Clay Sugg, Jackson Semcken, Justin Koppstein

Professor Colby

WRIT 1133

8 May 2013

What Attracts Players to World of Warcraft?

Introduction:

Understanding why people play videogames has traditionally been a very one-sided

research topic. Many scholars have looked at the player's motivation for playing, such as

Nick Yee who divided the motivation to play MMORPG's into three groups: Achievement,

Social, and Immersion components (Yee "Motivations"). Studies such as these show what

the player's motivation is to play the game, but do not go in to why or how the game

satisfies those components. A recent study placed *World of Warcraft* in the number one

spot of the top 10 played PC games, with an average of 534 minutes (8.9 hours) played per

week (Au). Our aim is to find what exactly about *World of Warcraft (WoW)* draws the

players in so much, how the game is fulfilling the motivations that have been presented by

other researchers.

Studies in the past have looked at certain aspects of the game in order to determine

which are the most attractive to gamers. A previous study by Ducheneaut et al. analyzed

aspects such as class and average weekly playtime, reporting vast differences such as

Rogues spending on average 3 hours per week more than the Warlock class (Ducheneaut et

al. 298). While information like this does provide insight in to the attraction of the game,

this study was conducted in 2006 and the game has evolved since then. Also, the authors

had a difficult time drawing conclusions because motivation of play was unknown; they

had no qualitative evidence to support their findings: "it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions from these differences due to the lack of data about each player's motivations" (Ducheneaut et al. 298). With our research, we will be looking into the structure of the game quantitatively while supporting our findings with qualitative research. We will analyze factors such as the one described above with the most recent numbers and proceed to corroborate those numbers with player testimony.

Methods:

Participants

Our study consisted first of forum posts pertaining to our topic. The forum posters were not contacted that their posts were being used. Our group looked at a total of 30 forum posts and 18 were used. Our study also made use of a survey consisting of 582 people (509 Male and 73 Female) with a mean age of 34.8 (18-58 years; SD=6.357). Those surveyed were both full/part time students (n=246) and non-students (n=294).

Design, Materials, Procedure

World of Warcraft forums *Battlenet* and *WoWhead* were viewed in order to find posts that contained relevant information on our topic. After collecting posts that displayed a trend in gameplay as well as attractive parts of the game (a total of 18 were used, 30 analyzed), the information was coded by our group. We used an inductive coding strategy, adding a section after about 3 to 5 posts were found on the topic, depending on the relevance of the post. The survey questions were compiled by 45 students in a first-year writing and research course at the University of Denver to address a descriptive research question about the attitudes and practices of *World of Warcraft* players. The anonymous survey was administered through the Qualtrics application, and a link was posted on select

Internet forums and Twitter. The survey was kept active for 1 week and had 582 usable

responses (excluded responses included those who reported under 18 years of age and

respondents who did not complete the majority of the questionnaire).

Analysis

The forum posts were collected and grouped according to what pieces of the game

they were focused on. The two main forums used were Wowhead and Battlenet. We used a

coding scheme in which we determined categories by number and quality of posts on the

subject.

Results

From the data collected it is clear that the attraction to *WoW* can be divided up in to

three distinct categories: Social interaction, role playing, and the class selection ability.

These three aspects of *WoW* are what really attract players to the game and keep them

playing for hours on end.

Social Interaction

One of the main aspects of *WoW* that keeps the players coming back is the social

interaction developed in the game. Whether it is joining a guild, dungeon raiding, or simply

questing with a friend, players love the ability to spend time with their online friends and

experience gameplay together. Friend making and interaction with others is a very

important part of the game to the players. The following posts pay tribute the strong social

aspects in the game:

"Once I did finally start playing, I enjoyed all of the aspects of RPGs as well as the new social aspect and the ability to share some of the play experience with other players. Life was good." (Cheesenrice, 90 Human Priest)

"For me it's large-scale raiding. simplle as that. The bigger the raid size the better. It's not about gear or server firsts, i just love the raid atmosphere with a lot of people involved." (Robokapp, 85 Human Paladin)

"It was easier to make friends before the dungeon finder was added since groups had to be put together from players on your server. You had time to chit-chat while people traveled to the summoning stone and usually a group with good chemistry would stay together for another dungeon or 2." (Natalius, 70 Night Elf Warrior)

"It's particularly satisfying when you get one of those parties that just meshes well, everyone is on the same page, everyone's instincts line up and help you to accomplish amazing feats such as clearing all of Mauradon with a group that queued for and was level specific to the first instance." (Cheesenrice, 90 Human Priest)

WoW fills this need of social interaction so well mainly with the way guilds are set up, the value each player feels in the group (also dealing with class selection) and the ability to show off to friends. These two posts describe the importance guilds play in social interaction:

"I loved my guildmates and the trial/error of raiding with my guild. I loved talking on vent and the "team sport" feel of trying to accomplish the raids by working together. The progress in wow always felt more legitimate because it was online and somehow other people seeing it validated it more then offline games." (Kloey, 60 Draenei Shaman)

"I, personally, can't imagine RP without a guild... I know some get by without it and are happy, but wouldn't it be better to be in a guild? To have guidies? It's a family setting, and I've never been in a guild where there weren't at least five people that I loved..." (Sapphyre, 50 Human Hunter)

Our survey data also supports the idea that a player's main reason for starting to play *WoW* is the ability to interact socially. Figure 1 shows that 54% of those surveyed said that socializing was the biggest motivator to play the game.
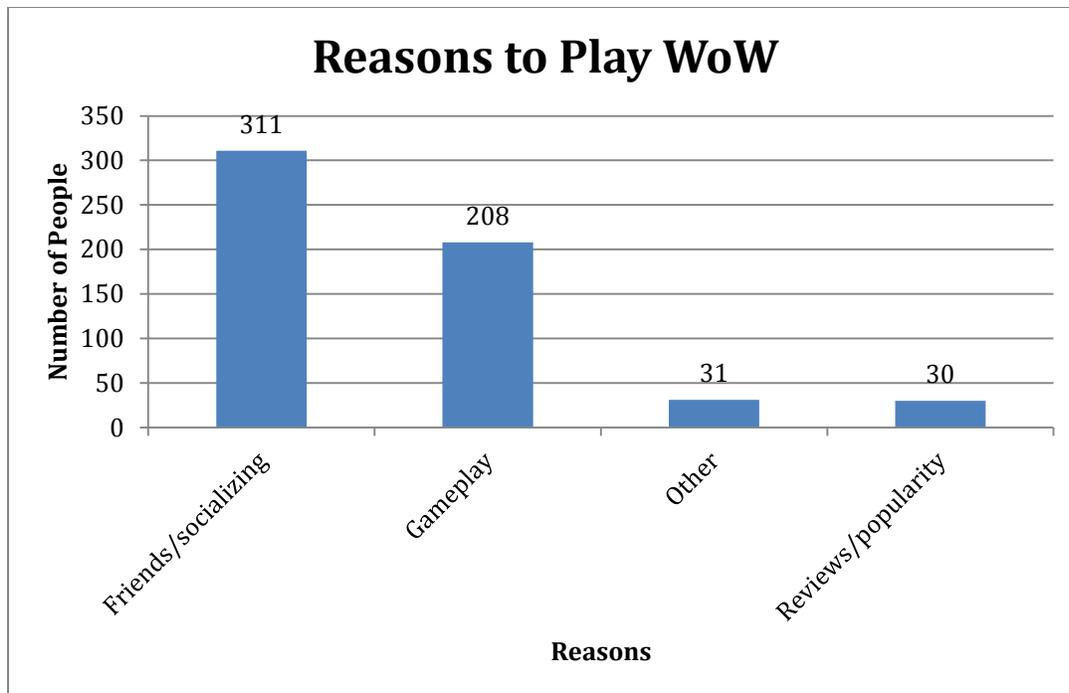
Reasons to Play WoW

Figure 1

It should also be noted that gameplay was another large factor to those surveyed, accounting for 35.8% of the responses (see Figure 1). This supports our idea that class structure is also one of the largest attractions as classes are one of the primary factors in gameplay. This idea is discussed in detail in the Class Structure section.

Role Playing

Players continuously support the powerful role-playing (RP) possibilities in the game. *WoW* not only has an extensive avatar design system but also contains a separate RP server for those who truly want to be immersed in the game in nearly every way. The following posts describe the importance of RP to the players of *WoW*:

"RP itself has definitely revived a good chunk of the game for me personally."

(Graphite, 90 Troll Hunter)

"I usually get on [RP] a few times a day, for around ten to fifteen minutes to see if anything's going on. If anything catches my eye, I stay on for the rest of the day."

(Alleiri, 90 Human Warrior)

"I find that role playing servers help bring back some of the magic of the game. For me what keeps the game going and playable is that i can serve the guild code as well as help out fellow players. Its all about the guild and parties." (Mudogamba, 90 Night Elf Death Knight)

For those players who are more casual, the ability to create such unique avatars is very attracting to them. Whether it is building a character that the player can live through and experience a different life through, or fully immersing oneself in the RP server, *WoW* creates an environment that fosters escapism into a new world where one can be whoever or whatever they wish. These two posts describe the immersion players feel within the game:

"Like they say, it's not a game, it's a world. Azeroth is a place to be and you simply like being there." (Peltz, 90 Human Hunter)

"I'm good with how immersive it is, but the most enjoyment I have is being immersed in my character. THAT makes a massive difference for me and helps immerse me more in the game." (Huggywuggles, 90 Gnome Warrior)

Class Structure

The third aspect that draws players to the game so well is the spectacular class system developed by Blizzard for *WoW*. The ability for players to specialize their avatars really gives the "fine tuned" feel to the player. The following players posts describe the incredible class structure within *WoW*:

"The classes are too balanced. Not perfectly balanced, but more balanced than what most other games have ever achieved." (Hiddenwalrus, 60 Goblin Rogue)[1]

"For a game with 30 different talent trees, that is balanced around PvE [classes], yes PvP Is balanced very well." (Kellogs, 85 Blood Elf Rogue)

"I just want to say that I have never seen WoW as fair and as balanced as I am seeing it now and I love it." (Thorinx, 80 Dwarf Shaman)

"On the topic of classes, I think you went too far in improving the depth of every class and spec. The change from spamming a single button in a raid to weaving a network of abilities has me enthralled." (Hiddenwalrus, 60 Goblin Rogue)[1]

These quotes are just a testament as to how well Blizzard was able to set up the class structure in the game. Players also enjoy the fact that all the classes are able to work together in order to complete a certain task. Everyone feels useful because everyone brings something vital to the battle; this idea is one of the reasons the game is so attractive. The players below describe the usefulness felt through classes:

"One of the biggest factors helping that replay value is the different roles that you can fill while in a dungeon/raid setting, the different toolkits that each of the specs have, and the different ways that you can get your toolkit to help your party achieve the goals of the particular instance that you are running in conjunction with those of the other players." (Cheesenrice, 90 Human Priest)

"Find a class you enjoy playing-- be that as a DPS, Healer, or Tank--and learn how to do whatever that class does with excellence and you will find yourself invited to raids." (Selunar, 85 Night Elf Preist)

---

[1] The two quotes above coming from "Hiddenwalrus" that seem contradictory are most likely sarcastic. He was "complaining" that WoW was "too good" and "keeping him from playing his other games".

Many of the attractions described by these players can also be seen in the survey data. Looking back at Figure 1, 35.8% of those surveyed believed that gameplay was their primary motivation.

Discussion

World of Warcraft has many factors that attribute to its playability by gamers. The forums are nearly an endless supply of gamers praising and even complaining about certain aspects of the game. Each player enjoys different aspects of the game and the attraction is never the same for one single player; however, these results show that what keeps bringing players back to the game day after day can be divided up into three main groups: the social aspect, the role playing ability, and the class structure of the game.

Many players see *WoW* as a form of escapism, allowing them to immerse themselves in another world and forget their troubles. Many studies have been done on the topic of escapism, such as Nick Yee's "On Therapy and Dependency". Yee found through his qualitative research that escapism caused by immersion is very important to many players. It can be argued that the immersion factor is largely assisted by the social aspects (see Figure 1) as well as the class structure in the game, which is the reason why players see those, rather than immersion, as the most important. The sociability allows the player to meet friends and spend time with them, as not to be solitary. It is a way for them to share their accomplishments and gain a feeling of importance and acceptance. The class structure in the game ensures that everyone plays a unique and important role during gameplay, giving each player a feeling of importance. This feeling of importance is vital in the virtual social setting as it is in real life; it is the feeling of being a part of a group. All these aspects combine to truly immerse the player and allow for this "escapism".

The limitations involved in our study stemmed mainly from the forum posts themselves. There are millions of gamers out there, all with their own individual opinions. Along with the posts stated in this paper there were some that talked about *WoW* becoming boring or no fun; some of the threads contained arguments. These arguments however were not sufficient to be coded into our data, as the number of arguments was few and they were consistently attacked by numerous, positive posts. Further research could be done on what aspects of *WoW* turn players off to the game, or make them frustrated. This would illuminate the other side of the argument and give those curious a better understanding of the drive to play *WoW.*

The attraction that gamers feel towards *World of Warcraft* can be broken up into three main aspects: Social Interaction, Role Play, and the Class Structure of the game. Players of all genders, types, and roles pay testament to these ideas and discuss them constantly. These three pieces of *WoW* successfully fill the motivations players have for gaming. Through this fulfillment they draw players in and keep them playing. *WoW* is a very complicated game with many compelling gameplay aspects; however, ones need for social interaction and acceptance in a group will lie at the heart of game attraction.

Works Cited

Alleiri. "RP." Web log post. *Us.battle.net*. Blizzard Entertainment, 4 Jan. 2012. Web. 7 May

2013. <http://us.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/3870807411>.

Au, Wagner J. "Second Life Stays on Nielsen's Latest Top 10 Played PC Games & Increases

Total Share, Engagement." *'New World Notes'* Nielsen Ratings, n.d. Web. 20 May

2013. <http://nwn.blogs.com/nwn/2012/07/second-life-top-pc-game-april-2012.html>

Cheesenrice. "The Best and Worst Part of WoW Is You!" Web log post. *Us.battle.net*. Blizzard

Entertainment, 11 Mar. 2012. Web. 6 May 2013.

<http://us.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/4175548820>.

Graphite. "What Is so Addicting about This Game?" Web log post. *Us.battle.net*. Blizzard

Entertainment, 12 Apr. 2013. Web. 6 May 2013.

<http://us.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/8568399022>.

Hiddenwalrus. "WoW Is Too Fun." Web log post. *Us.battle.net*. Blizzard Entertainment, 28

Apr. 2011. Web. 6 May 2013.

<http://us.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/2416210446>.

Huggywuggles. "Does WoW Feel Immersive?" Web log post. *Us.battle.net*. Blizzard

Entertainment, 22 Sept. 2011. Web. 7 May 2013.

<http://us.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/3229084458>.

Kloey. "What Is so Addicting about This Game?" Web log post. *Us.battle.net*. Blizzard

Entertainment, 12 Apr. 2013. Web. 6 May 2013.

<http://us.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/8568399022>.

Mudogamba. "What Makes WoW Fun." Web log post. *Us.battle.net*. Blizzard Entertainment,

8 May 2011. Web. 7 May 2013.

<http://us.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/2489950953>.

Natalius. "Question about the Social Aspects of WoW." Web log post. *Us.battle.net*. Blizzard

Entertainment, 26 June 2011. Web. 7 May 2013.

<http://us.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/2721373405?page=1>.

Peltz. "What Is so Addicting about This Game?" Web log post. *Us.battle.net*. Blizzard

Entertainment, 12 Apr. 2013. Web. 6 May 2013.

<http://us.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/8568399022>.

Robokapp. "Question about the Social Aspects of WoW." Web log post. *Us.battle.net*.

Blizzard Entertainment, 26 June 2011. Web. 7 May 2013.

<http://us.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/2721373405?page=1>.

Sapphyre. "Why You Should Join an RP Guild." Web log post. *Us.battle.net*. Blizzard

Entertainment, 3 May 2011. Web. 7 May 2013.

<http://us.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/2456910540>.

Thorinx. "Balanced Game." Web log post. *Us.battle.net*. Blizzard Entertainment, 11 Apr.

2013. Web. 7 May 2013.

<http://us.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/8569388855>.

Ducheneaut, Nicolas, Nick Yee, Eric Nickell, and Robert J. Moore. "Building an MMO With

Mass Appeal : A Look at Gameplay in World of Warcraft." *Games and Culture* (2006):

280-317. *Sage Publications*. Web. 1 May 2013.

<http://www.bendevane.com/VTA2013/wp-

content/uploads/2013/01/281.full_.pdf>.

Yee, Nick. "Motivations of Play in MMORPGs." *The Daedalus Gateway* (2004): 1-46. *The*

Daedalus Gateway. Web. 30 Apr. 2013.

<http://www.nickyee.com/daedalus/gateway_motivations.html>.

Yee, Nick. "On Therapy and Dependency." *The Daedalus Project* 7.1 (2008): 1-10. *The*

Daedalus Gateway. Web. 24 Apr. 2013.

<http://www.nickyee.com/daedalus/archives/001610.php>.