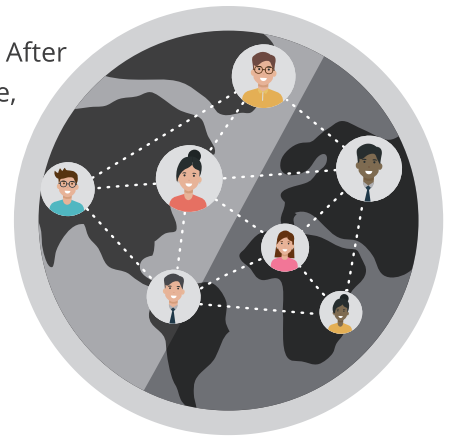


# The 2020 Social Network: ONLINE GAMING



**ONLINE GAMES ARE EMERGING** as the latest place to make friends, find community and connect with co-workers.

Billions of people found themselves spending more time at home this year. After the banana bread had been baked and the push up challenge was complete, many turned to their phones and computers in search of connection. The Harris Poll found that half of American adults have been using social media more since the pandemic began, with 60% of 18- to 34-year-olds and 64% of 35- to 49-year-olds reporting increased usage. Social media has quickly caught up to consumer demand, with new live streaming, video chat and gaming features accelerated and launched over the course of months.



Alongside traditional forms of social media, more novel types - like online games - are also experiencing a record-breaking surge in new users. Verizon found that online gaming increased by 75% during peak hours in North America, while streaming is up by 12%. In March, video game sales neared \$1.6 billion, representing a 35% year-over-year increase, with many new players embracing games as a newfound way to build not only online but real-world relationships.

With the goal of diving deeper into how online games serve as a social outlet for gamers and non-gamers, FlowPlay launched **The 2020 Social Network: Online Gaming** survey in November 2020. This accompanying report highlights that while it's clear the games industry is growing, the ways people are playing, the reasons they play and their perception about the function of games in their real-world lives is shifting rapidly.



## KEY FINDINGS

### You Can Be Competitive and Social, Too

FlowPlay's survey found one quarter of respondents said they rely on online games for social interaction, putting games on the same playing field as traditional social media, like LinkedIn (27%) and TikTok (25%) and streaming media (23%). Only the big four social media companies, Facebook (76%), YouTube (67%), Instagram (56%) and Twitter (38%) outpaced games as a place to find social connection.

Generation Z is the most active when it comes to gaming, with 70% playing more games now than they did pre-pandemic. Online games have also become more appealing to new audiences, with 20 percent of non-gamers starting to play online games during COVID-19. Generation Z is also the most social gaming generation, with more than half identifying social connection as the most appealing part of gaming.

### **New Online Outlets, New Friendships**

While online gaming might sound like the antithesis of in-person interaction, the opposite is actually true. FlowPlay's survey identified many player benefits that extend into the physical world, including building and strengthening both new and existing relationships. One-third of respondents reported playing online games with a combination of real and in-game friends, with almost 20% playing solely with friends made in-game.

For many, these in-game friends turn into real-world relationships. One-third of respondents said they have made real friends in games this year. More than half of Generation Z has turned online relationships into real-world ones. Notably, it is this social connection that is most appealing to many gamers, with 36% of overall respondents and almost half of Generation Z and Millennials most interested in the social community aspect of online games.

### **Online Games Just Might be the Remedy for Zoom Fatigue**

Zoom, Slack, Microsoft Teams and Google Hangouts have all been immensely helpful for organizations forced to transition to remote work practically overnight, but the platforms' appeal is quickly waning. Gone too are the days of Zoom happy hours and birthday parties, with most Americans worn out after long days on the platforms for work and virtual school.



Conversely, a number of respondents identified online games as an opportunity to further connect with coworkers. One-quarter reported playing online games with colleagues, with almost half playing on a weekly basis and one-third playing daily. Of respondents who don't already play online games with their coworkers, almost one-third stated they would consider it if the games were integrated with live video.



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## **TAKEAWAYS**

### **Video Reigns Supreme**

The online gaming landscape is a crowded one, but opportunity is ripe for companies looking to expand into the space or tailor new products to appeal to shifting consumer preferences. When asked what features would make them most interested in playing online games or enticed to choose a certain game, 20% identified live video as most appealing. This sentiment is echoed specifically with generations not typically seen as gamers, including Generation X and Millennials.

## Despite a Challenging Year, Many are Still Willing to Give

Respondents identified an openness to spending more money within online games if it were going to a good cause. Specifically, 80% of Generation Z and 75% of Millennials would support in-game philanthropic giving. Generation Z is also already the most giving, with 40% reporting they have already contributed to an in-game fundraiser.

It's been a year like no other for the online games industry. While normalcy will eventually return, the changes the industry experienced - at a breakneck pace - is here to stay. Thanks to technology and a focus on community, online games are beginning to feel lifelike, with virtual relationships transitioning seamlessly to the real-world.



## Survey Methodology

FlowPlay's The 2020 Social Network: Online Gaming survey was administered in November 2020, using an online survey. The survey received 1,047 responses from nationally representative Americans ages 18-65.



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## ABOUT FLOWPLAY

FlowPlay is the company behind the most powerful connected gaming platform for casual and sports wagering games, virtual worlds and social casinos. A developer, operator and publisher, FlowPlay serves both consumers and businesses with engaging online and mobile free-to-play experiences. Partners turn to FlowPlay for its extensive multiplayer infrastructure, industry-leading monetization rates and proven track record helping businesses launch custom-branded online games. FlowPlay's consumer products include ourWorld, one of the most popular teen virtual worlds, Vegas World, the industry's most engaging multiplayer social casino, and Casino World, the company's most grandiose, interactive and community-driven free-to-play social casino with tycoon gameplay. Together, they have been played by a loyal community of more than 75 million users around the world. FlowPlay dominates a cross-section of industries including online and mobile games, fantasy sports and casinos – consistently creating opportunities in high-growth and emerging markets. Based in Seattle, FlowPlay was founded in 2006 and is primarily funded by Intel Capital and the creators of Skype. For more information, visit [www.FlowPlay.com](http://www.FlowPlay.com) or contact [bizdev@flowplay.com](mailto:bizdev@flowplay.com).