**Gamified UK**

Candy Crush Saga from King games is one of the worlds most played games, boasting 93 million daily players at one point! I have always avoided it, but my wife has been into it for years. Finally, when she was explaining a level on the spin-off game Soda Saga, I cracked and downloaded it.

For those that don't know, Candy Crush and Soda Saga are a genre of puzzle game called "Match 3", first popularised by Bejewelled (though Shariki was actually the first). The basic concept sees you start with a board full of colourful tokens and you must swap two around that are next to each other to form rows of three.  Create a row of three and they disappear, moving all of the other tokens around.

King took this idea and turned the dial to 11! It's that turn of the dial that I want to speak about a bit. That is where they introduced what we would consider to be gamification in a game!

# Onboarding

First of all, onboarding is handled perfectly. THe first few levels introduce you to the basic gameplay, simple images and animations explaining how the game works. Within minutes you feel totally at home playing. As the game progresses it shows you new features, as and when you need them – not before! Not sure what move to make? Wait a few seconds and the game will give you a hint!

# Challenge and Skill

Every level is slightly harder than the last, perfectly balancing the challenge with the skill needed, never letting you drop into boredom.That is not to say you don't get frustrated. Some levels have you challenged for days, but they never make you feel that you can't do them – just that you need to try one more time to succeed!

As you progress, new challenges are added to the basic gameplay. Blocks that need to be destroyed, blocks that multiply, blocks that float, blocks that sink. Every few levels there is something new to discover.

# Progress

From the outset, you can see what level you are on and what levels you can head towards. The map is nearly endless with hundreds and hundreds of levels!

# Feedback

Feedback in Soda Saga is instant and plentiful! From satisfying animations and sounds as lines are made to bonus scores flashing up as you play to full-on, screen clearing explosions! After the level is finished you are shown your score, how well you did in the form of stars (3 being the best) and finally a leaderboard. In fact, the leaderboard is worth mentioning here. When the leaderboard is shown at the end of a level, it shows you are the bottom of the table relative to your score. It then shows you rising up and displacing the person with the next lowest score at the top of the visible board. It never makes you feel like you didn't win or surpass your friends!

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# Friends

Soda Crush masterfully combines competition and a feeling of teamwork. For the most part, once connected to Facebook, you are competing with your friends. You always see who of your group has done best on a level. After that, you are shown your position relative to your friends on the leaderboards. However, there are also opportunities to feel like part of a team as certain challenges appear that require you to choose one of four teams to join. The challenge may require you to score highly or destroy the most green sweets or create the most fish or any of a dozen other challenges! At the end of each level, your contribution is added to that of other members of the team. So even in the midst of solo competition, you feel like you are part of something larger.

## Help / Powerups

Soda Saga offers you aids as you play, from bonus special sweets to lollipop hammers and free swaps. When you feel like a level is just too hard, you can always use a few special items and powers to help push through. You can earn these specials powers by completing levels or by purchasing them with real money (of course). There are also special sweets that can be created by combining more than 3 in a row, creating an extra level of strategy when considering what lines to create.

## Reward Schedules

Soda Saga makes great use of reward schedules. Killing it by finishing levels without ever losing a life? There is a reward schedule for that! Coming back every day? There is a reward schedule for that! Soda Saga rewards both excellence and consistency.

## Player Types

If I was to analyse what types in my HEXAD were catered for I would have to say everyone except for *Disruptors.*

- *Players* have plenty of points and leaderboards positions to play for.
- *Free Spirits* have a great deal of autonomy in how they play the game, there are multiple ways to win each map.
- *Achievers* have plenty of challenges to overcome and skills to learn.
- *Socialisers* get to see how their friends are doing, creating some friendly competition. On top of that, they get to feel like part of a team in certain challenges.
- *Philanthropists* are also catered for as they can donate lives to people in their networks.

# Learning from Games

All in all, Soda Saga is full to the brim with lessons for gamification designers. I have not even mentioned the micro narratives! Soda Saga once again proves that gamification designers should play games when they can. After all, our bread and butter is using lessons learned from games. You can't learn from them if you don't play them!

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