ULTIMART

SEEKING COMFORT FROM ONLINE STRANGERS: AN ANALYSIS OF 'KIND WORDS 2' GAME

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Abstract: *In an era where digital communication often lacks emotional resonance, the video game 'Kind Words 2' emerges as a distinctive platform for anonymous, empathetic exchange. This study investigates how anonymous interactions within the game promote emotional support, comfort, and a sense of companionship among players. Employing a mixed-methods approach—including self-observation, online surveys, and semi-structured interviews—the research uncovers key findings: players consistently report feelings of emotional relief, validation, and reduced loneliness after engaging with the community. The study also reveals that anonymity significantly enhances openness and authenticity in communication, allowing players to share vulnerabilities without fear of judgment. These findings demonstrate the game's potential as a digital tool for fostering mental well-being and community resilience. By highlighting how anonymous digital environments can facilitate meaningful social support, this research contributes to ongoing discussions on the therapeutic potential of video games and their role in addressing emotional needs in online spaces.*

Keywords: *'kind words 2'; anonymous social support; empathy-driven; game design; online community interaction; emotional expression in games*

Introduction

In today's digital age, it is unavoidable for people to use technology as an escape from real-world difficulties, such as seeking consolation from strangers online rather than from those in their immediate surroundings. When it comes to seeking emotional support and wellbeing, the concept of "familiar strangers" is no longer unfamiliar. Familiar Strangers is a social phenomenon that refers to people we routinely see but never contact with. In other words, our connection with these known strangers is one in which both parties choose to ignore each other rather than interact directly (Paulos & Goodman, 2004). For example, if someone buys coffee at the same cafe every day and then fails to show and disrupts their routine, we will notice right away.

However, there appear to be exceptions to the non-interaction rule with Familiar Strangers: as we move away from our usual encounters with them, we perceive them more as close friends with whom we have direct touch. As a result, we are more inclined to treat our coffee shop Familiar Strangers in other locations, such as distant cities, with courtesy than we do in our own area. Similarly, when we see them in sporadic situations such as accidents, injuries, and so on, we would engage in more encounters with our Familiar Strangers due to our previ-

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ous shared knowledge and awareness of each other, even if they were not direct.

Despite rapid technological breakthroughs and an ever-expanding digital landscape, loneliness and social isolation have arisen as important concerns in modern society (Jones et al., 2014). Interestingly, new study suggests that online interactions and video games may provide a unique opportunity for people to find consolation and form meaningful connections, even with strangers (Ducheneaut & Yee, 2013; Jones et al., 2014; Snodgrass et al., 2017; Villamil & Heshmati, 2023). In this context, the release of 'Kind Words 2' a video game in which players share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences with anonymous peers, has aroused renewed interest in the ability of digital platforms to build empathy, compassion, and a sense of community.

There is a wealth of research on how technology might support mental health and wellbeing, which offers a useful context for comprehending the effects of 'Kind Words 2' Research has demonstrated how video games can promote social connection, a feeling of accomplishment, and general life pleasure. Furthermore, studies have indicated that people, especially those who are socially isolated or upset, may be able to express themselves more freely and form meaningful connections with others due to the supposed anonymity and safety of online environments. In 2017, Snodgrass et al. Dunbar et al., for example, discovered that playing video games and other digital activities can result in "pleasant sensations" and a greater sense of "oneness" with other people, which in turn can improve one's general quality of life. In a similar vein, Ryan et al. (Jones et al., 2014) highlighted how video games may provide a sense of accomplishment and purpose while also fostering strong social and emotional relationships, even when players are physically separated.

This research article seeks to add to the expanding body of literature on the beneficial effects of technology on mental health and well-being by analyzing how 'Kind Words 2' might provide a special means of seeking solace and connection in a world that is becoming more and more detached.

About "Kind Words 2 (lofi city pop)" Game

The second game in the 'Kind Words' series, 'Kind Words 2 (lofi city pop)' is the sequel to the original game, which was launched on July 16, 2019. On October 7, 2024, Popcannibal developed and released this game globally on several platforms, including Windows, Linux, Android, PlayStation, and Steam. According to its website, 'Kind Words 2' allows users to be authentic without fear of being judged or having to follow or subscribe to anything to join the community (lofichillbeats.com). Five million participants from around the globe have joined 'Kind Words' to express themselves and offer support to one another. With its comfortable settings and relaxing lo-fi music for the backdrop, 'Kind Words' is also classified as a casual life-sim independent game. 'Spirit City: Lofi Sessions' and 'Virtual Cottage' are two similar games, but none of them have the same characteristics as 'Kind Words' which is regarded more as a social media platform than a video game. In essence, 'Kind Words 2' is an expanded version of "Kind Words," and players can combine their game histories so they can pick up the game without having to start from scratch.

Comfort in Strangers

'Kind Words 2' facilitates the experience of finding comfort and support from strangers by creating a safe and anonymous space for sharing vulnerabilities

and receiving encouraging responses. The game mechanics encourage empathy and compassion (Chen et al, 2021; Jerret et al., 2020) by allowing players to anonymously share their thoughts and feelings without fear of judgment. Players offer kind words and support to others, fostering a sense of community and connection (MacCarthy et al., 1989). This exchange of kindness can be particularly helpful for those experiencing social isolation or emotional distress, offering a sense of belonging and validation. The act of giving and receiving kindness within the game contributes to a positive feedback loop, reinforcing prosocial behaviors and creating a supportive environment. Furthermore, the game's focus on positivity and encouragement can promote emotional well-being and resilience, helping players cope with challenges and build a sense of hope (Kind Words (Lo Fi Chill Beats to Write To), 2019).

Methodology

This research will explore the connection between playing 'Kind Words 2' and the experience of finding comfort between players anonymously using a mixed-methods approach incorporating both self- observation through gameplay and data collection from other players. This multifaceted approach allows for a richer understanding of the phenomenon by combining personal experience with the perspectives of a wider player base. The study will be conducted in two phases:

Phase 1: Self-Observation through Gameplay

This phase will involve the researcher actively playing 'Kind Words 2' for a predetermined period (e.g., one month). The researcher will engage in various in-game activities, including:

1. Sending and receiving letters: Experiencing the process of both requesting and providing support anonymously. This will involve sharing personal experiences and responding to the requests of others with kind words and encouragement.

2. Observing community interactions: Monitoring the general flow of communication within the game, noting recurring themes, expressions of comfort, and the dynamics of anonymous support.

3. Documenting personal experiences: Maintaining a detailed journal reflecting on personal emotional responses, observations of the in-game social environment, and insights gained through participation. This reflexive practice, as discussed in (Pezalla et al., 2012), is crucial for understanding how personal biases and experiences may influence the research process.

Phase 2: Data Collection from Other Players.

This phase will broaden the scope of the study by incorporating the experiences and perspectives of other 'Kind Words 2' players. This phase will include an online survey and interview, which will be distributed within the game itself and treated as if it were a question from a stranger or another player in the game. This strategy is thought to be the best way to get genuine responses from the players, just like talking to another player rather than an interviewer. The survey will include both closed-ended (e.g., Likert scale) and open-ended questions exploring players' experiences of giving and receiving comfort, perceptions of anonymity, and the impact of the game on their emotional well-being. The anonymity provided by online platforms can facilitate more open disclosures, particularly when discussing sensitive topics (McLean et al.,

2018; Deleuze et al., 2019; Marques et al., 2023). In this phase, the respondents are only asked about their initials and country of origin to encourage deeper expression and opinions on 'Kind Words 2' and gain a sense of demographics on how widely the game has been played around the world. The survey was distributed widely to maximize reach and successfully gathered insights from 12 engaged respondents.

This mixed-methods approach offers a robust framework for investigating the connection between 'Kind Words 2' and the experience of finding comfort among players anonymously. The combination of self-observation and data collection from other players provides a more complete and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. However, potential limitations include the researcher's subjective opinions and bias during self-observation and the challenges of recruiting a representative sample of players. Despite these limitations, this research aims to contribute valuable insights into the potential of online gaming communities to foster connection, support, and emotional well-being.

In order to avoid such circumstances in bias and subjective opinions, this research will also be using the Game Experience Questionnaire (GEQ), especially the Social Presence GEQ (IJsselsteijn et all, 2013), as the tool for the online survey to measure the player's emotions and cognitive responses during gameplay, especially targeted for measuring empathy, behavioral involvement, and psychological involvement between players. This method was formerly used by Sandra (2021) to determine the players' gaming experience in understanding 5 Stages of Grief in the form of video games, namely 'Gris'. The result shows that not only do players have distinctive understandings in the theory but also highlighting the importance of emotional connection between a game and its player. In conclusion, the Social Presence GEQ is likely the best approach in obtaining data and answers that involve the emotional engagement and behavioral impact of a player in a game.

Result

This study focuses on the gameplay of the 'Kind Words 2' video game and the interactions that build emotional connections between players. The data collected is summarized in three tables, explained as below:

1. **Table 1 and 2** include reviews of various features from the game. All documentations and reviews are from self-observation, directly obtained from the game.

2. **Table 3** includes direct responses from the players of 'Kind Words 2', which is obtained from online surveys and interviews from the players in the game.

Table 1 shows the analysis of "Home" in the 'Kind Words 2' game and user interactions within it. This part of the game has the exact same UI design as 'Kind Words', the first game, and has been adopted into the newer version to keep the main root of the game itself. The gameplay and interactions are shown as below:

Table 1. Gameplay analysis of Home Interactions on 'Kind Words 2'

| Review	The main page of *Home*, the first page players will be encountered following the opening page of '*Kind Words*', whether it's the first or the second version.
Interaction	Players can rotate the environment and would be given the full view of it. Players can also interact with the furniture inside the room and airplanes that's flying around the environment.

(1.B) View Request
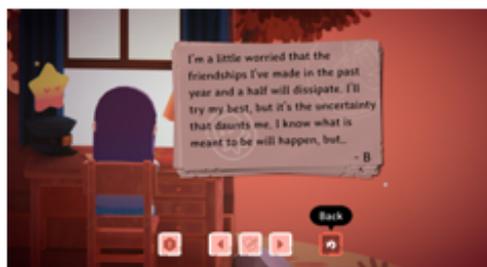
Review	Piles of requests from players all over the world can be found here.
Interaction	Players can view the requests, view others, and respond to each one.
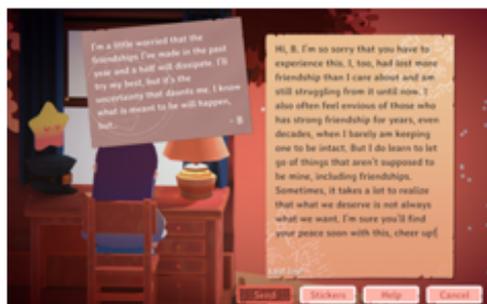
Request responded

(1.C) Make Request
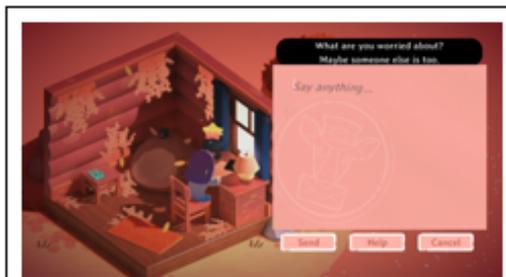
Review	Players make their own request to share thoughts for other people to respond.
Interaction	Players can write and send their writings
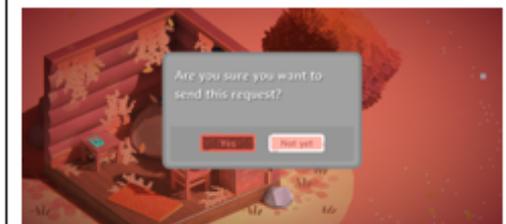
Feedback on request to be sent

(1.D) Inbox
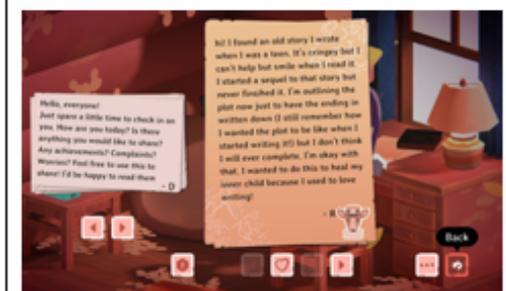
Review	This part enables the player to look into other players' responses and look back into their past requests.
Interaction	Players can interact and read their past requests, respond to the sender with various stickers, and put them into *Favorites*. Players can also receive new stickers left by other players that responded to their requests.

Preview on Inbox *and* Thank with Stickers

(1.E) Decorate

Review	This section enables players to get creative and decorate their 'safe place'. It's customizable and has several room design options to choose from.
Interaction	Players can decorate their house/environment by converting the collected stickers into exhibits or furniture. Each set of stickers represents one room design.
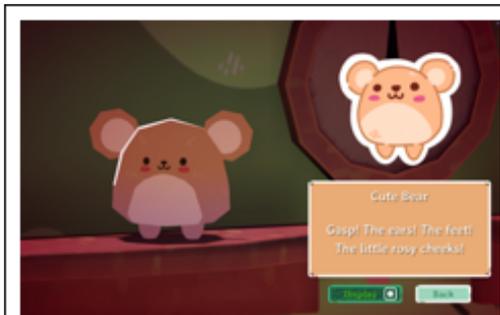
(1.F) Say Nice Things
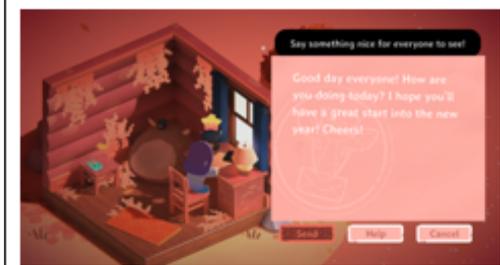
Review	This feature allows players to send a short message to be read publicly, usually containing jokes, compliments, encouragements, etc.
Interaction	Players can write and send their short writings.
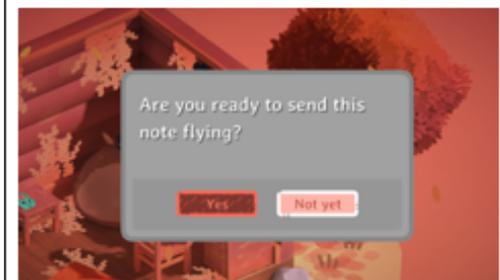
Paper plane preview as opened

Review	Players are allowed to treat this feature as their personal journal or diary.
Interaction	Players can add entries, save or delete each of them accordingly.

As far as the 'Kind Words' game goes, these parts are the only gameplay available to the players to be interacted with. However, in 'Kind Words 2', the developers also added some new features that allows the players to explore and interact more with the game. Thus, in addition to this analysis, Table 2 shows a deeper analysis of some of 'Kind Words 2' added features as shown below:

Table 2. Other expanded features and gameplay in 'Kind Words 2'
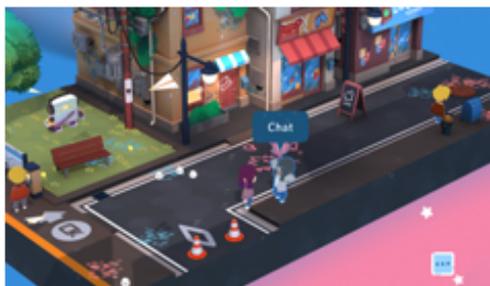
Review	Players now are allowed to travel to the outside of their room, exploring the outside world and meeting other people in avatar form.
Interaction	Players can move around, enter various buildings, and interact with the people hovering around and have a chat with them. Players can also find paper planes that are flying around the environment.

Review	This feature allows players to make a customized appearance of their avatars.
Interaction	Players can change their appearance at any time. The customization includes hairstyle, hair color, skin color, eyes, glasses, and outfits.

Review	Similar to *Inbox* feature, but this part is focused on discussion about movies, books, and similar other hobbies.
Interaction	Players can write and send their responses in long writings.

(2.D) Home - Chat
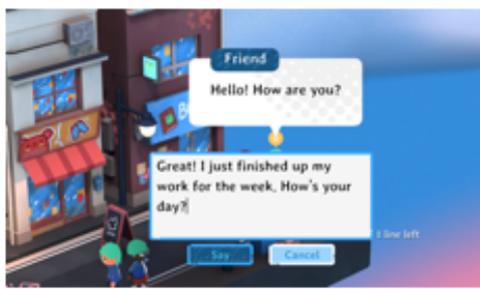
| Review	This feature allows players to interact 'directly' with other players around them and have small conversations.
Interaction	Players can write and send their writings in short responses.

(2.E) Bus Stop - Map
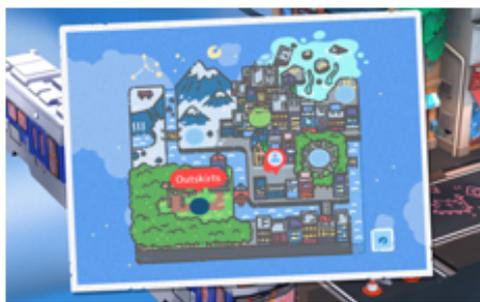
Review	Other than the homebase, the map on the *Bus Stop* provides access to other places to explore.

Interaction	Players can choose their favored destination to travel to.

Map found near the Bus Stop *on each location*

(2.F) Snow Mountain - Magic Echo
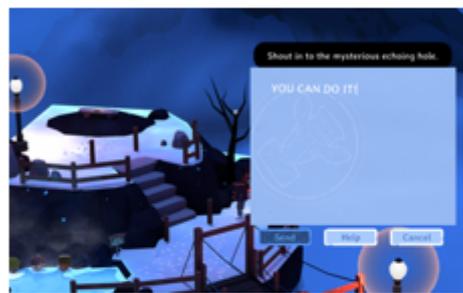
Review	Like *Paper Planes*, this feature enables the player to send a message as a "shout" that can only be read once.
Interaction	Players can write and send their short writings.

Magic Echo preview in response

(2.G) Snow Mountain - Make a Wish

Review	Players are allowed to express their wishes, then they would be shared publicly as they stare into the sky landscape.
Interaction	Players can write and send their short writings.

Make a Wish *preview can be shown to public*

(2.H) Outskirts - Chain Forest

Review	This feature allows players to interact in short chain responses to discuss their interests or similarities or just to play mini games in text.

Interaction	Players can write and send their short writings.

Forest Chain *preview when players make a start of a topic chain or a response to a topic chain*

(2.I) Outskirts - Cafe

| Review	For players that enjoy poems, they can share their writings in this feature where poems are greatly appreciated enough to have its own space in this game. And players can "perform" their poems in a virtual stage and be watched by the "audiences".
Interaction	Players can write and send their short writings.
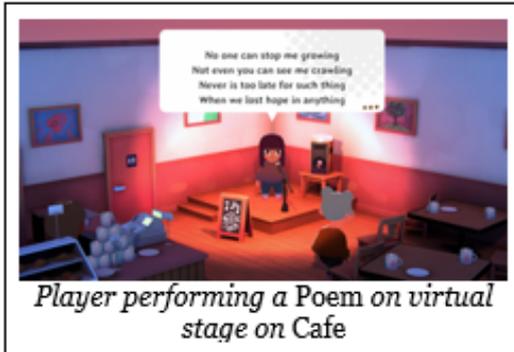
Player performing a Poem on virtual stage on Cafe

(2.J) Plaza - Cats!
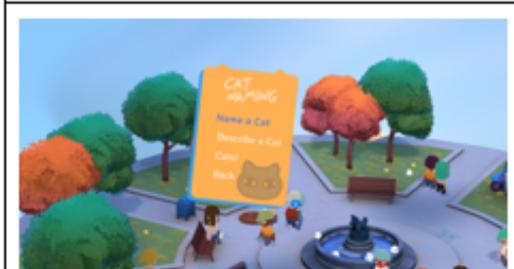
|	
Review	This feature allows players to match a cat's name into a description given by other players, giving them freedom of imagination and connecting each other through common affections towards cats.
Interaction	Players are allowed to type a name for a cat or make a description of a cat to be named by other players.
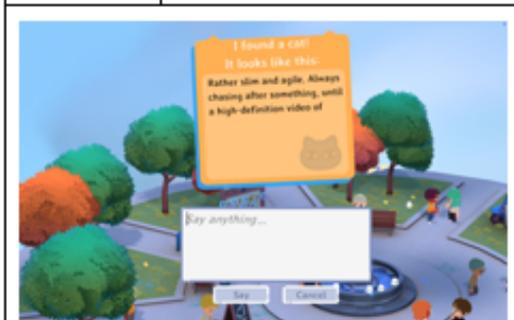
Cat! preview, along with description and the cat's name

(2.K) Last Stop - Wiggling Void

Review	This feature allows players to express thoughts to be heard and forgotten. Players can feed the "void" with short writings, and they won't be shared to the public as the other features do.
Interaction	Players can write and send their short writings.
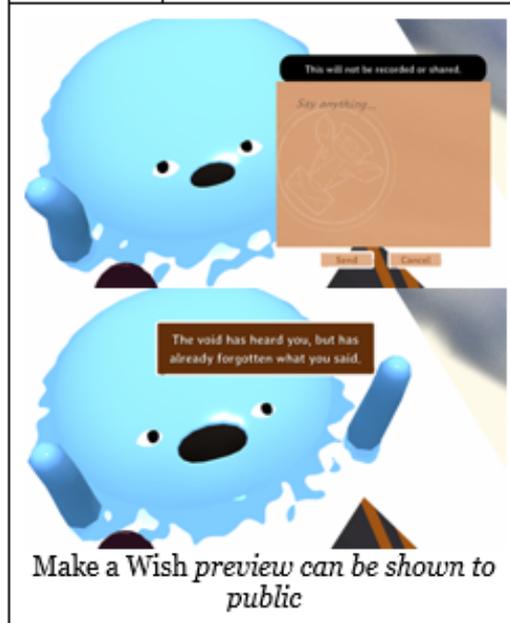
Make a Wish preview can be shown to public

Furthermore, Table 3 also shows the feedback from 'Kind Words 2' players when being asked about the game's impact and what makes it become a safe place for them to share their thoughts and private matters to strangers. This data is

sampled by taking respondents from the players in the game. The result is shown below:

Table 3. 'Kind Words 2' players' reviews on why they use the game as their comfort zone
(Source: personal record, 2024-2025)

Anonymity	
A, Mexico	"I would say anonymity. Nobody knows me here and I don't know anybody, so that makes me comfortable to share anything. This also helps me get unbiased opinions on whatever I need help with!"
M, Germany	"It's the anonymity that gives me the confidence to reveal more about myself. But also answers to questions. There is less fear of rejection and being misunderstood here. It's fun to be there for others. Perhaps making a difference through words."
C	The ability to be anonymous, for each question and between questions
	Not needing to get into a whole conversation
	Not needing to evaluate make a fancy appreciation of the replies, one just sends a sticker
K	"I'm sure we all struggle with bias and prejudice (even if we don't consciously operate in those ways). The anonymity helps to level the playing field. We remember that we're all just monkeys on a space rock :P With so much social media, it can be easy to get stuck in comparison mindsets. This game frees us of that insecurity to truly focus on others."

Emotional Support	
P, China	"I want to contact other people. But I don't have enough courage to speak with my parents and my friends can't help me all the time. So I come to write my feelings, which make me feel good. And I'm very excited when I receive useful letters from strangers. I want to help others as a way to express my gratitude to everyone!"
B, Slovenia	"I think this game in general just puts you in the right mood. Helping other people at least a bit makes you feel like you did something good for someone, so you keep coming back. and when you get the courage to open up to you always get these supporting replies that you know are from an objective eye instead of subjective when you talk to friends/family)."
A	"I think what's more important is trust- -the belief that this space is kind and warm, where everyone's thoughts can receive gentle responses. Well, I write replies more often because of my desire to help, I want to share the little kindness I can."
C. United States	"I like bringing some positivity to other ppl. Even though 1 struggles a lot with my own anxiety and sense of inadequacy, lifting others up surprisingly helps a lot with that."
S, North Carolina	"If all the requests are sad, I kind of shut down and I'll go elsewhere. I do usually feel like I can help though. I also have the music off. It's not bad music! I like the music! but it's also like working at a CVs in December. I can only hear the songs so many times."
B	"This game makes me feel like I'm not going in blindly and has some advice behind me."

Helping Oneself and Others	
O	"Occasionally I do come on to vent about something specific. But mostly, I enjoy responding to other people and helping them with their own problems. I might write one post of my own, but respond to 10+ other people in return."
J, Peru	"I honestly feel pretty warm using this game. I love that I'm able to help people and that people show concern for me when I'm down. I'd call this a support tool rather than a game. And that's just what was in the 1st version, here there's so much to do! There's the forest, the recommendation shop, lots! And yeah, sometimes l let it run while I study due to the music letting me focus."

Discussion

The analysis of the 'Kind Words 2' gameplay and players' feedback focus on two saspects: gaming experience and players' interactions with each other as can be seen in sections below.

Players and Strangers

Table 1 and Table 2 shows various interactions that the 'Kind Words 2' players could do during the gameplay. Unlike other games, this game shows no storyline and focuses on the interactions between players with the game and players to players. When it comes to player involvement, 'Kind Words 2' uses a variety of approaches to encourage players to share their most private thoughts that they can express to a wide range of interests. In terms of human interaction, players of the game 'Kind Words 2' can communicate with one another—from all over the world—but only through short messages sent at random and anonymously. As illustrated in Tables 1.C, 1.D, and 1.F, players are encouraged to actively participate in the community by exchanging messages, requests, and responses. Although the interactions are short and don't last long, it gives players freedom in expression and shows compassion towards other players. To support this claim, Table 3 is presented as a cumulative response from a few players from all over the world, who are questioned based on the Social Presence GEQ. As shown in the table, most players are drawn to the game because of the anonymity it provides, allowing them to express themselves without fear of rejection. They go on to say that 'Kind Words 2' gives a space for players to discover bravery and confidence in the words of others who empathize with them, even if they do not know the full narrative of their troubles. Although it is comforting for them to vent about their life in the game, they also like responding to and encouraging other strangers. Thus, "Kinds Words 2" serves as a platform for people to demonstrate kindness, empathy, and bravery by stepping out of the shadows and reaching out for advice and aid, even if it means simply starting a conversation.

In terms of sharing, gamers are expected to discuss their problems in "Kind Words." However, in "Kind Words 2," players are also encouraged to express their interests and hobbies through special features such as 2.C, 2.D, 2.H, 2.I, and 2.J. These elements are most likely being developed since users were using the key features in 'Kind Words' to discuss their interests and initiate chains of conversation. With this new addition to the game, players will be more likely to have the platform they need to share their interests

with others.

The way that these players seek comfort from strangers other than their loved ones represents the shift in the dynamics of social support and emotional well-being that often comes from various factors, including the perceived lack of judgement or preconceived notions from unfamiliar individuals, offering a safe space for vulnerability and open expression (Loveys et al., 2019). The anonymity provided by conversations with strangers through 'Kind Words 2', particularly in virtual and online situations, might decrease the worry of social repercussions or disrupted relationships that may accompany confiding in loved ones (Lotun et al., 2024). Additionally, the emergence of social media and online groups has made it easier to interact with people who have similar viewpoints or experiences, creating a sense of understanding and belonging that might not exist in one's immediate social circle (Zhang et al., 2023). These diverse yet similar viewpoints can provide validation and emotional support, especially when dealing with niche issues or unconventional lifestyles (Merza, 2022), which are heavily referred to by the players of 'Kind Words 2' during the gameplay with other players (Table 3).

The Comfort and Safe Medium

This section will be focusing specifically on the private aspects of the interactions rather than the more public ones—since it is happening between players, the interactions that let them share their interests and hobbies are already covered in the previous section. And as mentioned before, 'Kind Words 2' is adopting the main features of its previous version, 'Kind Words', which is focusing on sharing the players' thoughts and responses. A one-sided interaction between the player and the game itself is provided by this more recent edition of the game, never-theless. These elements are shown in 1.F, 1.G, 2.F, 2.G, and 2.K, where players are just asked to express their opinions without having to respond to another player. "Journal" (1.G) and "Wiggling Void" (2.K) are two features that even function as a private journal that can be written at any moment and as a "trash" where secrets can be safely shared. These aspects provide the security that most individuals require—the ability to express themselves and be heard without being judged by others (Jiménez, 2015; Siyahhan et al., 2017). Writing about private or sensitive topics provides a structured way to cope and find psychological comfort. According to research, persons who confess their secrets, whether through private writing or another means, frequently report feeling better and more capable of dealing with life's obstacles (Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2018). Furthermore, deciding to destroy written records—such as burning a diary or deleting a record—is a symbolic act of release and closure, indicating a conscious break with past obligations. This is most likely why elements like "Journal" and "Wiggling Void" were included in the game: to provide another type of comfort and platform for discharging burdens and unwanted feelings that no one else can help with.

In addition, the game also offers personalized features to which players often use to decorate their 'room' and give a preferred touch to their avatars, though it's in limited customization (1.E and 2.B). Players can express themselves more through visual preferences and appearances that better reflect their personality thanks to these features. In a way, 'Kind Words 2' also serves as avenues for self-expression, identity construction, and psychological empowerment, even when the available options are limited. Customizing one's avatar or in-game surroundings allows players to transfer aspects of their real-life identity into the virtual world, giving them a sense of per-

sonal control and ownership over their gaming experience (Shang, 2024). Self-expressive customization satisfies the dual desire of conveying individual uniqueness and enabling players to align with communal identities, which can ultimately improve their willingness to contribute in the experience, further enhancing their sense of accomplishment and engagement in the game (Lei et al., 2020). Therefore, 'Kind Words 2' offers its players features—such as "Decorate" and "Fashion!"—to address fundamental psychological motivations and to provide a creative outlet for self-expression and personal identity in virtual settings.

Conclusion

In summary, using 'Kind Words 2' or other such video games to seek solace from strangers might be viewed as a complex coping mechanism that took advantage of the special social dynamics of virtual spaces. Interacting with new players promotes social capital bridging and bonding, offering chances for emotional support that may not be easily accessible offline. Virtual worlds' inherent anonymity makes it possible for people to discuss personal weaknesses with a perceived decreased danger of judgment, creating a comfortable and safe environment for emotional exposure (Coanda & Aupers, 2019). Furthermore, the collaborative aspect of many online games allows even brief contacts with strangers to develop into important supporting connections. Overall, the comfort gained from connecting with strangers in video games emphasizes the value of virtual communities in current psychosocial support systems, where the act of sharing and receiving empathy in digital contexts is critical to human well-being.

In addition to that, this research is limited by the small scope of the sample and might need to be improved in future research to gain a more comprehended result. Furthermore, it is kindly encouraged to do more research on the importance of game design in modern and digital society, especially when it comes to its relation to building emotional connection and safe place in the virtual world.

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