

Coin Master. Have you played it? I have. It's currently the top grossing game on mobiles. If you have not played it, it's a fruit/slot machine. You put virtual money in, spin the reels and possibly win more money. You then use that money to build a series of villages, upgrading parts of one village until the whole thing is completed, then move on to the next one. You can also ruin friendships by attacking peoples villages, knocking their development back and costing them virtual money. It is a phenomenon, with a staggeringly well thought out social media presence and gameplay that is essentially addictive. I don't say that about games usually, but this is pure addictive, gambling-based button pressing. But it is simple, relaxing and pleasing on the eye - so I play it. There is probably a whole blog peice there to be written actually!

Glitch

However, it's meteoric rise to the top has seen a few issues, in the form of glitches in the game. Twice in the last week or two, there have been issues where people have lost spins or money.

The first one, I was unaware of. However, when I logged in that day I was greeted with a surprise of 1500 spins. "Wow", I thought, "that's awesome!" However, I was curious to know why I had been given them, so went on Twitter to have a look at what people were saying. There were lots of people talking about their free spins, but to my annoyance, they all seemed to have far more spins than me. Som had 15,000 - ten times more than me. "How unfair", I thought.

And that is where perception plays such an important factor in fairness. I had not been affected by the glitch, had free spins I was not expecting, yet felt I had been treated unfairly based on the compensation others had received. My wife was even more annoyed, she didn't get anything. She emailed their support and was told that the glitch had not affected her. They had worked out compensation was based on predicted losses based on the glitch.

Glitch Again

This week, another glitch hit the game. My wife won 95,000,000 coins only to have them disappear instantly. She was not happy. Hitting Twitter, she discovered that others were in the same boat. However, she was somewhat comforted by the thought of the compensation that she would likely get once she submitted a support ticket. After all, I had never even seen my glitch and got 1500 spins. Imagine what she would get for losing 95,000,000 coins.

Well, it turns out, not very much. After a few days of silence and umpteen attacks on her village that she could not afford to repair, she got her compensation... 200 spins. To say she was unimpressed is an understatement.

With 200 spins, it is possible to earn far more than 95,000,000 coins, but it is not guaranteed - this is a game of chance after all.

Her perception of the reward was that it was not in line with the loss the glitch had caused and certainly did not compensate for the extra coins she had been using to maintain the village she would have easily finished and then some with the 95,000,000 coins.

The Perception of Fairness and Cheating

It is so important to consider how people perceive fairness, not just what is and isn't factually fair. For instance (I have probably said this before), pay to play/win games suffer from this terribly. A player who likes to explore the game is not going to be all that interested in grinding to gain gold to buy all the good stuff. They would much rather pay to get the gear they need to go off exploring more effectively.

So imagine a situation where an achiever style player has played for 50 hours to unlock a might horse to ride into battle on. They would be proud of the achievement. Imagine their feelings if they saw a player with 1 hour of gameplay riding on the same type of horse, one they had just used real money to pay for rather than grinding for hours. They could perceive that as unfair and cheating. It isn't but that would not be their perception.

Treat Loyalty Better Than Impulse Buying!

When you design a system, consider perception vs fact. If there is the opportunity to purchase an item, make sure it is somehow different from the one you can earn. Usually, this is done the wrong way around. The one you buy is fancier than the one you earn. This is, of course, to encourage people to buy. But try valuing loyalty vs impulse spending! Look at how many people hate being treated like a second class citizen when renewing mobile contracts compared to new customers who get treated like gods!

People are not algorithms, they thrive on feelings not facts!

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