



**Sugar rush:** Ramona Koh (centre, with mum Rachel Kerk, left, and sister Ranieri) and her extended family, who are huge Candy Crush Saga fans, have a 17-people Whatsapp group that discusses the game almost every single day. ST PHOTO: DESMOND FOO

## Sweet lead for Candy Crush Saga

**Eileen Tay**

Housewife Jenny Tan waits for her two children, 22 and 18, to get home before "confiscating" their smartphones. Instead of monitoring their SMSes and online activity, however, the mum starts playing Candy Crush Saga.

Says Madam Tan, 50, who plays the game on her kids' phones twice or thrice a week because she is not savvy on the computer: "I feel very happy when I get to the next level."

The latest game craze to hit Facebook and smartphone platforms, Candy Crush Saga is topping the leaderboard for next week's Social Star Awards - for now.

The game by King.com is one of four popular games nominated for the Game Award at the social media gongs. The inaugural Social Star Awards ceremony will take place at MasterCard Theatres, Marina Bay Sands on May 23.

As of yesterday, Candy Crush Saga is leading the games category nominees with 119,283 YouTube views and 25,171,883 Facebook fans.

The other three popular games are Angry Birds with 24,679,096 Facebook fans and 1,144,705,769 YouTube views, League Of Legends with 6,353,050 Facebook fans and 492,511,354 YouTube views, and Texas Hold'em Poker (Zynga) with 1,465,233 YouTube views and 70,610,488 Facebook fans.

Released last year, the Candy Crush Saga is now a top-grossing free app in both the iTunes Store and Google Play.

Game play is simple: Objectives vary across levels, but basically involves moving sweets around to line them up by colour.

Sounds like it is as easy as, well, taking candy from a baby? The diversion is addictive, as scores of players, of all ages, have discovered.

Ms Ramona Koh, 24, a fresh graduate from Nanyang Technological University, says that her extended family has a Whatsapp group of 17 people, aged from 19 to 55, who constantly discuss the game.

Although everyone is glued to their phones, Ms Koh says the game bonds her family: "The game becomes a topic for conversation, even for aunts and nieces who are not so close. At family gatherings, we swop phones when we get bored of a certain stage that we are stuck on."

Once the game du jour, Angry Birds is currently behind Candy Crush - but be sure that the annoyed avian army is going to fight back.

Mr Lin Yukai, 23, a third-year student at Singapore Management University, says of the game which involves launching birds to bring down precariously perched pigs: "It is simple but not brainless. You need to know what angle to shoot and which types of birds to use."

Mr Lin used to watch videos on YouTube to figure out how the harder levels are cleared. He now plays the game about half an hour each day. He also intends to visit the Angry Birds Theme Park in Finland when he goes on a student exchange programme there in August.

The Angry Birds franchise, designed by Finnish game developer Rovio Entertainment and first released in 2009, now has seven different games - including Angry Birds Star Wars.

Though some may dismiss Candy Crush Saga and Angry Birds as fads for casual gamers, most fans of League Of Legends are serious gamers who have been playing it for years.

Associate sales manager Edmund Liew, 24, has been playing the game for about four years, since its release in 2009. He used to compete in local amateur tournaments once a month but has since stopped because of the decline in such tournaments due to lack of sponsorship.

He spends most of his weekends gaming, spending about \$20 a day at LAN shops.

He says: "There have been many times when I have accidentally missed meals when I game with friends. Every weekend, we will eat lunch late at 3pm and dinner at about 11pm."

League Of Legends is a multi-player online battle arena video game where teams of three or five champions are formed to attack the opposing team's base. The free-to-play game was developed by Riot Games.

Game programmer Kenn Chee, 25, holds League Of Legends game marathons with his friends once or twice a month. They order food from McDonald's and play for 12 to 16 hours straight, taking bites of burgers in between.

Though his parents and girlfriend nag him for his constant playing, he says: "What we gain is personal space and a virtual world we create ourselves. The game satisfies our ego."

It is not only time but money spent on the game as well. Urban planner Amanda Tan, 25, has spent up to \$500 to buy character customisation "skins" since she started playing League Of Legends four years ago.

Fans agree that these all-time popular games top the chart because they can be really addictive.

Ms Jolene Lim, 21, part-time designer, says she was completely addicted to Zynga Poker, which is online Texas Hold'em Poker, where you gamble with virtual chips instead of real cash.

She says: "I dreamt about the game and sometimes I could not sleep till 3am because I was thinking about how to win my money back the next day. I would eat lunch at my table while playing and ignore my friends' text messages."

She adds: "The reason why it's so addictive is because you take risks and when you earn from it, that makes it thrilling."

The Straits Times is the official Singapore media partner of the event, Hot FM 91.3 is the official Singapore radio station and Kiss92 FM, the supporting Singapore radio station.

The 24-hour Social Star Awards show will be streamed live on YouTube. During the event, the awards, called Social Stars, will be given out in 288 categories spanning different countries worldwide and to the most popular personalities and brands in fields such as music, movies, television, sports and games.