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(54) SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR CREATING AN AFFINITY BETWEEN PERSONS AND AN ONLINE ENTITY

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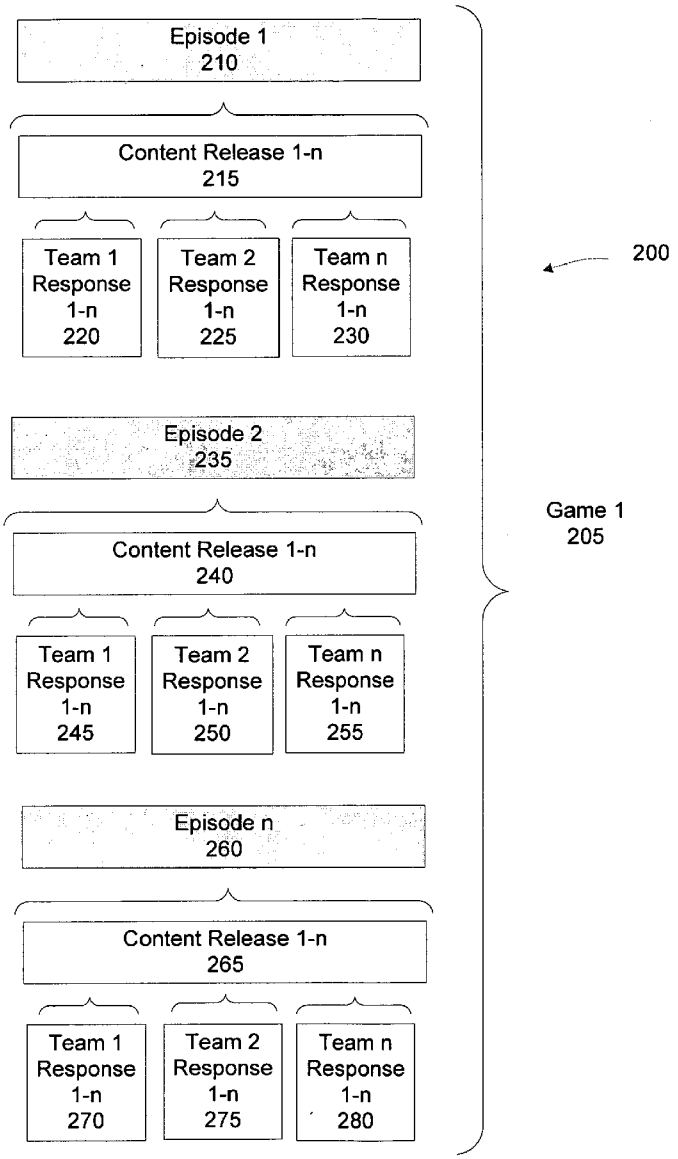
(57) **ABSTRACT**

A method and system associated with creating an affinity between persons and an online entity through a multi-team game. In one embodiment, the steps of the multi-team game involve at least in part some interaction between the players playing the game and the online entity, so as to engender an affinity between them. In another embodiment, the online entity is associated with online services and thus, affinity is engendered between these online services and the players.



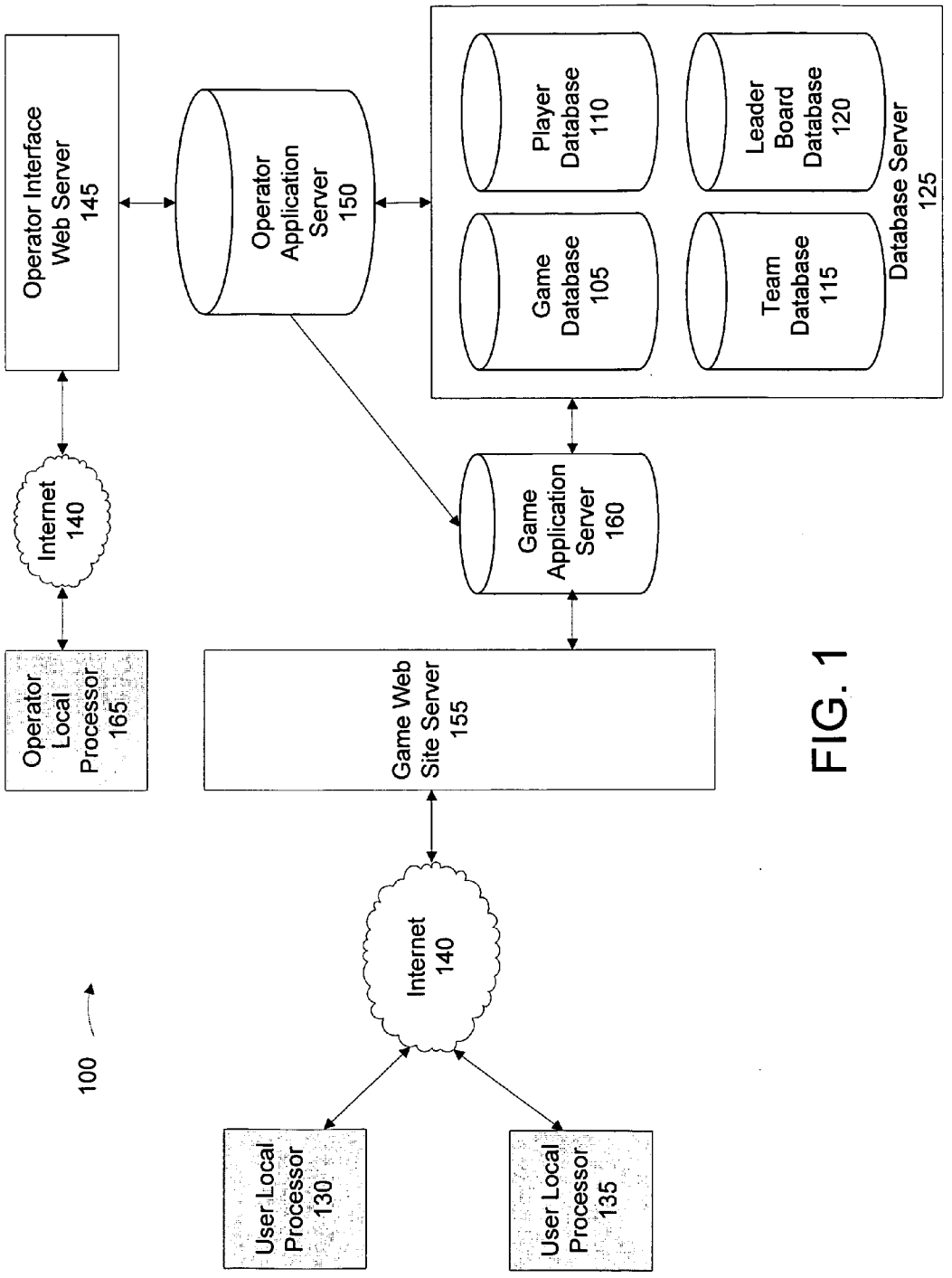

100
Operator Interface Web Server 145
Operator Application Server 150
Player Database 110
Leader Board Database 120
Game Database 105
Team Database 115
Database Server 125
Internet 140
Game Application Server 160
Operator Local Processor 165
Game Web Site Server 155
Internet 140
User Local Processor 130
User Local Processor 135

FIG. 1

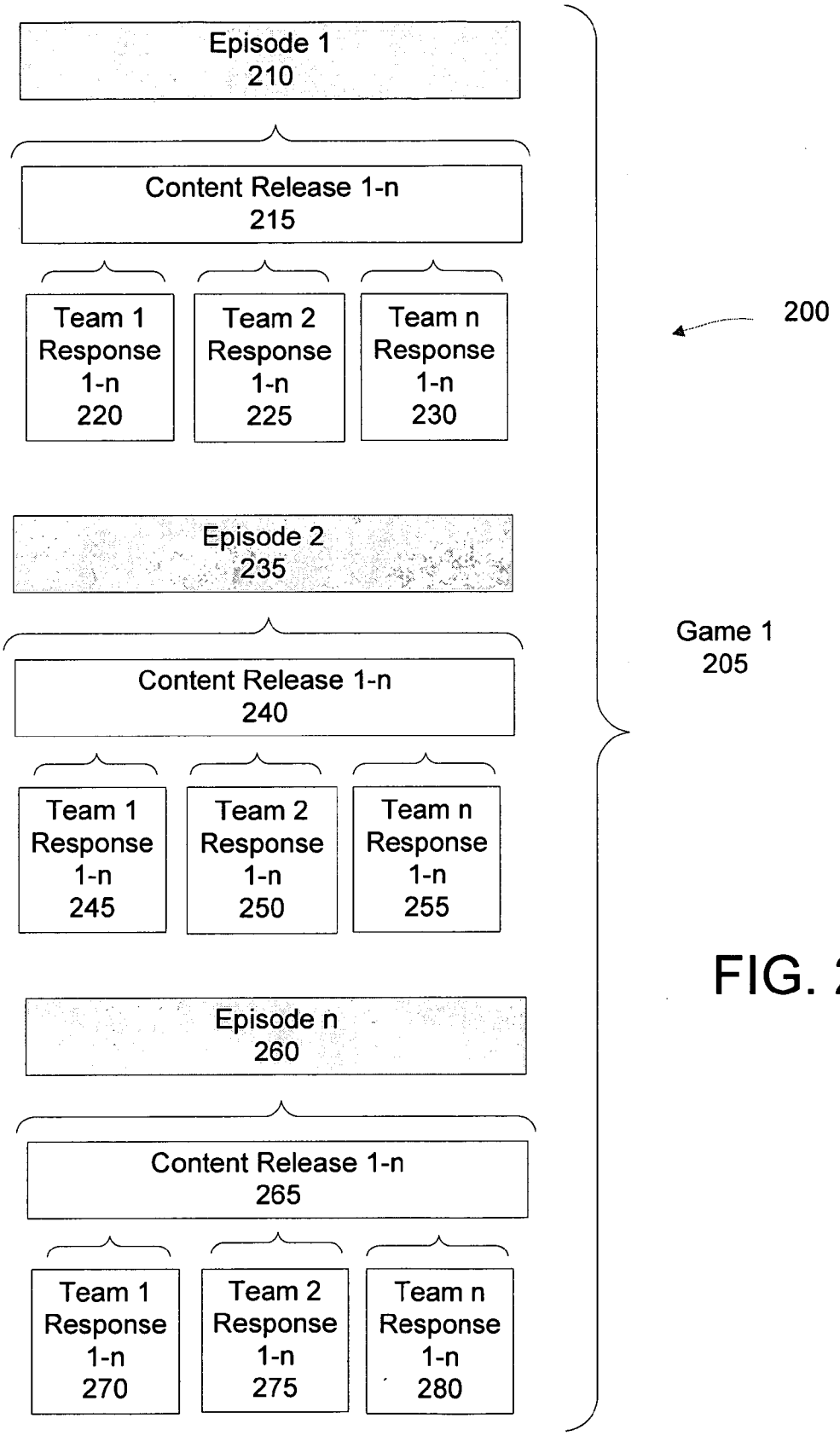

Episode 1
210
Content Release 1-n
215
Team 1 Response 1-n
220
Team 2 Response 1-n
225
Team n Response 1-n
230
Episode 2
235
Content Release 1-n
240
Team 1 Response 1-n
245
Team 2 Response 1-n
250
Team n Response 1-n
255
Episode n
260
Content Release 1-n
265
Team 1 Response 1-n
270
Team 2 Response 1-n
275
Team n Response 1-n
280
200
Game 1
205

FIG. 2

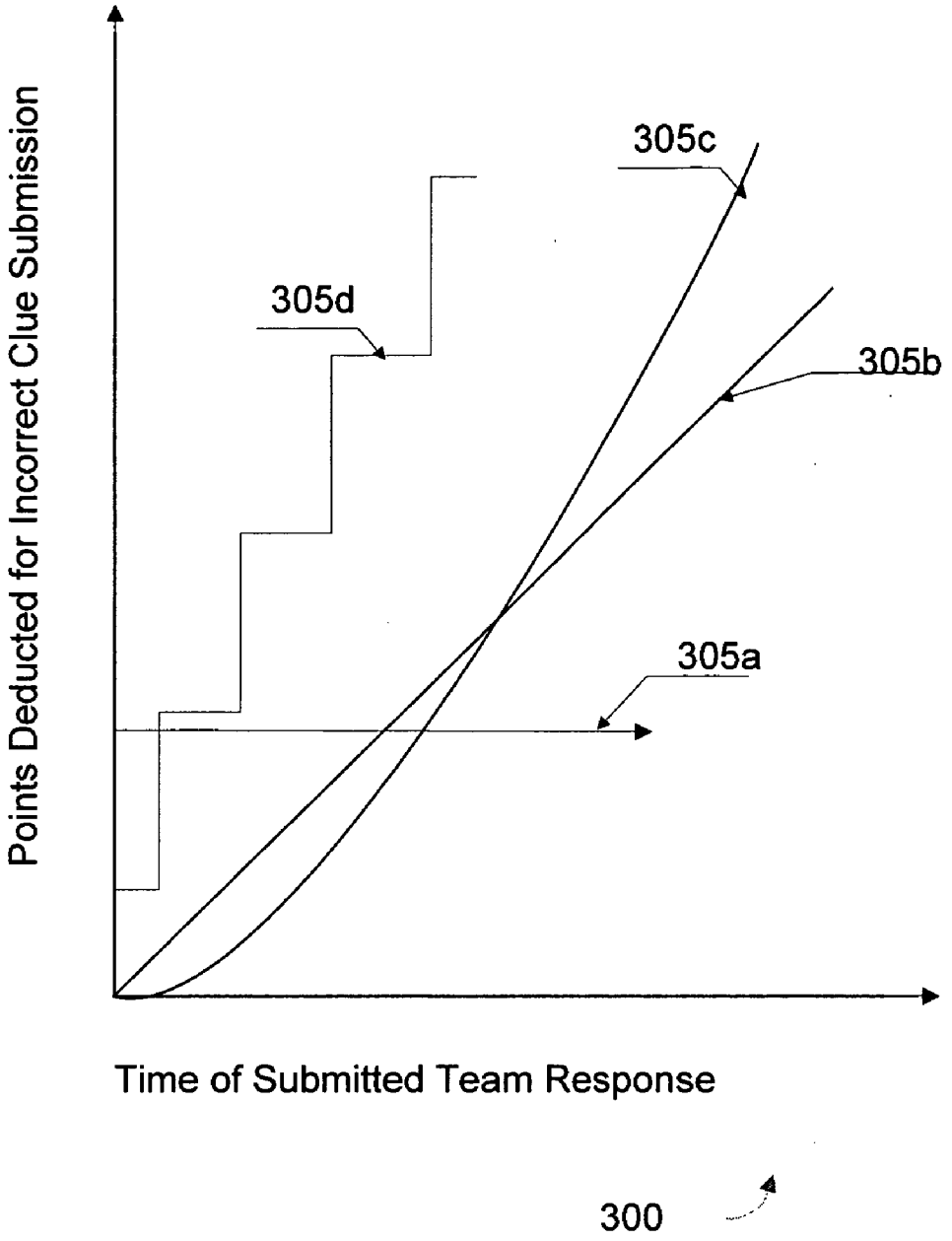

Points Deducted for Incorrect Clue Submission
305c
305d
305b
305a
Time of Submitted Team Response
300

FIG. 3

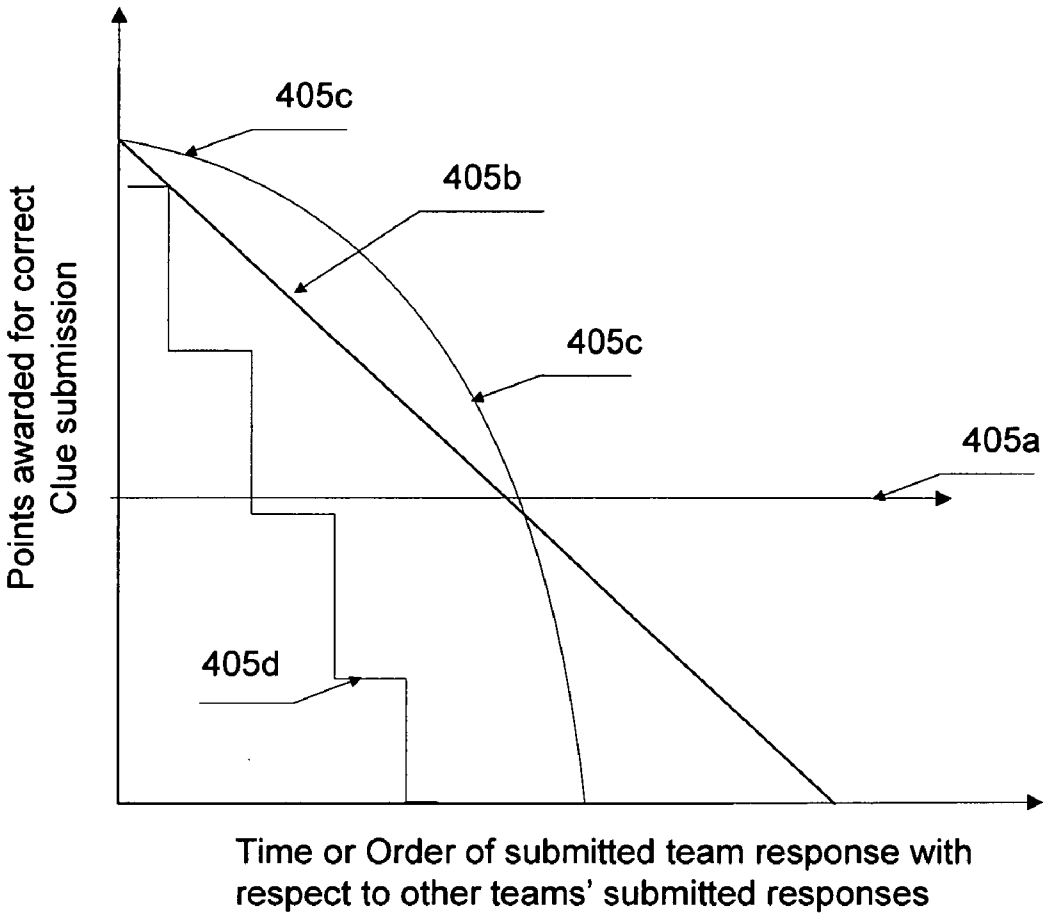
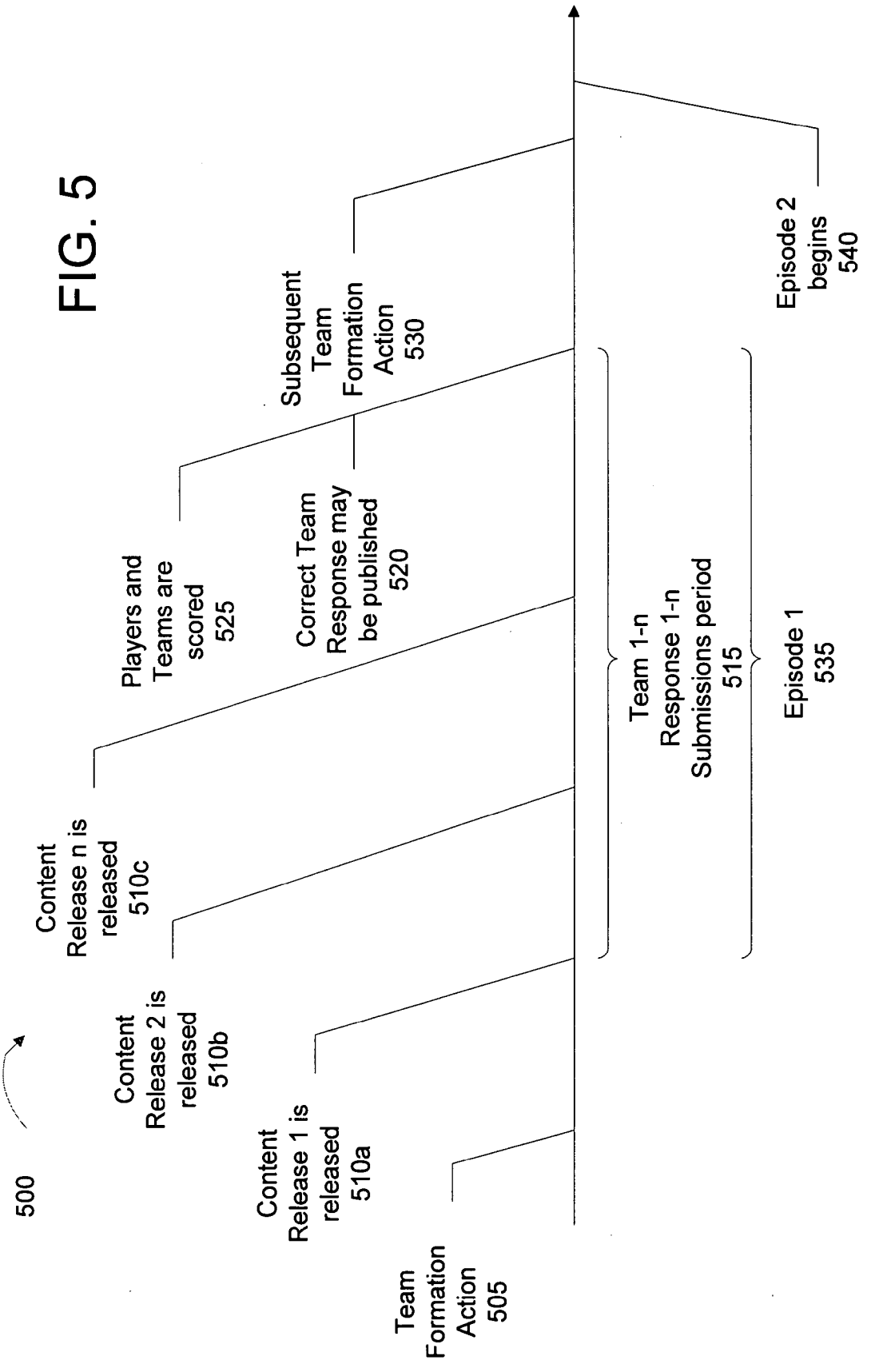

405c
405b
405c
405a
405d
Points awarded for correct Clue submission
Time or Order of submitted team response with respect to other teams' submitted responses
400

FIG. 4

FIG. 5


500
Team Formation Action 505
Content Release 1 is released 510a
Content Release 2 is released 510b
Content Release n is released 510c
Players and Teams are scored 525
Correct Team Response may be published 520
Subsequent Team Formation Action 530
Team 1-n Response 1-n Submissions period 515
Episode 1 535
Episode 2 begins 540

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR CREATING AN AFFINITY BETWEEN PERSONS AND AN ONLINE ENTITY

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0001] The present disclosure relates generally to a method and system for creating an affinity between persons or players and an online entity.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Current multi-team games typically engage players in a game using online and/or real-world experiences. Often, these multi-team games release content such as clues in forms such as puzzles hoping to encourage players and teams to consume and react to the released content such as by solving clues and submitting responses. However, there lacks a system and method for scoring each player individually, in some instances, only revealing the correct response at the end of a predetermined time period, and/or allowing different team formations and re-formations throughout the game so as to encourage complex player strategies and continuing player's engagement and participation. Further, there lacks a system and method for creating affinity towards an online entity associated with such a multi-team based game.

SUMMARY

[0003] The present disclosure addresses these failings. In one embodiment, the present disclosure relates a method and system associated with playing a multi-team based game and creating an affinity between persons and an online entity. The embodiments herein can be implemented in a variety of ways, by way of non-limiting example, as a plug-in or extension to any type of existing clue based game, or as a new self-contained game.

[0004] The present disclosure relates to a method and system for creating an affinity between persons and an online entity.

[0005] In one embodiment, a method for creating an affinity between persons and an online entity is disclosed. In one embodiment, the method comprises receiving data representing a team formation action indicating a desire for a player to join a team in a multi-team game, each team comprising at least one player and having a team roster, the multi-team game comprising one or more episodes ending in a final episode, each episode comprising one or more episode content releases and associated team responses; for each episode except the final episode, performing the steps of: publishing an episode content release to each player of the multi-team game, the episode content release being associated with a correct episode response, the correct episode response being associated with an episode time period for receiving the correct episode response, wherein if the correct episode response is to be published, the correct episode response is not published prior to the end of the episode time period, receiving an episode team response during the episode time period; scoring, at the end of the episode time period, each player of each team, the episode player score being based in part upon an episode team score and the episode team roster, the episode team score based in part upon whether the episode team response is correct or incorrect, and a temporal factor; and receiving, during a second time period, data representing a subsequent team formation action during which players may effect changes to team rosters so as to change a player's team association, but wherein each player's score remains individual to that player throughout the duration of the game regardless of any change in team association during the game; and for the final episode, or if the game comprises only a single episode, performing only the steps of, publishing content, receiving team responses, and scoring players, wherein the scoring of players that occurs after the final episode yields a final player score comprising all episode players scores for the game and wherein all of the above steps involve at least in part some interaction between the players playing the game and the online entity, so as to engender an affinity between the players and the online entity.

[0006] In one embodiment, the online entity is associated with at least one online service.

[0007] In one embodiment, the online service comprises email.

[0008] In one embodiment, the online service comprises instant messaging.

[0009] The In one embodiment, the online service comprises really simple syndication.

[0010] In one embodiment, the affinity causes the players to select advertisements displayed by the online entity.

[0011] In one embodiment, the affinity causes the players to join services associated with the online entity.

[0012] In one embodiment, the method further comprises, during the predetermined episode time period, a player submitting a submitted episode team response does not know if the submitted episode team response matches the correct episode response.

[0013] In one embodiment, the episode content release comprises a clue, a puzzle.

[0014] In one embodiment, the episode team response comprises an answer.

[0015] In one embodiment, the episode team response comprises a solution.

[0016] In one embodiment, the subsequent team formation action comprises a player joining another team.

[0017] In one embodiment, the subsequent team formation action comprises a player forming a new team.

[0018] In one embodiment, the subsequent team formation action comprises a player leaving the game.

[0019] In one embodiment, only one designated player on each team can submit an episode team response on behalf of each team.

[0020] In one embodiment, any player on each team can submit can an episode team response on behalf of each team.

[0021] In one embodiment, the method further comprises disbanding all teams at the beginning of the final episode so that each player is competing individually for the highest individual player score aggregated among of all the episodes.

[0022] In one embodiment, a player with the highest aggregated individual player score at the end of the final episode is a winner of the multi-team game.

[0023] In one embodiment, a system for creating an affinity between persons and an online entity is disclosed. In one embodiment, the system comprises a server operated by the online entity and associated with the online entity, the server comprising code operable upon execution to: receive data representing a team formation action indicating a desire for a player to join a team in a multi-team game, each team comprising at least one player and having a team roster, the

multi-team game comprising one or more episodes ending in a final episode, each episode comprising one or more episode content releases and associated team responses; for each episode except the final episode, performing the steps of: publishing an episode content release to each player of the multi-team game, the episode content release being associated with a correct episode response, the correct episode response being associated with an episode time period for receiving the correct episode response, wherein if the correct episode response is to be published, the correct episode response is not published prior to the end of the episode time period, receiving an episode team response during the episode time period; scoring, at the end of the episode time period, each player of each team, the episode player score being based in part upon an episode team score and the episode team roster, the episode team score based in part upon whether the episode team response is correct or incorrect, and a temporal factor; and receiving, during a second time period, data representing a subsequent team formation action during which players may effect changes to team rosters so as to change a player's team association, but wherein each player's score remains individual to that player throughout the duration of the game regardless of any change in team association during the game; and for the final episode, or if the game comprises only a single episode, performing only the steps of, publishing content, receiving team responses, and scoring players, wherein the scoring of players that occurs after the final episode yields a final player score comprising all episode players scores for the game and wherein all of the above steps involve at least in part some interaction between the players playing the game and the online entity, so as to engender an affinity between the players and the online entity.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0024] The following drawing figures, which form a part of this application, are illustrative of embodiments of the present disclosure and are not meant to limit the scope of the disclosure in any manner, which scope shall be based on the claims appended hereto.

[0025] FIG. **1** is an exemplary system architecture according to an embodiment of the present disclosure;

[0026] FIG. **2** is an exemplary figure illustrating a format of a multi-team game according to an embodiment of the present disclosure;

[0027] FIG. **3** is an exemplary line graph illustrating point scoring methods for incorrect team responses according to embodiments of the present disclosure;

[0028] FIG. **4** is an exemplary line graph illustrating point scoring methods for correct team responses according to embodiments of the present disclosure; and

[0029] FIG. **5** illustrates an exemplary episode timeline of a multi-team game according to an embodiment of the present disclosure.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EMBODIMENTS

[0030] In general, the present disclosure includes a method and system for creating an affinity between persons and an online entity. Certain embodiments of the present disclosure will now be discussed with reference to the aforementioned figures, wherein like reference numerals refer to like components.

[0031] In one embodiment a method of playing a multi-team game is disclosed. FIG. **2** depicts an exemplary embodiment of a format **200** for a multi-team game. As can be seen in FIG. **2**, a multi-team game **205** comprises several episodes **210**, **235** ending in a final episode **260**. Each episode **210**, **235**, **260** contains at least one correct response associated with each content release **215**, **240**, **265**. For example, an episode can have several content releases, each content release having an associated correct response. In another example, an episode can have several content releases, however some of the content releases **215**, **240**, **265** may be chained or nested meaning that once player consumes and reacts to a content release, another content release is revealed, and so on until consuming and reacting to the content releases leads to a correct response.

[0032] Further, in one embodiment, each team (**1**-*n*) can submit team response (**1**-*n*) **220**, **225**, **230**, **245**, **250**, **255**, **270**, **275**, **280** to the content release.

[0033] As used herein, the term "content release" can mean a clue, puzzle, or any type of content that elicits an answer, solution, or any kind of response from player(s) on teams. Further, the term "content release" can comprise an "episode content release" which is defined as one or more content releases within or part of a discrete episode. Thus, in the present disclosure, use of the term "content release" can also refer to an "episode content release." In turn, the term "response" or "episode response" as used herein can mean any response to a content release. Similarly, in the present disclosure, use of the term "response" also refers to an "episode response." Further, the term "team response" refers to a response submitted by a player in behalf of a team.

[0034] Many different content release types are known and are contemplated in the present disclosure. In one embodiment, a content release or an episode content release may be completely online, within the physical world, or a combination thereof. In one embodiment, a content release or an episode content release type may comprise distributed clues which are clues distributed in multiple parts and which may distributed across different physical or online mediums. For example, jigsaw pieces, or segments of a media clip whether audio, video, and/or podcast. In one embodiment, content release types comprise degraded clues such as a noisy or distorted photo, audio, or video. In one embodiment, a content release or an episode content release type comprises redacted clues such as text with blackout words, audio with bleeps, video with dropouts, or any type of content with missing portions. In one embodiment, content release types comprise embedded clues which are clues subtly placed in web pages or media that don't impinge upon the overall original content. For example, assembling letters in a different font or color to spell a phrase.

[0035] In one embodiment, some teams may receive different content releases. In another embodiment, some teams may receive a content release which is a deliberate red herring. Both of these embodiments give a randomness or perceived "luck" feel to the game.

[0036] In one embodiment, content release types also comprise laddered clues which lead to another clue until a final clue with a final correct response is reached. In one embodiment, content release types can comprise different clues that are sent to different random subsets of teams of the multi-team game so as to add an element of luck and encourage collaboration. In one embodiment, content release types can comprise ephemeral clues which appear

and disappear within a short period of time. In one embodiment, content release types can also comprise reward clues which require players to succeed at a task such as quiz. In another embodiment, reward clues can comprise clues which require players to succeed at a task before the content release can be dispensed. In another embodiment, content release types can comprise real-world event based clues which are clues that are found at a particular time and associated with a particular event.

[0037] Content releases may comprise many different modes such as text, graphics, drawings, photos, maps, audio, video, animation, and/or an object embedded in a Web page such as an image, slide show, video, animation, and/or ad, and/or a physical object.

[0038] FIG. **5** depicts one exemplary embodiment of a timeline **500** of an episode **535** of a multi-team game, in which the order should be read as non-limiting. Further, it is contemplated an episode may comprises only some of the events or elements depicted in FIG. **5** and/or in a different order. As depicted in FIG. **5**, an episode **535** begins when the first content release is published **510***a* and ends when the time period for submitting team responses ends. Of course, it is contemplated that the timing of publishing the first content release is variable and thus, the beginning of the episode is variable, and the timing of the end of team response submissions is likewise variable and thus, the end of the episode is also variable. As can be seen in FIG. **5**, the timeline **500** comprises first receiving data representing a team formation action **505** indicating a desire to participate in a multi-team game. In one embodiment, a team formation action comprises one or more players forming a team to participate in the multi-team game. For example, signing up to join the multi-team game. As discussed herein, there are several strategies associated with team formation **505**. For example, in one embodiment, where a player's individual score is determined by the team's episode score divided by the number of players on that team, each player must weigh whether he/she wants a larger number of team members to more easily respond to a content release or a smaller number of team members to receive a higher apportioned individual score if the team submits a correct team response.

[0039] In one embodiment, the multi-team game comprises a series of episodes ending in a final episode, wherein each episode comprises at least one content release and associated team response. In one embodiment, multiple teams participate in the multi-team game. Further, each team comprises at least one player and has a team roster. In one embodiment, the team roster comprises the makeup of the players on each team for each episode. In one embodiment, each player must register to form or join a team in order to participate in the multi-team game. In one embodiment, each player can join only one team per episode. Several known methods for verifying player registration are contemplated so as to prevent players from fraudulently joining more than one team. For example, address verification, billing verification, email verification, texting a code to a phone, calling a phone number, and/or manually entering a non-machine-readable code.

[0040] Referring back to FIG. **5**, in one embodiment, after the teams are formed, at least one content release **510** is published to at least one player of each of the teams and the episode **535** begins. As depicted in FIG. **5**, in one embodiment, there may be several content releases **510***a*, **510***b*, and **510***c* which may or may not be nested or chained. In another embodiment, there may be only a single content release. In any case, the present disclosure contemplates numerous ways of sending out a content release via embedding the content in a webpage, a game Web site, RSS feed, email, SMS/MMS, instant messaging program, a broadcast such as through television, satellite, or radio, blogs, podcast, message boards, any audio or video mechanism, physical medium, tags or visible metadata associated with a medium, search engine, any service associated with a particular online entity such as for example Yahoo Inc! of Sunnyvale, Calif., and/or any method of delivery of content or information known or to be known.

[0041] In one embodiment, there is a predetermined time period **515** for receiving a team response and then the episode **535** ends, meaning, the teams have to submit team responses within a certain predetermined time period. The predetermined time period can span any length of time. Thus, the predetermined time period begins when the first content release is published and ends at a predetermined time for submitting team responses. For example, if the predetermined time period is two days, then each team has two days from the time the content is released to submit a team response. Thus, in one embodiment, after the predetermined time period ends, a team cannot submit a team response. The predetermined time period can be variable or static among episodes. In another embodiment, the predetermined time period can be triggered and/or concluded based upon the occurrence of an event, such as the first correct team response, or based on the number of teams responding or the number of team responses. In another embodiment, there is no predetermined time period for receiving a team response, thus the episode ends arbitrarily during game play without any a priori criteria.

[0042] In one embodiment, any player on a team can submit a team response at any time during the episode. In another embodiment, only a designated player of each team can submit a team response. This embodiment encourages player behavior such as cooperating with team members to decide on a team response to submit. In a further embodiment, only team responses reached via a majority decision may be submitted as a team response. In a further embodiment, each team has an unlimited number of team responses available to them. In another embodiment, a team is limited to a predetermined number of team responses during an episode. For example, if the episode lasted seven days, each team could only have five allotted team responses per every day. This embodiment encourages player behavior such as conserving the submissions of team responses.

[0043] Multiple methods and modes of submitting a team response are contemplated such as via online, cellular telephone, telephone, physical submission which is associated with a digital time stamp upon submission, embedding the submission in a webpage, a game Web site, email, SMS/MMS, instant messaging program, blogs, podcast, mail, message boards, any audio or video mechanism, any service associated with a particular online entity such as for example Yahoo Inc! of Sunnyvale, Calif., and/or any method of receiving submitted content known or to be known.

[0044] In a further embodiment, during the episode, a player submitting a team response does not know if the response is correct, i.e. matches the correct response associated with the content release the team is attempting to answer or solve. In other words, when a player submits a team response to a content release, the player and his/her

associated team receives no type of recognition or verification that the submitted response was correct or not. This embodiment adds a level of player behavior and complexity since the players cannot simply enter multiple team responses until they know they have gotten the correct team response, the players are left to strategize and work together to really respond correctly to the content release. Also, this embodiment prevents a player on a team with a correct team response to publish the response as a spoiler. It is however contemplated that the team will receive some form of notification or acknowledgement that the submitted team response has been received. Thus, in one embodiment, at some point during the episode, each team submits at least one team response to a content release. Of course it is contemplated that a team could fail to determine a team response and not submit a team response during the episode.

[0045] In one embodiment, the correct response to the released content is not published or made known to the players. In another embodiment, if the correct response is to be published or made known to the players of each team, the correct response is not published until the end of the time period and/or episode. Again, this allows for complex player behavior to determine the correct team response during the episode. Further, this prevents the correct response being distributed to others before the end of the episode. In one embodiment, the correct response would then be published **520** at the end of the episode.

[0046] Continuing to refer to FIG. **5**, in one embodiment, once the episode ends, each player is scored **525**. In one embodiment, each player's score is based in part on an episode team score and on an episode team roster. For example, in one embodiment, each player's score for each episode could be determined by dividing the total team's episode score by the number of players on his or her team. Thus, the number of players on a team roster affects each player's score which leads to player behavior of deciding between having many players on a team versus getting a larger apportioned player score. In another embodiment, each player's score can be determined by weighting each player differently when apportioning the player's team episode score. For example, by applying a predetermined handicapping,

[0047] In one embodiment, the episode team score is based on points based on whether the submitted team response was correct and a temporal factor.

[0048] In one embodiment, a temporal factor may comprise a specific length of time. In one embodiment, the temporal factor may comprise a specific length of time within a predetermined time period. In one embodiment, the temporal factor may comprise a specific length of time within each episode. In one embodiment, the temporal factor may comprise when, with respect to the other teams, each team submitted a team response, i.e. the order of submission. In further embodiments, the temporal factor may be constant or variable among episodes. In another embodiment, the temporal factor may be triggered and/or concluded based upon the occurrence of an event.

[0049] In one embodiment, the episode team score is based on whether a team's response was correct or incorrect. There are various methods of scoring team responses based on whether they are correct or not and then determining an episode team score. In one embodiment, an episode team score is determined by aggregating the team's deducted points and/or awarded points for the team's submitted responses during each episode. FIG. **3** illustrates some exemplary methods of scoring submitted incorrect team responses, which in one embodiment, discourage guessing behavior, and FIG. **4** illustrates some exemplary methods of scoring submitted correct team responses.

[0050] Referring to FIG. **3**, in one embodiment, the scoring method may be constant **305***a* so that regardless of time, the amount of points deducted for an incorrect clue submission is constant. In another embodiment, the scoring method may be linear **305***b*, so that as time increases the amount of points deducted increases linearly. In another embodiment, **305***c* as time increases, more points are deducted from a team episode score for an incorrect team response. Of course, multiple curves with differing shapes and slopes are contemplated. In a further embodiment, the graph line may take the shape of a step function **305***d* so that the amount of points deducted remains constant in value over a given interval of time but changes abruptly in value from one time interval to the next.

[0051] In one embodiment, using any of the scoring methods discussed herein, points may be deducted for only the first incorrect team response. In another embodiment, points may be deducted for only incorrect team responses after a predetermined number of team responses. In another embodiment, points may be deducted for each and every incorrect team response. In another embodiment, points may be deducted for each and every incorrect response wherein the amount of points depend on at what time the incorrect responses were each submitted. In another embodiment, the same or a constant amount of points are deducted from an episode team score for an incorrect team response, regardless of when the incorrect team response was submitted. Again, in this embodiment, points may be deducted for only the first incorrect team responses, for each incorrect team response, or for only the incorrect response submitted after a predetermined number of responses. In a further embodiment, no points may be deducted from a team's episode score for an incorrect team response.

[0052] Referring to FIG. **4**, in one embodiment, the scoring method may be constant **405***a* so that regardless of time or order, the amount of points awarded for a correct clue submission is constant. In another embodiment, the scoring method may be linear **405***b*, so that as time or order increases the amount of points awarded decreases linearly. In another embodiment, **405***c* as time or order increases, fewer points are awarded from a team episode score for a correct team response. Of course, multiple curves with differing shapes and slopes are contemplated. In a further embodiment, the graph line may take the shape of a step function **405***d* so that the amount of points awarded remains constant in value over a given interval of time but changes abruptly in value from one time interval to the next. Again, in these embodiments, points may be awarded for only the first correct team responses, for each correct team response, or for only the correct response submitted after a predetermined number of responses.

[0053] Further, in one embodiment, the content releases may increase in the level of difficultly and become more complex. Accordingly, in one embodiment, the points available may increase as the content releases become more complex and as the episodes within a game progress. In one aspect, this encourages new players to join the multi-team game at any episode, because he/she can still compete for points without suffering an unfair disadvantage.

[0054] In one embodiment, once a correct team response is received, further correct and/or incorrect team responses are not considered or counted in the team's episode score. In another embodiment, all responses, whether correct or incorrect are considered and counted in the team's episode score.

[0055] Thus, using any of the scoring methods discussed herein, an episode team score can be determined by aggregating the points for the correct and incorrect team responses for each episode. Of course, other methods, such as weighting points for correct and incorrect team responses to determine an episode team score are contemplated.

[0056] Further, as stated above, once the episode team score is determined, each player is scored. In one embodiment, each player's score is individual to that player through out the duration of the multi-team game. Meaning, regardless of what team a player belongs to in a particular episode, the player has their own individual score for each episode. Further, in one embodiment, the player's individual episode scores are aggregated over all of the episodes. Thus, in one embodiment, although players are part of a team, the players are still competing against each other for the high individual player score.

[0057] Turning back to FIG. **5**, in one embodiment, during a second time period, a subsequent team formation action **530** occurs. In one embodiment, the subsequent team formation action **530** occurs after the end of the episode **535**. In one embodiment, during this subsequent team formation **530**, players may affect changes to their respective team rosters. For example, a player may leave a team, join another team, form another team, or leave the multi-team game entirely; a new player may join a team, or form a new team, and any combinations thereof. However, in one embodiment, the player carries his or her individual score regardless of what team he or she is associated with. Allowing players to change their teams encourages player behavior such as strategizing about which team a player should join in order to achieve the highest individual points. In one embodiment, a player's individual score is calculated as the total team score divided by the number of players on the team.

[0058] In one embodiment, this second time period may begin sometime after the correct team response is revealed **520**, and/or after the each player is scored **525**, and/or after an episode ends **535**. Although, in alternate embodiments, this second time period may occur at anytime, even during the episode itself. This second predetermined time period may be of any length of time.

[0059] In one embodiment, as depicted in FIG. **5**, a new episode **540** begins at some time, which can be immediately after or some period of time after the second time period in which the subsequent team formation action period **530** occurs. Thus, in one embodiment, the timeline **500** depicted in FIG. **5** may be repeated for episodes numbered **1** to n within a game. Further, in one embodiment, for the final episode (even if the game only comprises a single episode), each player receives a final score. In one embodiment, this final score is determined by aggregating each player's individual scores over all of the episodes. Thus, the player with the highest score at the end of the final episode wins the multi-team game. This allows each player during the multi-team game to play for their highest individual score although they are associated with one or more teams.

[0060] In a further embodiment, all teams are disbanded at the beginning of the final episode, so that each player is playing against all other players individually. This enforces the embodiment and the player behavior that although each player was associated with one or more teams throughout the episodes, at the final episode, the players are each competing for the highest score to win the entire multi-team game.

[0061] In an alternate embodiment, the teams are not disbanded at the beginning of the final episode. Of course, it is anticipated that in the event that at the end of the final episode there is a tie among player scores, there will be a decision process for determining the winner such as a random drawing or other selection process.

[0062] In the present disclosure an embodiment for a system for creating an affinity between persons and an online entity is disclosed. In one embodiment, the system uses a server or other computing platform to perform the steps of playing a multi-team discussed game as discussed herein. In one embodiment, the system comprises a server operated by an online entity and associated with the online entity, wherein the server comprises code operable upon execution to perform the steps of the multi-game as discussed herein. In one embodiment, the online entity can be associated with any type of entity, whether a corporation, company, group, community, or individual interested in creating affinities between itself and its users. For example, an online entity can comprise an entity such as Yahoo! Inc of Sunnyvale, Calif.

[0063] In one embodiment, the server comprises code operable upon execution to perform the steps (as discussed herein) of receiving data representing a team formation action and for each episode except the final episode, performing the steps of publishing out an episode content release to each player of said multi-team game, receiving an episode team response during an episode, scoring, at the end of the episode, each player of each team, receiving, during a second time period, data representing a subsequent team formation action during which players may effect changes to team rosters so as to change a player's team association, and for the final episode, performing only the steps of sending content, receiving team responses, and scoring players, wherein the scoring of players that occurs after said final episode yields a final player score comprising all episode players' scores for the game wherein all of said above steps involve at least in part some interaction between said players playing the multi-team game and the online entity's server, so as to engender an affinity between said players and the online entity and/or services associated with the online entity. In one embodiment, content releases may comprise various Web sites programmed, hosted and or owned by the online entity. In another embodiment, such services may comprise email, instant messaging, games, RSS, and any other online service.

[0064] In one embodiment, the purpose is to encourage some interaction between players playing the multi-team game and an online entity's server, so as to engender an affinity between the players and the entity. For example, an entity having multiple services can encourage use of its services by having those services used within the multi-team game. In one example, content releases can be embedded within the pages of an entity's various Web sites. In another example, an entity having an instant messaging service and email service can send out the multi-team game's content releases to players via email or instant messenger. Thus, the players participating in the multi-team game are familiarized with the entity's services.

[0065] In one embodiment, the method of playing the multi-team game is practiced in part online and thus at least a portion is facilitated by a supporting system. Of course, in an alternate embodiment, it is contemplated that the methods and functionality discussed herein are performed in part or in whole manually and/or in the real world.

[0066] FIG. **1** depicts an exemplary overall system **100** of one embodiment for playing a multi-team game where at least a portion of the game is online. As can be seen in FIG. **1**, the system **100** comprises of at least one user at a local processor **130**, **135**, connected via the Internet **140** to a game Web site server **155** which communicates through a game application server **160** to a set of database, including a game database **105**, a player database **110**, a team database **115**, and a leader board database **120** running on database server **125**. In turn, the database server **125** is in communication with an operator application server **150** and an operator interface Web server **145**, connected via the Internet **140** to an operator local processor **165**. In one embodiment, the users are connected via a browser running on the local processor **130**, **135**. In one embodiment, the game Web site running on the game Web site server **155** functions as a central site accessed by the players. For example, in one embodiment, the game Web site facilitates player registration, team formation, leader board listing, content release publishing, and/or response submission entry.

[0067] In one embodiment, the game application server **160** facilitates communication between the game Web site server (and in turn the users) and the database server **125**. In one embodiment, the operator application server **150** facilitates communication between the game operator's local processor **165**, the Internet **140**, operator interface server **145** and the database server **125** and in turn the game Web site server **155**. In another embodiment, the game operator's local processor **165** can communicate with the operator interface server **145** and operator application server **150** via a local area network (not depicted). For example, a game operator, using the operator interface can publish an episode content release using the operator interface running on the operator interface server **145**, causing the operator application server **150** to update the databases **105**, **110**, **115**, **120** and, in turn, the game application server **160**, thereby updating the game Web site running on the game Web site server **155**. Then, users via their respective local processor **130**, **135** over the Internet **140** can access the released content.

[0068] In one embodiment, the databases **105**, **110**, **115**, **120** maintain data associated with the multi-team game. Of course other databases necessary for maintaining the data not depicted in FIG. **1** are contemplated. Further, different distributions of data among databases are contemplated. In one embodiment, the game database **105** maintains the number of games and for each game, the number of episodes. For each episode, the game database **105** maintains the number of content releases, the content release text, the number of team response submissions, an associated id for each response submission, the number of players, an associated player id for each player, the number of teams, and the associated team id for each team.

[0069] In one embodiment, the player database **110** maintains the number of players, and for each player, an associated player id. For each player id, the player database **110** maintains a player name, player information such as their email address, physical address, contact information, and game information for each game. In one embodiment, the game information comprises for each episode, a team id that lists what team a player belonged to for each particular episode and corresponding game, a player score for each episode, a player score that is cumulative over all the episodes for the particular game, and a player score that is cumulative over all the games.

[0070] In one embodiment, the team database **115** maintains the number of teams and a team id. For each team id, the team database **115** maintains a team name, team information stored as descriptive text, and game information. In one embodiment, the game information comprises for each episode, the number of players on a team roster for each episode wherein a zero indicates that the team is not active for that particular episode and/or game, a player id that lists the players for each particular team for each episode, a team score for each episode, and the number of response submissions from each team for each episode, the response submission and its associated response submission timestamp, and an indicator signifying whether the particular response submission was correct or not.

[0071] In one embodiment, the leader board database **120** maintains a team leader board that may or may not be public for every episode, a player leader board for every episode, a player leader board for each game and a player leader board cumulative over all games.

[0072] Those skilled in the art will recognize that the method and system of the present disclosure within the application may be implemented in many manners and as such is not to be limited by the foregoing exemplary embodiments and examples. In other words, functional elements being performed by a single or multiple components, in various combinations of hardware and software, and individual functions can be distributed among software applications at either the client or server level. In this regard, any number of the features of the different embodiments described herein may be combined into one single embodiment and alternate embodiments having fewer than or more than all of the features herein described are possible. Functionality may also be, in whole or in part, distributed among multiple components, in manners now known or to become known. Thus, myriad software/hardware/firmware combinations are possible in achieving the functions, features, interfaces and preferences described herein. Moreover, the scope of the present disclosure covers conventionally known and features of those variations and modifications through the system component described herein as would be understood by those skilled in the art.

We claim:

1. A method for creating an affinity between persons and an online entity comprising:

receiving data representing a team formation action indicating a desire for a player to join a team in a multi-team game, each team comprising at least one player and having a team roster, said multi-team game comprising one or more episodes ending in a final episode, each episode comprising one or more episode content releases and associated team responses; for each episode except the final episode, performing the steps of:

publishing an episode content release to each player of said multi-team game, said episode content release being associated with a correct episode response, said correct episode response being associated with an episode time period for receiving said correct episode

response, wherein if said correct episode response is to be published, said correct episode response is not published prior to the end of said episode time period,

receiving an episode team response during said episode time period;

scoring, at the end of said episode time period, each player of each team, said episode player score being based in part upon an episode team score and said episode team roster, said episode team score based in part upon whether said episode team response is correct or incorrect, and a temporal factor; and

receiving, during a second time period, data representing a subsequent team formation action during which players may effect changes to team rosters so as to change a player's team association, but wherein each player's score remains individual to that player throughout the duration of said game regardless of any change in team association during the game; and

for the final episode, or if the game comprises only a single episode, performing only the steps of, publishing content, receiving team responses, and scoring players, wherein the scoring of players that occurs after said final episode yields a final player score comprising all episode players scores for said game and wherein all of said above steps involve at least in part some interaction between said players playing said game and said online entity, so as to engender an affinity between said players and said online entity.

2. The method of claim **1** wherein said online entity is associated with at least one online service.

3. The method of claim **2** wherein said online service comprises email.

4. The method of claim **2** wherein said online service comprises instant messaging.

5. The method of claim **2** wherein said online service comprises really simple syndication.

6. The method of claim **1** wherein said affinity causes said players to select advertisements displayed by said online entity.

7. The method of claim **1** wherein said affinity causes said players to join services associated with said online entity.

8. The method of claim **1** wherein during said predetermined episode time period, a player submitting a submitted episode team response does not know if said submitted episode team response matches said correct episode response.

9. The method of claim **1** wherein said episode content release comprises a clue.

10. The method of claim **1** wherein said episode content release comprises a puzzle.

11. The method of claim **1** wherein said episode team response comprises an answer.

12. The method of claim **1** wherein said episode team response comprises a solution.

13. The method of claim **1** wherein said subsequent team formation action comprises a player joining another team.

14. The method of claim **1** wherein said subsequent team formation action comprises a player forming a new team.

15. The method of claim **1** wherein said subsequent team formation action comprises a player leaving the game.

16. The method of claim **1** wherein only one designated player on each team can submit an episode team response on behalf of each team.

17. The method of claim **1** wherein any player on each team can submit can an episode team response on behalf of each team.

18. The method of claim **1** further comprising disbanding all teams at the beginning of said final episode so that each player is competing individually for the highest individual player score aggregated among of all said episodes.

19. The method of claim **1** wherein a player with the highest aggregated individual player score at the end of said final episode is a winner of said multi-team game.

20. A system for creating an affinity between persons and an online entity comprising:

a server operated by said online entity and associated with said online entity, said server comprising code operable upon execution to:

receive data representing a team formation action indicating a desire for a player to join a team in a multi-team game, each team comprising at least one player and having a team roster, said multi-team game comprising one or more episodes ending in a final episode, each episode comprising one or more episode content releases and associated team responses;

for each episode except the final episode, performing the steps of:

publishing an episode content release to each player of said multi-team game, said episode content release being associated with a correct episode response, said correct episode response being associated with an episode time period for receiving said correct episode response, wherein if said correct episode response is to be published, said correct episode response is not published prior to the end of said episode time period,

receiving an episode team response during said episode time period;

scoring, at the end of said episode time period, each player of each team, said episode player score being based in part upon an episode team score and said episode team roster, said episode team score based in part upon whether said episode team response is correct or incorrect, and a temporal factor; and

receiving, during a second time period, data representing a subsequent team formation action during which players may effect changes to team rosters so as to change a player's team association, but wherein each player's score remains individual to that player throughout the duration of said game regardless of any change in team association during the game; and

for the final episode, or if the game comprises only a single episode, performing only the steps of, publishing content, receiving team responses, and scoring players, wherein the scoring of players that occurs after said final episode yields a final player score comprising all episode players scores for said game and wherein all of said above steps involve at least in part some interaction between said players playing said game and said online entity, so as to engender an affinity between said players and said online entity.

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