Night of The Nerds research

Contents

Context

During the research phase of our project for Night of The Nerds, me and my group decided we wanted to get to know our target audience better. We wanted to know their needs so that we could make a product that could help them in the best way possible. Therefore, we decided we would go and interview a few students. In this document I'll explain our conclusion, the interviews that I did and the questions I came up with, together with my group.

Research plan

The initial plan me and my group had devised was to start out with a survey and then get some interviews out of it with students who said they felt lonely. If a survey was the way to go, we would need a lot of data, so our plan was to message my old secondary school. It was a pretty ambitious plan, and we were hoping to get about 400-500 answers out of it on the survey alone.

Defining target audience

The target audience was already painted out for us which saved us a lot of work luckily. Our target audience according to our client, is young adults and teenagers (14-19 years old) who feel lonely. It's a pretty broad group, because over 250,000 people in the Netherlands between 15 and 25, feel lonely.

Research questions

Me and my group went and brainstormed some questions together to get research going. We defined that we would make a videogame at the start, because that is the main reason we founded our studio in the way that we did. We made a few research questions.

The main research question was:

How do we make socializing easier for people who feel lonely through means of a game/videogame?

To guide our design thinking process and encourage solution-oriented brainstorming, we reframed our challenge into a "How Might We" question:

How might we use games to create safe and engaging social experiences for young people who feel lonely?

This HMW question helped us explore various possibilities without being too narrow or too vague, keeping our users' emotional needs and behaviours at the centre.

and the sub questions were:

- Why do people who feel lonely find it difficult to socialize?
- How could a game help with socializing?
- How could we help turning online friendships into offline ones as well?
- Could AI or NPCs in game stimulate social interaction?
- How could we make a digital experience comfortable for people?
- What makes people feel comfortable to socialize?

Messaging old principle

I messaged my old principle of my secondary school to ask whether we could conduct our research at the school and this was the conversation that took place:

My message:

Dear Mr. Van de Westerloo,

I hope everything is going well with you and at school. You may still remember me from my time at Carolus. I am currently studying at Fontys ICT and working together with my project group on an assignment for the event *Night of the Nerds*. In this project, we are exploring how to come up with a solution for young adults who experience loneliness or have difficulty socializing.

To tailor our solution as effectively as possible to the target group, we would like to conduct direct research among young adults (upper secondary students). We aim to do this through a digital survey and a number of interviews.

Our project team consists of four international students and myself, as the only Dutch member. Three of us will be visiting, but most of us do not speak Dutch. Therefore, the introduction will be given in English.

My question is whether this research can be conducted at the school. We are available on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday next week between 10:00 and 15:00. Since the survey will be completed digitally, I was wondering if an exception to the phone ban could be made during the completion of the survey. If not, perhaps you see other possibilities to ensure the research proceeds smoothly?

I look forward to hearing from you! Thank you in advance for your time and help.

Kind regards,
Nieck Buijs

Translated using chatgpt with the prompt: 'translate this message to english'

Response:

Dear Nieck,

Thank you very much for your message.

How nice to hear from you again! I hope you're doing well. Are you enjoying your studies?

In the meantime, I have discussed your request internally. We are currently being overwhelmed with research requests, especially from former students. At the moment, there are four studies running simultaneously. For that reason, I'm sorry to say that we are unable to accommodate your request, particularly because students are becoming a bit "research fatigued." We need to prevent that.

Apologies for the inconvenience.

Kind regards,
Ruud van de Westerlo
Director

Translated using chatgpt with the prompt: 'translate this message to english'

my response:

Dear Mr. Van de Westerlo,

That's unfortunate to hear but thank you for your quick response nonetheless! Fortunately, we have other contacts through which we can continue our research. Perhaps in the future, there will be an opportunity for another project!

~personal message~

Thanks again for the swift reply, and hopefully we'll meet again sometime!

Kind regards,
Nieck Buijs

Translated using chatgpt with the prompt: 'translate this message to english'

Interview questions

Did some brainstorming to get interview questions together and these are the questions we came up with. We all sat in front of a board and took turns to go to the board and write questions down. Then we'd go over them later.
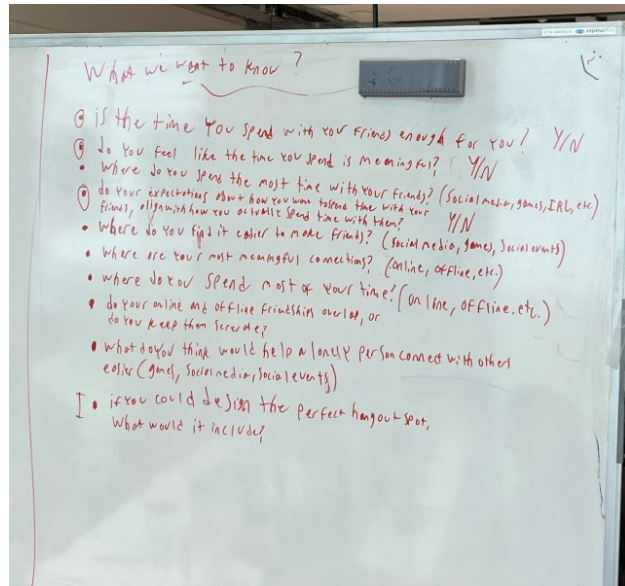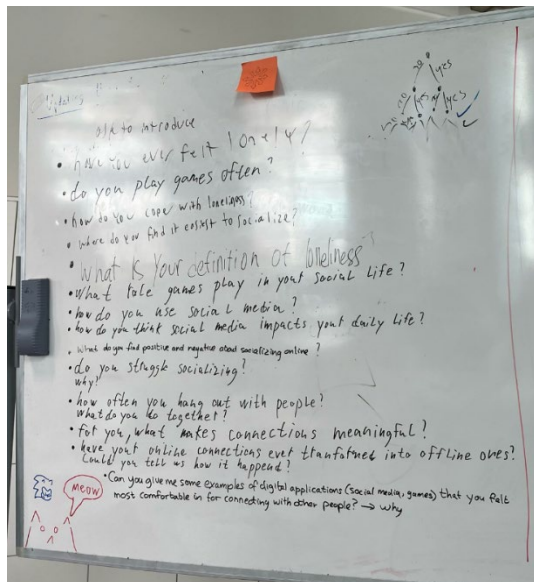
In the end the questions we decided on were as follows:

May I record this call?

Introduce yourself -> tell me about your day.

Purpose of the interview -> You fall into the target audience of young adults who know how it feels to be lonely.

Have you ever felt lonely?

If yes

What is your definition of loneliness?

Would you like to tell how you felt lonely?

How do you cope with loneliness?

Would you say you struggle with socializing?

If no

What is your definition of loneliness?

Would you say you struggle with socializing?

How often do you hang out with people? What do you do together?

For you, what makes these connections with people meaningful?

You played games before; you've been on social media. -> How does social media impact your life?

What do you find negative and positive about socializing online?

You made connections through social media and games before; how do you compare that process of making these connections online and connections offline (irl)?

Besides the obvious one, do you have any other online connections that turned to a closer one offline? Would you like to tell me that?

Back onto digital experiences -> Can you give me examples of digital applications, like social media apps or games, that you found most comfortable with connecting with people? Why for these examples?

When it comes to making new connections from your experience, do you find social media apps a better environment or multiplayer games? Why is that?

Interviews I did & transcripts

I did an interview with 3 students and my group interviewed 9 people in total. I won't be naming the interviewees for privacy reasons, and I will use placeholder names for these students. I also have recordings of all the interviews, but I also won't be posting these anywhere for the same reason. I have the transcript and that's the proof of the interviews having taken place.

I interviewed three students at media all around the ages of 20. All the interviewees were around that age because it's quite difficult to get in touch with teenagers without being seen as suspicious or weird. So, we decided to interview people a bit older but still young adults.

Do you consider yourself lonely?
Never felt lonely

What is your definition of loneliness?

When it takes a lot of effort to speak to someone, or scared to do so. Having a problem approaching others. Having less friends.

Would you say you struggle with socializing?

Doesn't have a problem with socializing. Having the same interests, being at the same place or even having the same problem makes it easier to talk

How often do you hang out with people?

Hangs out often. 3-4 times a week.

For you, what makes these connections with people meaningful?

Experiencing moments together. (fun, hard times, etc.)

You played games before, you've been on social media. How does social media impact your life?

Hasn't played games for long time. Used to play Minecraft, LoL, COD, CS. Goes more on social media. Not much of an impact on his life, he isn't addicted and he only finds positive posts due to who he follows.

What do you find negative and positive about socializing online?

Negative: Too many lies. Propaganda. Bunch of fake news these days.

Positives: Getting to socialize with people from every kind of group around the world. Getting to see photos of places around the world. (like the pyramids as an example)

You made connections through social media and games before, how do you compare that process of making these connections online and connections offline (irl)?

Only made friends irl. Making friends online is harder because he doesn't know who he is interacting with. Prefers face-to-face interaction.

Do you have any other online connections that turned to a closer one offline? Would you like to tell more about that?

Only once. A friend he met via group chat. Still talks to him to this day. Friendship would not have been made if he did not meet him online.

Can you give me examples of digital applications, like social media apps or games, that you found most comfortable with connecting with people? Why for these examples?

Apps that have a private place to talk with someone (DM's), because it's closest to offline interaction.

When it comes to making new connections from your experience, do you find social media apps a better environment or multiplayer games? Why is that?

Video games are better for making new connections because of the teamwork bonding games offer. Social media is harder to make new connections.

Do you consider yourself lonely?
Yes. Everyone must have felt like this at least once before.

What is your definition of loneliness?
Being the only person in a place. Uses the classroom as an example, if he were the only one there, he would consider that being lonely or alone. The word explains itself.

Would you like to tell how you felt lonely?
Doesn't really know

How do you cope with loneliness?
Watch movies, play games and go outside with friends.

Would you say you struggle with socializing?
No. It's not easy nor is it hard. Selective of who he interacts with.

How often do you hang out with people? What do you do together?
1-2 times a week. Gather together in real life and just chill and hang out together.

For you, what makes these connections with people meaningful?
Enjoying moments with them (laughing, fun times, etc.)

You played games before, you've been on social media. How does social media impact your life?
A lot. Met most friends through social media (Skype for an example)

What do you find negative and positive about socializing online?
Negative: Can't people that easy. Anonymity
Positive: Faster and easier to interact with someone

You made connections through social media and games before, how do you compare that process of making these connections online and connections offline (irl)?
For offline, and one time online, it was due to mutual connections with other friends. No comparison there

Besides the obvious one, do you have any other online connections that turned to a closer one offline? Would you like to tell that?
Mentioned before. A lot of friends made on Skype

Can you give me examples of digital applications, like social media apps or games, that you found most comfortable with connecting with people? Why for these examples?
Now Instagram. Back in the day: Facebook and Skype. The popular apps where everyone is at

When it comes to making new connections from your experience, do you find social media apps a better environment or multiplayer games? Why is that?
Games are easier, because of teamwork bonding. Also he made friends on games that then became social media friends (started on games like Minecraft, to then they exchanged contact on Skype)

Do you consider yourself lonely?
Has before. It's a bad feeling. Depressing. Alone with no one else.

What is your definition of loneliness?
Sitting and hearing nothing. In absolute darkness alone. Like if you are in the void.

Would you like to tell how you felt lonely?
He was the odd one out. But accepted it after.

How do you cope with loneliness?
Being with family.

Would you say you struggle with socializing?
Used to, but not anymore.

How often do you hang out with people? What do you do together?
As much as possible, not a definitive answer. If there is a chance to hangout, he takes it

For you, what makes these connections with people meaningful?
The talking. Not just the place they are at, like at a boba spot for example, but the conversation and laughter

You played games before, you've been on social media. How does social media impact your life?
None. Only uses social media, Like Facebook and Instagram, to view posts and videos. For interacting with others, Discord is preferred

What do you find negative and positive about socializing online?
Negative: You don't know who you are talking to online
Positive: Finding people across the world with different views, thinking and humor

You made connections through social media and games before, how do you compare that process of making these connections online and connections offline (irl)?
Has before. Irl interaction is more personal as you get to interact eye to eye. Online is just through voice, until you use a webcam. Online interaction is harder

Besides the obvious one, do you have any other online connections that turned to a closer one offline? Would you like to tell that?
Friend in US. Talked and talked on ps3 and then got his facebook.

Can you give me examples of digital applications, like social media apps or games, that you found most comfortable with connecting with people? Why for these examples?
Minecraft servers, Discord. One friend on Minecraft, made a world together and then went on to social media.

When it comes to making new connections from your experience, do you find social media apps a better environment or multiplayer games? Why is that?
Games are preferred, social media is very vague because of fake posts, filters. Games people are more themselves. Not fake.

Interview conclusion

I wrote down all the answers of each questions side by side and came up with an answer per question and out of that answered the main research questions.

Here are the answers per question, these include answers from all the other interviews:

Have you ever felt lonely before?
Most of the people that we interviewed have felt lonely before. Some think it's a universal thing to feel lonely, others feel like it daily. Some of them have also grown over it. Overall people think it's a depressing and very negative feeling.

What is your definition of loneliness?
A lot of people said that loneliness has to do with not having a deep social connection with enough people. They say they don't have anyone to do anything with or talk to. For some they also feel it even though they have many friends. They just don't feel like their connection with them is deep enough. Loneliness is a deep sense of isolation from social connections or emotionally.

Would you like to tell how you felt lonely?
The way the interviewees felt lonely was by not having anyone as support, feeling left out, relationship problems, or no real way to describe it, which then leads them to distract themselves from that feeling with what they feel comfortable with. Though one interviewee found that loneliness calming instead of depressing.

How do you cope with loneliness?
Interviewees use a mix of social engagement—like by reaching out to friends, family, or online communities—and personal hobbies such as video games and reading, or quiet reflection to cope with loneliness.

Would you say you struggle with socializing?
Most interviewees don't generally struggle with socializing, though some face challenges in specific situations, such as finding trustworthy or compatible people. A few note that while initiating conversation isn't difficult, establishing deeper connections can be. Others mention that their ease of socializing can vary based on context or the age group of the people around them.

How often do you hang out with people? What do you do together?
The frequency ranges from hanging out several times a week to only occasionally due to busy schedules. Activities vary from in-person chilling, gaming, and enjoying outings like restaurants or movies, to predominantly online interactions and gaming sessions. Games were a common theme across all interviews, whether digital or physical.

For you, what makes these connections meaningful?
Meaningful connections stem from shared experiences, genuine conversations that evoke laughter and memories, and a sense of trust and mutual care. They also thrive when built on common interests and an effortless flow of interaction.

You played games before, you've been on social media – how does social media impact your life?
The responses show mixed impacts: some value social media for connecting with friends and discovering communities, while others limit its use to avoid negative moods, comparisons, or

distractions. A few see meaningful gaming experiences as beneficial for social skills, though there's also concern about real-life connection being replaced.

What do you find negative and positive about socializing online?
Online socializing is seen as a quick and convenient way to connect with a diverse range of people, share experiences, and even reconnect with loved ones, while also providing a safer distance from harsh real-life interactions. However, many pointed out negatives like the prevalence of fake news, anonymity-fueled dishonesty, cyberbullying, and a lack of depth that can make face-to-face interactions more challenging.

You made connections through social media and/or games before – how do you compare the process of making friends online versus offline?
Offline connections are generally seen as more personal and genuine because of face-to-face interaction and non-verbal cues, while online connections offer convenience and access to a broader pool of people. Some appreciate the ability to casually check profiles and interact at ease online, but others find that the lack of physical cues and certainty can make online friendships more challenging to develop.

Do you have any online connections that turned into a closer one offline? Would you like to tell us that?
Several interviewees shared that online connections sometimes evolved into meaningful offline friendships. Some maintain lasting bonds with friends they met through group chats or gaming communities that eventually met in person. Others mentioned similar transitions via platforms like Skype, PS3, and Roblox.

Can you give me examples of digital applications, like social media apps or games, that you found most comfortable with connecting with people? Why for these examples?
Interviewees valued apps that offered both privacy and a sense of community. Some prefer platforms with private messaging to mimic offline interaction, while others mentioned popular apps like Instagram, Facebook, Skype, and even Minecraft servers for their familiarity and community feel. Others highlighted Discord and Telegram as spaces where diverse communities thrive and where it's easier to gradually build meaningful connections.

When it comes to making new connections from your experience, do you find social media apps a better environment or multiplayer games? Why is that?
Interviewees were split on whether social media or multiplayer games are better for making connections. Many preferred games, noting that the teamwork and cooperation required in games create natural bonding experiences and make people more authentic. Others preferred social media, finding it easier to connect through shared interests and communities rather than the competitive or sometimes toxic environments of games. One acknowledged the utility of social media but also noted the organic nature of friendship formation, whether through games or social media.

(Rewrote with ChatGPT to make all interviewees anonymous. Prompt: 'rewrite this in the exact same wording but remove all names of the interviewees'.)

Conclusion of research

As a group together we split up the tasks between interviews and desk research and in the end, we concluded everything in a user persona that we decided to base our game off of. It can be found in my portfolio under LO 4. (User persona)

Here is a summarized version *(Summarized with ChatGPT)*

Dianne Jansen is a 16-year-old student with a strong interest in games and technology. As an introverted and thoughtful individual, she finds it difficult to socialize, especially while balancing a demanding school schedule. Her main goals revolve around addressing her feelings of loneliness by forming deeper emotional and social connections. She hopes to find a safe and accepting community where she can express herself without judgment and build meaningful relationships, both online and offline.

Due to the impact of COVID-19 and limited free time, many of Dianne's past connections have faded, and she struggles to transition online friendships into offline interactions. She's frustrated by the lack of accessible places to connect with others and finds it challenging to maintain relationships. Despite these obstacles, Dianne is motivated by a desire to feel valued, find companionship, and combat her loneliness by setting clear goals and seeking ways to engage with others meaningfully.

Reflection

I think that these interviews were the most professional interviews I've done, ever. All of the interviewees felt very at ease talking about this topic with me. I think the way I set things up together with my group was also very professional and structured.
Also communicating with my old principle was a very nice experience not only in reaching out to other 'companies' in a professional way but also talking to him was a nice experience.

I think for the next time I can maybe do better with structuring and writing down all the things that I did somewhere. I'm sure there are more things that I did for the research of this project but I'm not entirely sure what it was. It's likely because we wanted to make sure that everyone had something to show in their portfolio, so we all worked together. Which makes it very hard to keep track of who did what.

Overall, the interviews were a good learning experience but also, in my opinion, a good performance and usage of the professional skills I have built up over the past 2 years.