with other players and the game.

  The *system dimension* accounts for the procedures with which the game, as a system, acknowledges, governs, and sets up the interactions both between players, and with the game.

Viral mechanics as Game mechanics

- Due to asynchronicity & the freemium model, **all social game mechanics are retention mechanics**
- after executing the mechanic, the player needs to be given a reason to come back
- Yet also, all game events are susceptible to prompting a viral feed to be sent
- **Viral not only breeds more viral, but also reinforces retention**

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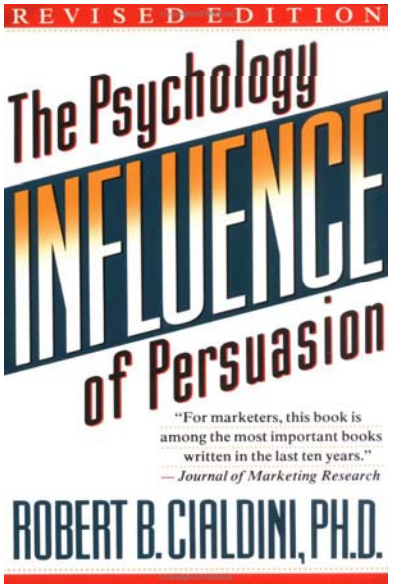
Weapons of Influence

- Social Proof
- Persuasion
- Commitment
- Reciprocity

Social Proof

- *'one means we use to determine what is correct is to find out what other people think is correct. The principle applies especially to the way we decide what constitutes correct behavior.* ***We view a behavior as more correct in a given situation to the degree that we see others performing it.'*** - Robert Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*



- Viral feeds & comments as testimonials where players go on record for 'liking' the game

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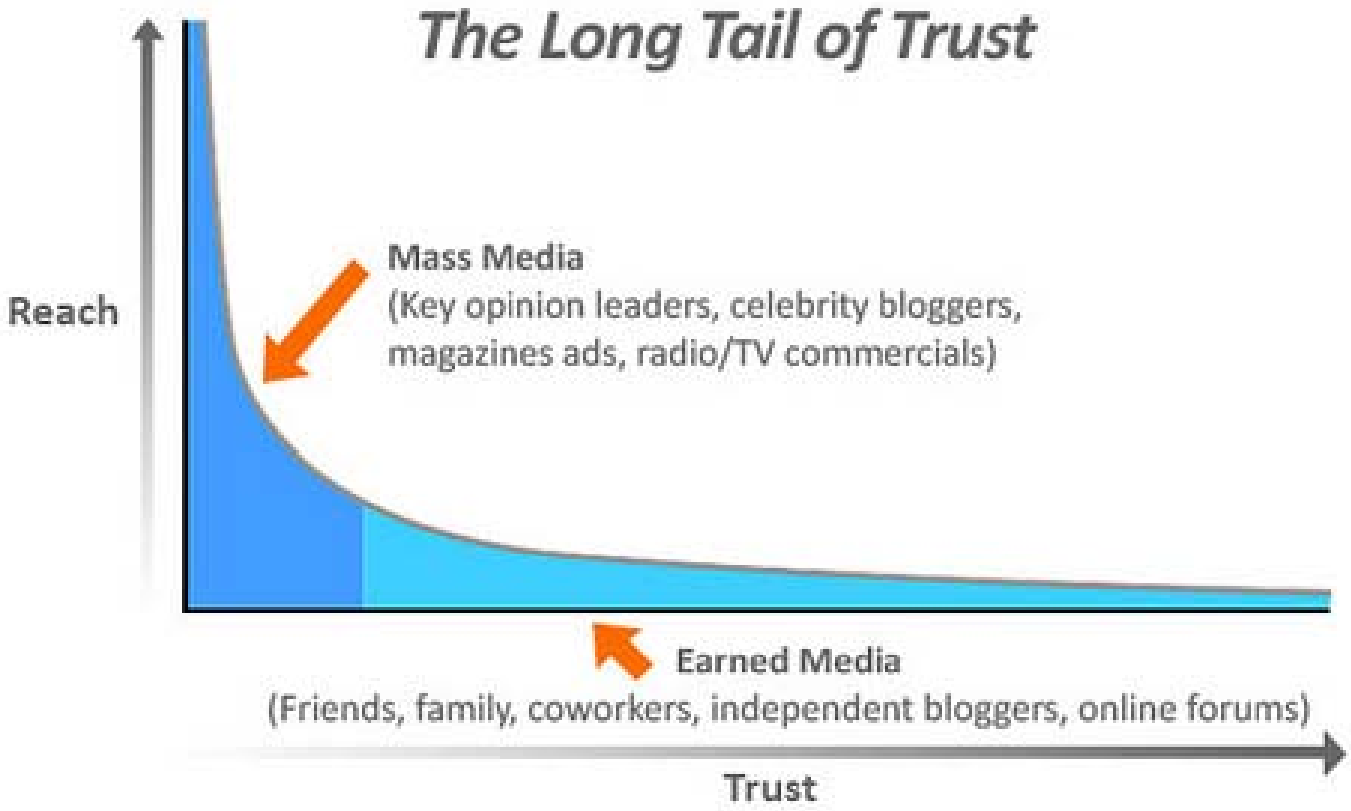
Persuasion

- **Viral** – persuading via social proof & means of direct marketing
- **Cross-promotion** – persuading your existing customers to spend more time with you
- **Advertising** – persuading those are seeking social entertainment to click on your ad

Reciprocity

- *'Although the obligation to repay constitutes the essence of the reciprocity rule, it is the obligation to receive that makes the rule so easy to exploit. The obligation to receive reduces our ability to choose whom we wish to be indebted to and puts that power in the hand of others.'* - Robert Cialdini, *Influence*

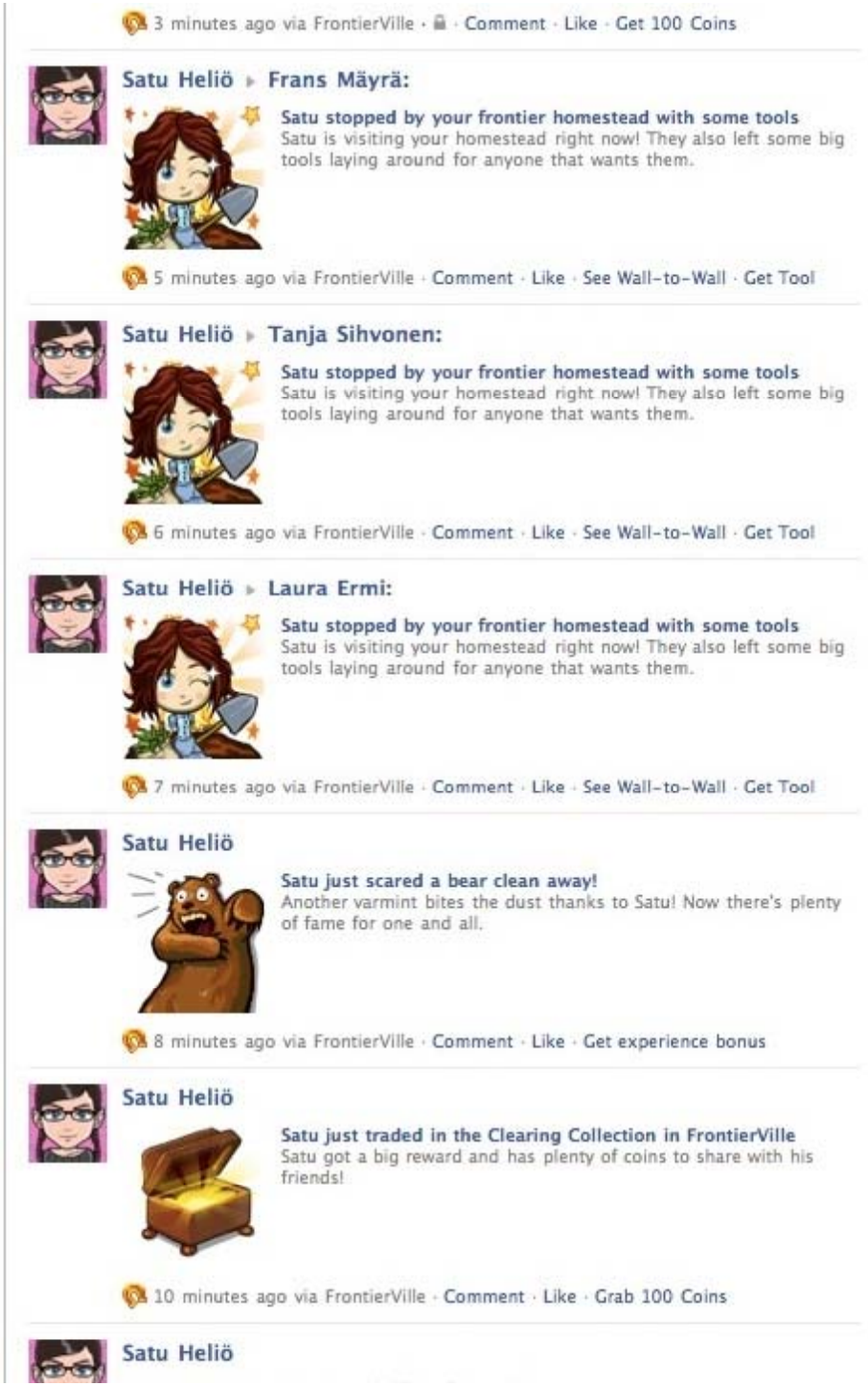
But: Viral in Social Games is (mostly) Social Proof ignored



http://www.flickr.com/photos/designdamage/

GDC Europe

Plus: ‘The pluralistic ignorance effect’ meets ‘The Flood’



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Viral Mechanics

- Identifying Shareworthy & Clickworthy

Shareworthy <> Clickworthy

- What kind of virality is **worth sharing** from the **host's** perspective?
- What kind of message is persuasive enough to **infect**; worth clicking?
- In a viral loop, embedded into game mechanics, shareworthy and clickworthy find each other…

- …which nudges business goals & customer relationship building forward: acquisition, retention, monetization

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Three most popular types of viral feeds*:

- Offering Apprentice/Partnership
- Cry for Help
- Sharing rewards / resources

* according to presenter's research & data available, tentative findings

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Shareworthy conditions

- Viral posts need to meet one or more of the following criteria:

  Instrumental: Signals the prospect of rewards, either material (game resources) or social (symbolic capital)

  Hedonistic: Shows off personal achievements and/or creativity

  Socially obligating: Seeks others' commitment via the promise of mutual benefits or via a social gesture

  Charitable: Provides an increased feeling of self-worth while giving something out for free

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Clickworthy conditions

- The viral messages need to meet one or more of the following criteria:

  Rewarding: Promises instant rewards or progression

  Provocative: Provokes through competition, empathy, or curiosity

  Socially obligating: Persuasive, affords reciprocity and/or responding to a social gesture

  [+Developer perspective] *Resistant*: Published in a communication channel that stays afloat in the stream

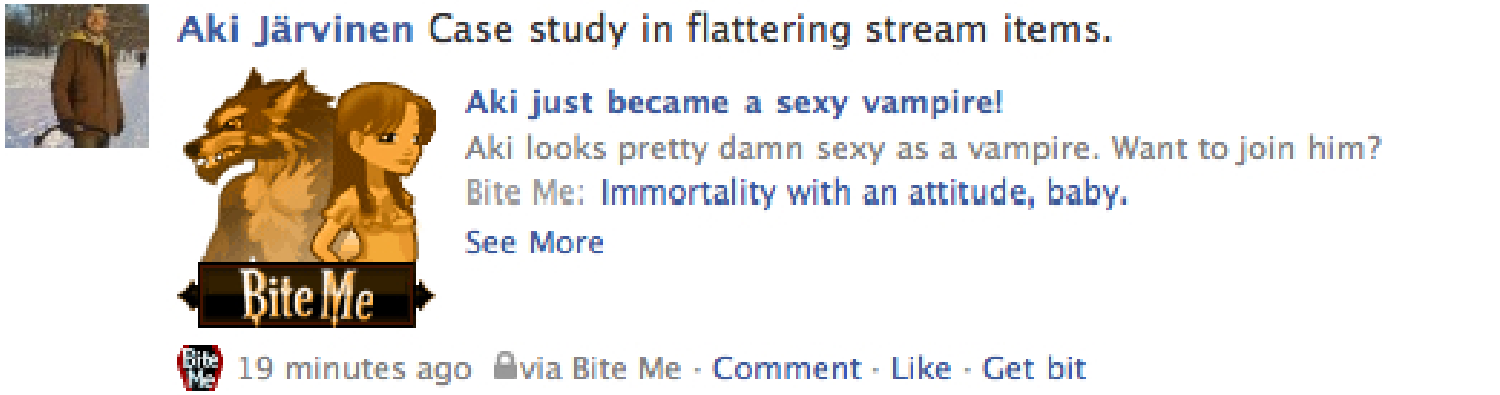
Share/Clickworthy or Not?

Shareworthy?

- Instrumental / Hedonistic / Socially obligating / Charitable?

Clickworthy?

- Provocative / Rewarding / Socially obligating?



Shareworthy?

- Instrumental / Hedonistic / Socially obligating / Charitable?

Clickworthy?

- Provocative / Rewarding / Socially obligating?

Shareworthy?

- Instrumental
  Hedonistic /
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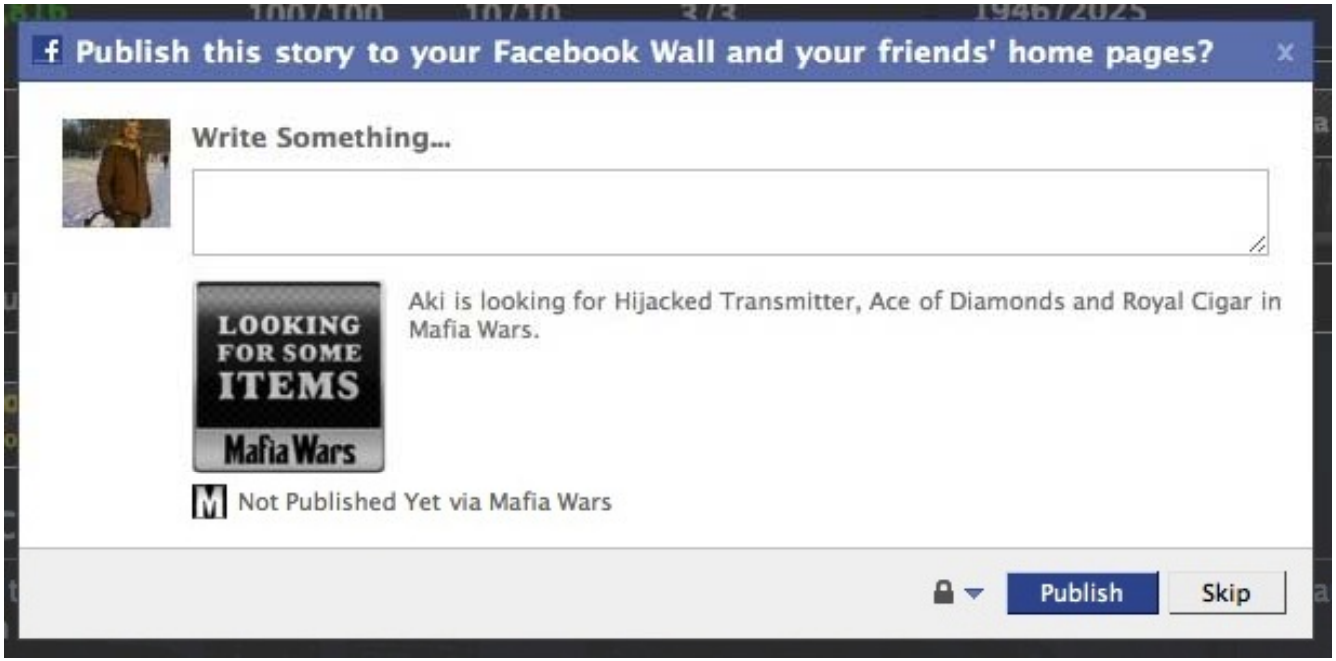

Clickworthy?

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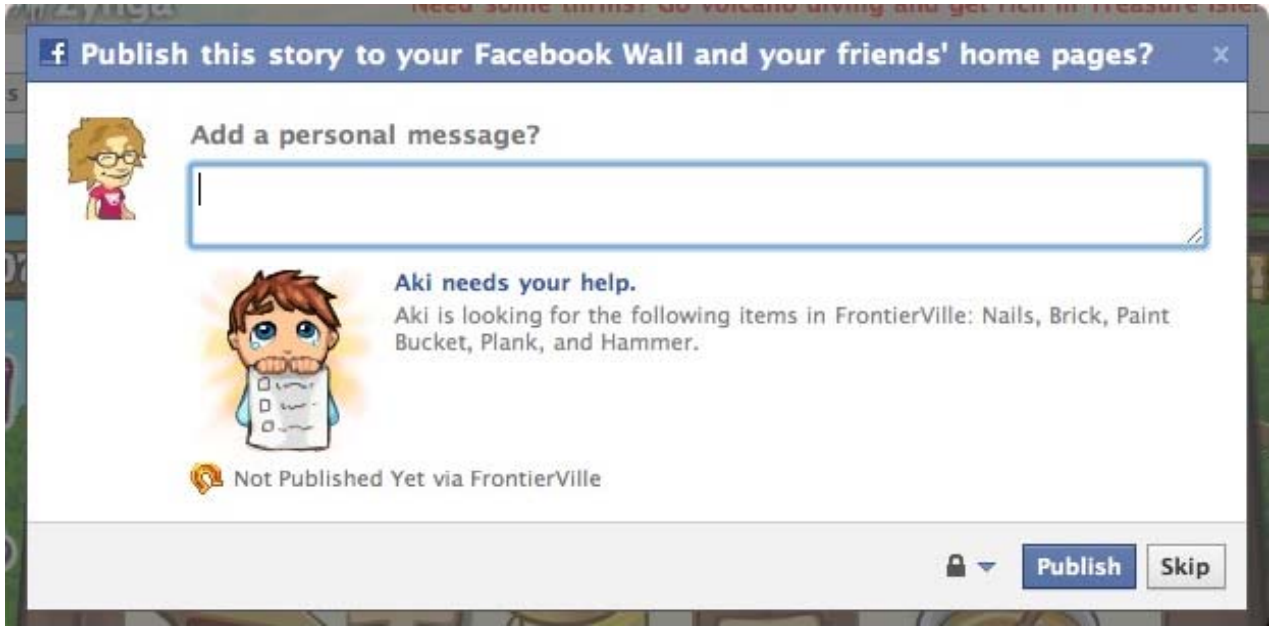

Clickworthy?

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Shareworthy?

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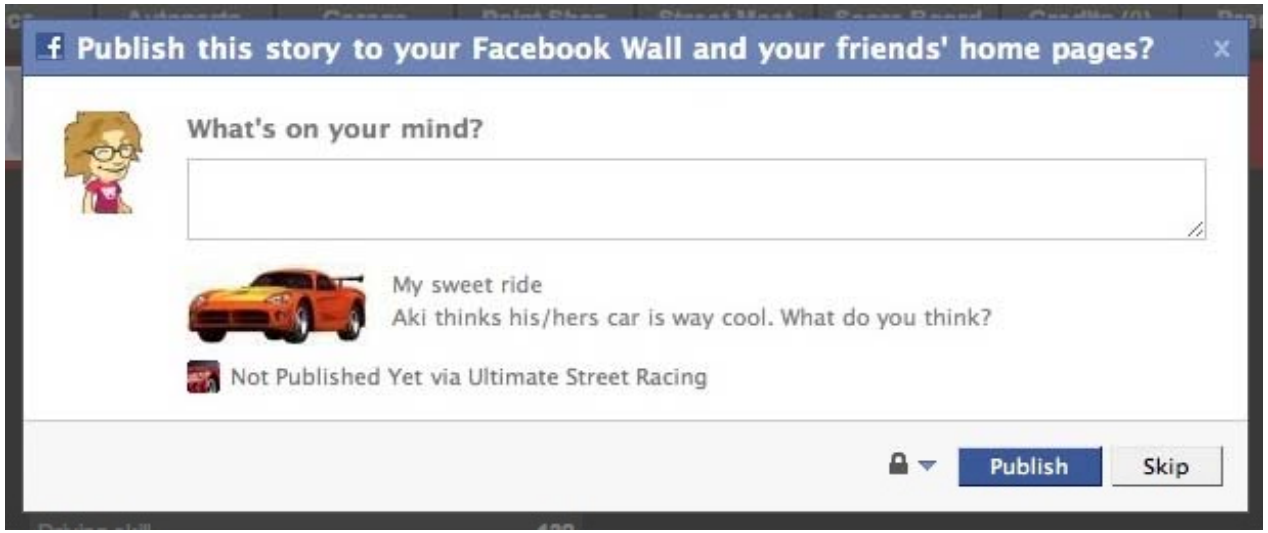

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Clickworthy?

- Provocative / Rewarding / Socially obligating?

Clickworthy?

- Provocative / Rewarding / Socially obligating?

Future Viral Potential?

- Cultural memes are content that accumulates meaning as it is passed on
- When will we see the first meme from a social game?
- Challenges:
  - Viral feeds from social games are ‘Published’, not ‘Shared’
  - They do not really accumulate meaning, because they refer to the game and its world, not a world shared by the general public
- Opportunity: User-created Content

Disrupt vs. Interrupt

- Traditional marketing relies on interrupting
- Viral marketing relies on disrupting our cognitive schema: an *air*plane that floats on *water* gains new meanings
- Can a social game ever be disruptive in its virality, if the meanings need to be channeled back to the game as a rule-bound system?

True Virality through Innovation?

- “Successful innovative products are always viral because they disrupt and/or transcend and accumulate meaning as they are being shared. Their distribution will be contagious, and by being passed on by advocates they become a cultural meme that is more powerful than anything your marketing dollars could ever buy.”

http://designmind.frogdesign.com/blog/don-t-interrupt-disrupt.html

Thank You.

http://games4networks.posterous.com

http://www.facebook.com/socialgamesbook

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