

# **User Needs Assessment and Contextual Inquiry for the game Township on iOS and Android**

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## **Section I - Introduction**

Township is an immensely popular phone game on both the Android and Apple platforms. With over a quarter billion downloads, there is no doubt that Township has done well in recruiting and retaining players. However, many people play the game but don't participate in its online community system, described as Co-ops. Why don't people join and participate in co-ops in Township, and what might make them more likely to utilize this feature?

To examine this potential problem in greater detail, I will administer two semi-structured interviews with two players of the Township game. This project is being performed to fulfill a portion of the requirements for the User Experience Research and Design Specialization from the University of Michigan on Coursera.

There are four primary components to this document. First, the introduction is what you're reading now. It introduces the topic, articulates the problem being investigated, and outlines this document.

The second section includes the protocol I created to carry out the semi-structured interviews with the two participants I recruited. Interviews were an hour long and included a contextual inquiry using a think-aloud protocol. Neither my hand-written notes nor a link to the audio recordings of the interviews are included or available online, so sorry if you are looking for that.

The third section displays the affinity diagram that I created from approximately half the notes I gathered from the interviews. The affinity diagram is used to develop common themes from across the two interviews as well as from findings observed during the contextual inquiry. I utilized Figma to develop the diagram.

Finally, the fourth section includes a report describing two of the higher-level findings from the qualitative analysis. The first primary finding discussed is related to improving accessibility in regards to the co-op system in order to improve player involvement and increase player retention. The second primary finding is related to improving the chat system in order to facilitate communication with other players while improving co-op functioning.

## Section II – Interview Protocol

### Interview Protocol

#### [Overarching Questions]

What UX design decisions motivate or hinder people from playing the co-op (multiplayer) element of the game Township on iOS or Android? What could be done to make people more likely to engage with this content?

#### [Introduction]

Hi, my name is Chris, and I'm interested in what you like about the game Township for iOS and Android. This interview will take about one hour, a portion of which will be dedicated to me asking you some questions and finding out more about how you play the game. I would like you to treat me as though I don't know anything about the game... I'm here to learn from you.

I wanted to clarify two things from the start. The first is that anything you say in this interview will be **completely confidential** and will not be identified to you personally. I will aggregate and anonymize all of the comments that I receive and nothing will be easily traced to you. If I quote you in my report, I will do so without identifying you in any way. If there's anything that you would not like on the record, please let me know. Also, your participation in this research is **completely voluntary**, and if you want to stop at any time, that's your right and you just let me know. We will end the interview immediately and I can also remove any data that you've given me.

Do you have any questions for me?

Oh, and I would like to record the audio of this interview so that I can revisit our conversation in the event that I missed anything. No one will have access to this recording besides me, and again, your statements will be completely confidential.

#### [Warm up]

How often do you play Township?

When are you most likely to play?

Are you the member of a co-op?

#### [Open-ended item about interest in Township]

I'd like you to think about the last time you were playing Township. What did you enjoy about that experience?

#### [Follow-ups]

- Was there some aspect of the game you enjoyed the most?
- What do you like least about that experience?
- Is there anything you found frustrating about your experience?
- How long did you play for?
- What caused you to stop playing?

- Would you say this was a typical occurrence playing the game?

**[Open-ended item about multiplayer element]**

Think back to the last time you engaged with a multiplayer element of the game. What component of the game was it? Describe your experience to me.

[Follow-ups]

- What did you like or dislike about engaging with that feature?
- Did you enjoy your interaction with the other player(s)?
- Would you have preferred more or less interaction?
- What specifically made you feel positive or negative about the social aspect of the game?
- Did you feel like the multiplayer component was time well spent in comparison to the rest of the game? Why or why not?

**[Open-ended item about fostering more multiplayer interaction]**

One thing I'm interested in is attempting to learn what might increase your utilization of multiplayer aspects of the game. Is there anything you can think of that might increase your interest in multiplayer content?

[Follow-ups]

- What has been your experience with direct communication with other players?
- Can you recall a time where you had a positive or negative experience with others and could you tell me about that?
- Do you feel like your interactions with others in Township have been rewarded adequately?
- Is multiplayer content necessary to play Township well?
- Is there a part of the social aspect of the game that you find frustrating or not particularly fun?

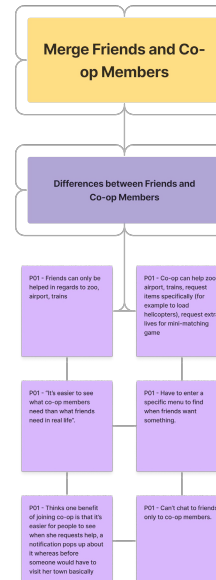
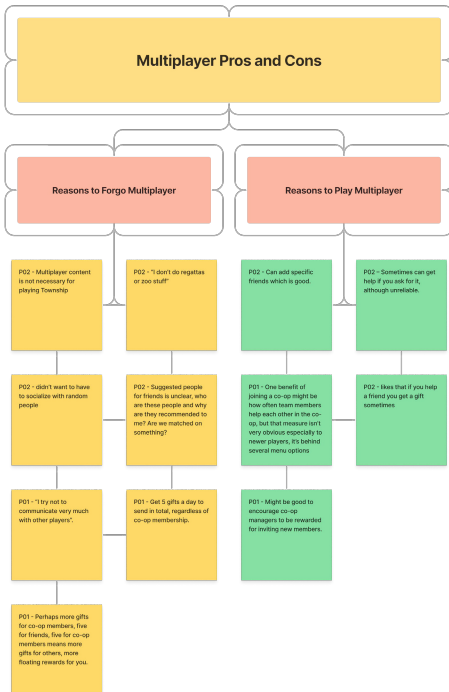
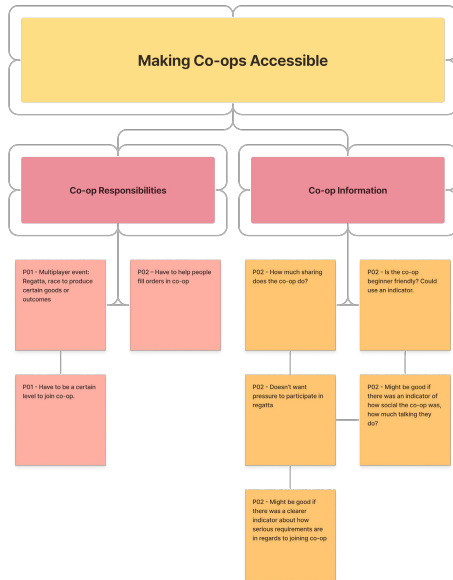
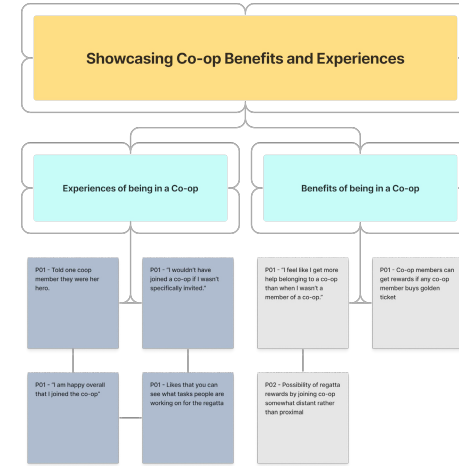
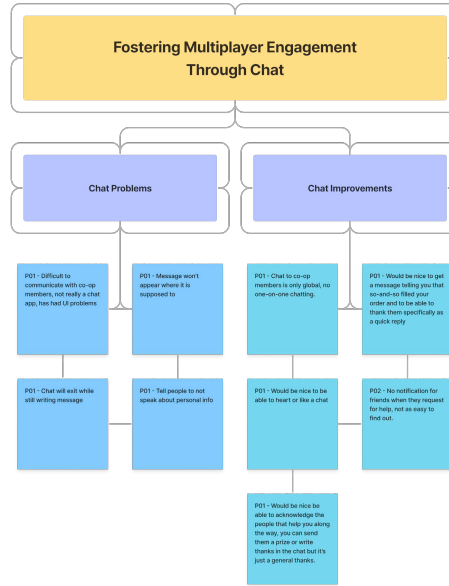
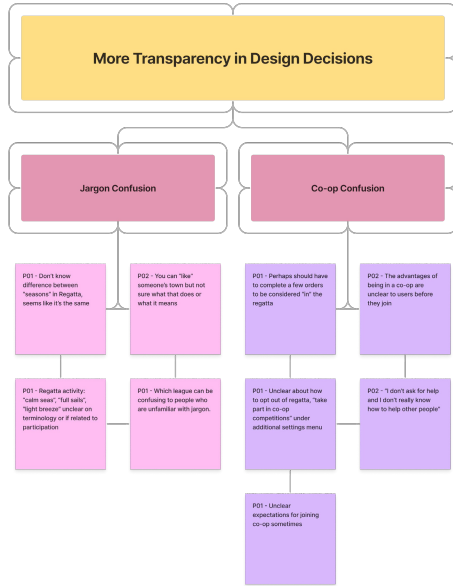
**[Conclusion]**

Thank you! Those are all the questions I have for you. Now I would like to watch you play the game for a few minutes if that's okay with you. I don't want you to do anything special or different than your normal play experience, but I might talk to you a little bit about what you are doing, if that's okay.

[Contextual Inquiry]

Do you have any questions for me at this point? Again, thank you so much for answering my questions today!

# Section III – Affinity Diagram – Figma



## Section IV – Report

### Increasing Co-op Participation and Player Satisfaction

Township is an immensely popular phone game on both the Android and Apple platforms. With over a quarter billion downloads, there is no doubt that Township has done well in recruiting and retaining players. However, many people play the game but don't participate in its multiplayer community system, described as Co-ops. Why don't people join and participate in co-ops in Township, and what might make them more likely to utilize this feature?

In order to investigate this question, I carried out two semi-structured, contextual inquiry interviews with users of the Township game. Utilizing the findings, I produced an affinity diagram in order to cluster common themes and to identify areas of improvement in regards to fostering engagement with Township's multiplayer systems. In this report, I will detail two of the higher-level findings from the qualitative analysis.

First, both of my participants found the co-op system to be a little opaque, and I believe that making the co-ops more accessible will improve initial involvement as well as player retention. For example, both participants reported having reservations about joining a co-op because they didn't want to let the other team members down or have players be mad at them for not fulfilling their duties as team members. Having a level requirement to join the co-op is a good start, but it would be beneficial if a player's responsibilities were more transparent to them in regards to joining a co-op.

One primary responsibility in joining a co-op is competing in the regatta, a race to produce certain goods over a period of time. This mechanic is not too different than the regular gameplay, yet one of our players didn't know what the regatta was until after joining her co-op, while the other didn't know much about the regatta at the time of our interview. Informing players of the basics of regatta participation might alleviate some of the hesitation in regards to joining a co-op.

At the same time, different people might have different interests in regards to joining a co-op. Neither of our participants wanted to join a co-op that took the game too seriously, and neither wanted a co-op where they would be forced to socialize too much with anonymous strangers, at least at first. It would be convenient for players if there were metrics describing the qualities of a co-op or perhaps what type of members the co-op was interested in recruiting. Our participants specifically mentioned that they would like to know how often co-op members socialize, how much helping teammates is expected, and how seriously the members take playing the game. Co-ops that are beginner friendly could be highlighted in some way for novice players who are more hesitant about the multiplayer aspects of Township.

The second higher-level finding from this analysis was that the chat system within Township is anemic and could benefit from an overhaul. By making the chat more functional, it is probable that players would build relationships more quickly and also feel more comfortable

communicating with co-op members. Many co-ops utilize chat systems outside of Township to communicate with their teammates, which seems like a missed opportunity to capitalize on player engagement.

One of our participants specifically mentioned that she had a very poor time with the chat UI and that she found it difficult to chat with teammates. For example, she reported that the chat would exit her keyboard while she was still attempting to write her message. She also found that her message in the chat window wouldn't appear where it was supposed to.

There are several limitations to the chat system that could improve user experience. First, chat is only for co-op members and not friends, meaning that when friends request help it is not as apparent as when co-op members ask for help. Second, the chat system is global only, meaning all members see all messages posted in the chat. Having the option of private, one-on-one engagement could foster deeper and more meaningful relationships between players. Third, many chat systems now have the option to quote text when replying to a specific comment, or to add a heart, emoji, or "like" to a post. This would make communication quicker and easier. Finally, one of our participants wished there was a notification when she was helped that she could reply to, allowing her to specifically thank the individual rather than spamming the global chat with a "thank you" message meant for one person.

Implementing these changes would be a modest undertaking while dramatically improving the user experience for the players of Township. By making slight changes to the present systems, giving players more access to information about co-ops, and allowing more player freedom in regards to in-game chatting, players would have more confidence and agency within the game.