

Patterns of Chat Topics by Realm Type and Faction in World of Warcraft

An Observational Study on the Chat of WoW



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Observations were done on the World of Warcraft in-game chat boxes to determine if patterns of chat differed by realm type. Furthermore, we divided into factions to view the difference between Alliance and Horde chat patterns. Using three characters per faction, each on a different realm type, we ran thirty-minute observation sessions during which we monitored the chat generated using the /chatlog function. We then coded the topics into one of six groups based on content. Our results showed that patterns in chat do indeed vary by realm type, but there are no significant differences between Alliance and Horde chat content. These findings may be used to explore the motivations of players for choosing a realm type; because people are drawn to the social aspects of World of Warcraft, players may choose a realm that generates chat they can actively participate in.

People are drawn to massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs), such as the celebrated World of Warcraft (WoW), for numerous reasons. Some enjoy the thrill of the quest, others prefer epic player versus player (PvP) battles, some focus on the role-playing (RP), and others still choose to play for the social aspects (Yee, 2006). Whatever manner of play one is interested in, there is always a place for them in the MMORPG world, especially in Azeroth, the world of WoW. From battle pets to flying mounts, WoW offers thousands of features that continue to bring in new players every day; there are reasons why over 7.8 million people are currently regular subscribers

(Stickney, 2014). Boasting four expansions since its release in 2004, with a fifth on the way, WoW truly has something for everyone.

Drachen and Smith (2008) have found that “Players of multiplayer games communicate”, and this statement is particularly true of players of MMORPGs, who are often drawn to the game for the social aspects of it (Yee, 2006), such as the guild system seen in WoW. Players have many ways to communicate with each other, including private messages and the in-game chat box, which allows all players in that server area to see all written comments made. The chat box is used for many reasons; some people use it to find a group for a raid or a dungeon, others use it to buy, sell, and trade rare items found in the game, and others still choose to use the chat box to socialize with other players. With so many active players, WoW’s chat box is always buzzing with some topic or another.

Related Works

Previous research has focused on the importance of communication to those who play MMORPGs and how their communication affects their gameplay. Most of this work has concluded that social aspects of the game have great effects on how people play the game. Suzenjevic et al., 2008, examined communication in relation to player behavior in MMORPGs. They concluded that, after raiding, players spend most of their playtime communicating (Suzenjevic et al., 2008). They also note that communication “is an interleaved activity”(p. 4), meaning that time spent communicating is also time spent doing another type of activity, like raiding or running a dungeon. In work done with both pen and paper RPGs and computer RPGs, Drachen and Smith compared how communication functioned in each type of game. They found “distinct differences in

communication patterns between the two formats” (p. 1). They found greater variance in the amount of words used per minute in computer RPGs than in pen and paper RPGs.

Some previous work has been done investigating the motivations of some players to play various realm types in WoW (Pollock, et al., 2013). This work also focused on PvP, PvE, and RP realms only and found that people play PvP realms for the challenge and immersion, PvE realms for the laid back nature, and RP realms for the RP and deeper immersion elements they offer. This research served as a guide when examining differences between realms that may lead to different chat patterns.

Server Types and Differences

WoW features 200 individual servers, called “realms”, in the US region alone. These realms are broken down into four categories: Player versus Player (PvP), Player versus Environment (PvE or Normal), Role-Playing (RP), and Role-Playing Player versus Player (RPPvP). For the purposes of this study, we examined three of these realm types, PvP, PvE, and RP realms. Each of these realm types has specific aspects that attract people to them. PvP realms, as the name suggests, allows players to engage in direct combat with each other, provided they are from opposing factions. This means that at any point in the game (with the exception of certain cities), a member of the Alliance may battle and kill a member of the Horde, or vice versa. PvP realms tend to attract more experienced players, who are ready for the challenge of other players. Previous studies on motivations in realm choice have shown that players feel that PvP realms “feel more like Warcraft” and are “the way the game was meant to be played” (Pollock, et al., 2013). The same study found that “aspects of competition and realism are what drive the PvP players” (Pollock et al., 2013).

PvE, or Normal, realms are similar to PvP realms in that players may interact with other players of the opposite faction, but unlike PvP realms in that players cannot fight and kill each other randomly, an act often referred to as “ganking”. Players who choose PvE realms are usually newer players looking to stay away from those looking to gank them while they are questing or fighting enemies (Pollock, et al., 2013). PvE realms also attract newer players because their worry free nature means that players can better immerse themselves into the quests and story of the game. Normal realms are often recommended for new players, so that they can get the feel of the game before engaging in PvP combat.

Role-playing realms are realms where players are expected invoke the spirit of the game by immersing themselves in it completely. On these realms, people are expected to stay in character and act as real members of the Warcraft world. Talk of real world topics in chat is not welcome in RP realms. RP realms have a reputation for being a bit odd; some people find themselves repelled by the idea of immersing themselves in the game to the degree that RP players do. But those who do play RP realms maintain that their level of immersion heightens the game experience and makes the game more enjoyable.

For the purposes of this study, we examined three major realm types and their chat boxes to find if there were any differences in chat topic patterns across realm types. We did this using in-game observation sessions with several characters on a variety of realms. We also divided into factions to see if chat patterns differed between the Alliance and Horde factions. Ultimately, we sought to answer the question: do in-game chat topics differ in pattern by realm type and faction? Given the findings of previous research, we expected to find differences between realm types, as each realm is so different by nature.

Methods

The data was collected during gameplay of World of Warcraft using the /chatlog function in game that stored the conversation for later coding. The coding was decided before actively collecting data this was because we both had previous experience with the game. The coding went from 1-6 and was defined as: 1 for ganking (the act of randomly killing people of the opposite faction in an area), 2 was defined as group seeking chat (raid, dungeon, battleground, arena, or questing), 3 was defined as trolling (the act of saying something unnecessary in hope of provoking a response), 4 was real world topics, 5 was the buying, selling, or trading of goods, and 6 was role-play, including combat. The data was collected from the three types of realm PvP, PvE, and RP. Each team member was then assigned a faction (Horde or Alliance) and then chose a realm. The realms were randomly selected: RP Moonguard (both Alliance and Horde), PvP Bloodscalp (Alliance) and Gorgonash (Horde), PvE Kilrogg (Alliance) and Aggramar (Horde). The data was then collected during a typical play session in which researchers were questing in various zones as well as just standing in major cities like Orgrimmar and Stormwind. From here we collected data from every chat channel for analysis. The data was collected on weekdays from 12-2 pm and 3-5 pm alternating by day and lasted 30 minutes per character per realm. After data was collected and aggregated (about 1500 lines), by realm and faction, it was input into Excel for coding and reporting.

Results

Our results showed that patterns of chat do indeed vary by realm type, but do not vary significantly by realm. What follows are data from six chat conditions: Horde PvE, PvP, and RP and Alliance PvE, PvP, and RP realms.

Comparison of Horde Realms



Figure 1: RP realm Moon Guard

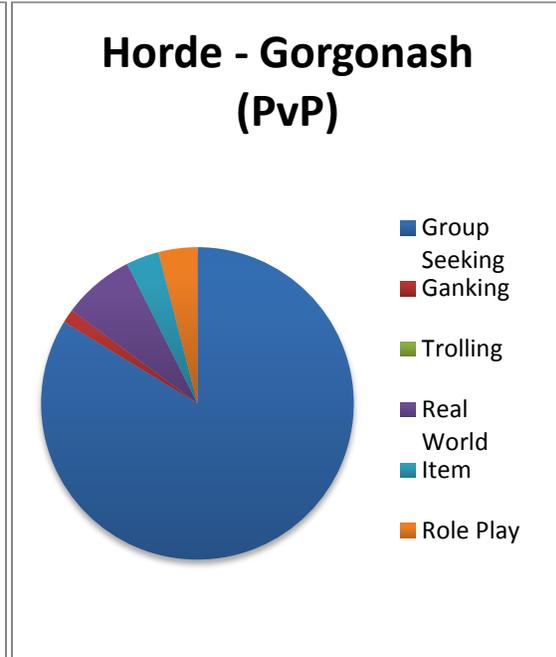


Figure 2: PvP realm Gorgonash



Figure 3: Normal realm Aggramar

Coded data from Horde chat logs presented in figures 1-3 that in the PvE realm (Aggramar), chat was dominated by group seeking chat and real world chat, although every type of chat, with the exception of trolling, was observed. Ganking chat was present when a city was under attack, otherwise players have to have PvP enabled to

warrant ganking chat chat, which was found on general chat channels as well as local defense channels. The trading of goods was the most prevalent of all chat on this realm because there appeared to be high need for materials for crafting every time it was played on this usually looks like in all cases.

When looking at Figure 1 of the RP realm (Moon Guard) it was majority role-playing chat with notable absence of trolling. This role-playing chat was varied, but usually consisted of conversations of history or ability, such as the following exchange:

”Baszhara said, “Your kind is not to be trusted for you dabble with fel magics (demon magics)”

“Gragas said, “Do not fear what you do not understand. I may dabble with demons but my power comes from the titans themselves.”

We witnessed no trolling, which could be because it is generally discouraged on RP servers, which prefer players to stay in character. The proportion of ganking chat on the RP realm logged is little to non-existent; this is because for ganking to occur on this type of realm, PvP has to be enabled or cities have to be under attack. Interesting to note, there was some real world (RW) chat on this realm, which is typically frowned upon on RP realms and shared an equal proportion with the Horde PvP realm

On the Horde PvP realm, Gorgonash, all forms of chat were present, except trolling chat, surprisingly. PvP usually warrants this sort of trolling chat, especially by the losing team in a Battlegrounds match (a PvP match that puts Horde and Alliance against each other in war games, such as Capture the Flag). The majority of chat was dedicated to group seeking, with a primary focus on looking for partners for rated Battlegrounds and arenas which are PvP activities, and some higher levels looking for raids. For

example, Gorlokimus said, “ LFM [looking for more] for rated battlegrounds,” or Iatethirdpig said, “looking for partner for 2v2 (two players versus two players) please have 1900 arena rating (points earned for winning battlegrounds).” We also noted some role-playing chat on the PvP realm in which players talked about the characters gear.

Comparison of Alliance Realms

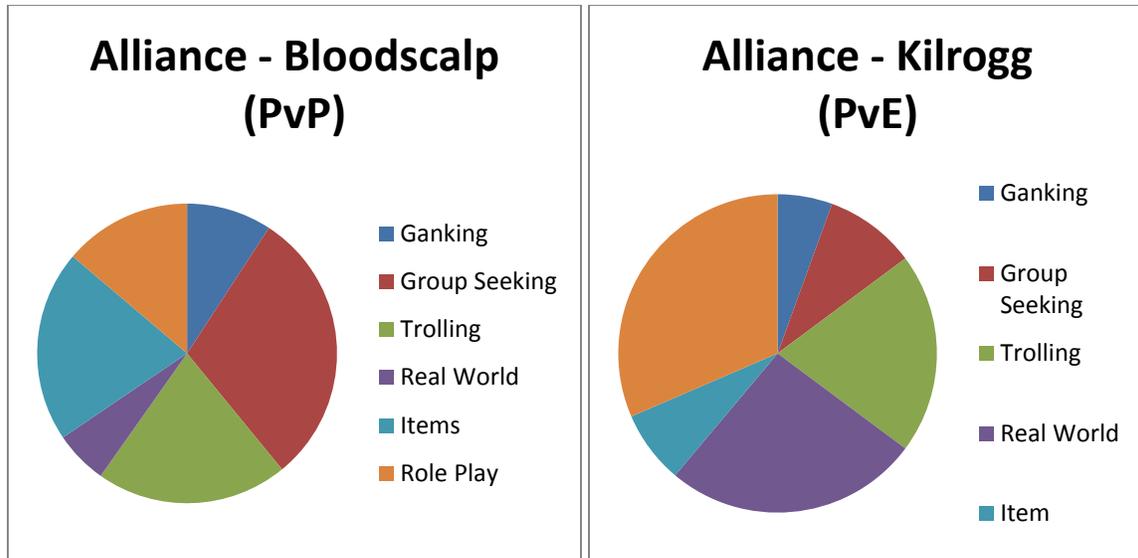


Figure 4 PvP realm Bloodscalp

Figure 5 PvE realm Kilrogg

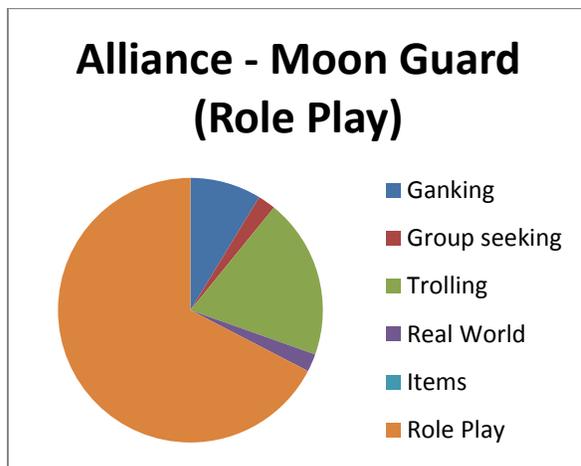


Figure 6 Role Play realm Moon Guard

On the PvE realm of Kilrogg on the Alliance side, every form of chat was observed. Role-playing chat occurred most frequently on this realm due to the high amounts of people wanting to duel in areas of questing as well as people talking about their character's items. For example, Kuldare said "Good duel. Where did you get your weapon" and in response Soggywaffles said, "I got it from grinding arena points." The discussion of real world topics was also heavily prevalent in chat, especially in the major cities. This had mainly to do with the recent South Korea ferry incident, despite it being a few weeks after it happened when data was collected. This chat consisted of people commenting on how people heard that the death kept on rising as well as how the ferry captain jumped ship leaving all of those people to die. Trolling was about as equal as RW chat. When in Stormwind, we were subjected to what is known as "anal spam" which is the word anal followed by some sort of in-game spell (e.g. anal Gore). The least common form of chat on this realm was ganking chat primarily because the cities were not being attacked and thus, there was no discussion on the topic.

On the RP realm of Moon Guard, role-playing chat was the most common, which was to be expected; however, the subject of the chat was bizarre and was known as erotic role play (ERP), located mainly in the quest hub Goldshire. Trolling was the next most common type of chat, and it had to do with first of May, which was related to the ERP mentioned previously. There was little RW chat, which primarily discussed which country is better: America or Canada. This exchange went like:

Kilgore said, "Canada is the best"

Fladpa says, "No America is better because we have real sports not just curling and hockey."

Surprisingly, there was no trade or transaction chat found on this realm and was especially empty every time we were in a major city.

On the PvP realm of Bloodscalp, group-seeking chat was the most common, especially for arenas and battleground, which is not surprising because these are PvP activities. Trolling was the next most common; again we were subjected to “anal spam”. Also, the transaction chat was common as well on this realm, especially in the major cities, looking for crafting materials for the creation of PvP armor and weapons. This looked like, Senatus said, in trade chat, “looking for 2 stacks of 20 kyparite (in game metal)”

PvE Realms Horde and Alliance

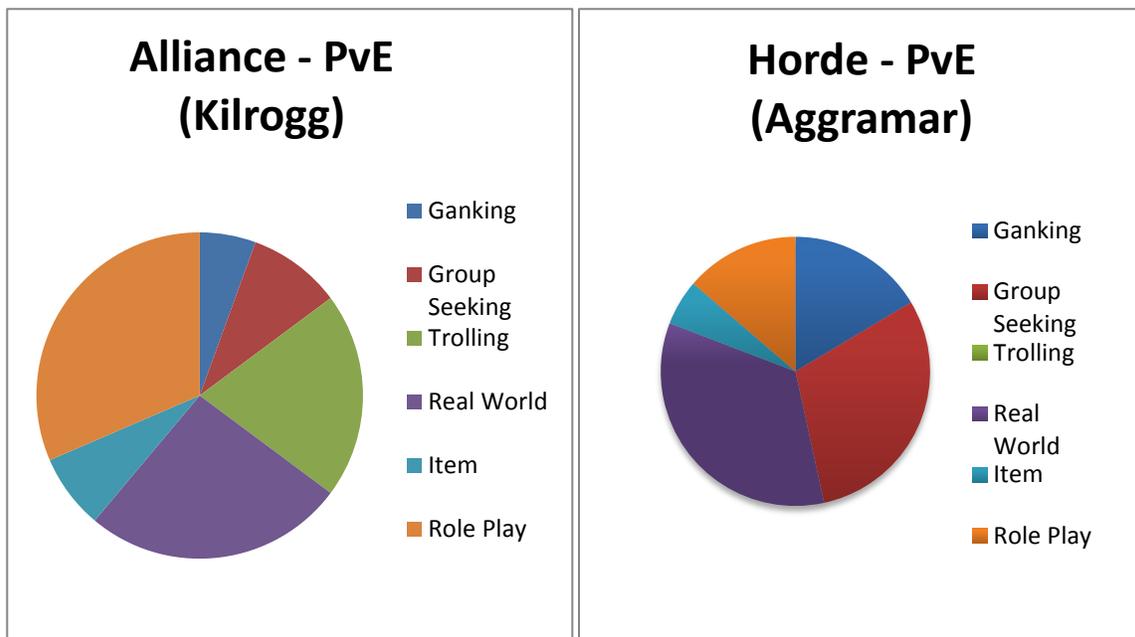


Figure 7 PvE realm Alliance Kilrogg

Figure 8 PvE realm Horde Aggramar

When comparing the PvE or Normal realms of both Horde and Alliance, it is noticeable that the Alliance included all the chat topics while there was lack of RP chat on the Horde side. Role-play chat was actually the most common of all chat on the

Alliance side, indicating that Alliance players on PvE realms tend to talk about or as their character more in game. There was an equal amount of trolling by both factions although they were different types of trolling (anal spam and player bashing) they still took up a high amount of chat. Also, both realms had high amounts of RW chat indicating that players on Normal realms used World of Warcraft as way of relaying news and discussing it.

Role Play Realms Horde and Alliance



Figure 9 Role Play realm Moon Guard



Figure 10 Role Play realm Moon Guard

This is a more direct comparison of chat because both team members played on the same realm by chance. It can be seen on this realm shows that role-play chat is the most prevalent on RP realms by both factions. On the Horde side, it was a more traditional role-play chat like players proclaiming their accomplishments or what is the reason for their powers while on the Alliance side, it was bit more bizarre and ventured into ERP. To note, trolling was the second most common thing on Alliance side while it was nonexistent on the Horde side. This had to do with the bizarre nature of the Alliance

area of Goldshire, which is directly related to the ERP. Also, it could be that the Horde takes role-play more seriously than the Alliance side does on this realm. There was discussion of real world topics by both factions, which is surprising because this is usually frowned upon on RP realms. Horde had prevalent transaction chat while the Alliance had none. This was due to where the data was gathered. Data from Horde chat from the major cities where transaction chat can be spammed for materials while most Alliance time was spent in Goldshire, a huge hub for role-play.

PvP Realms Horde and Alliance

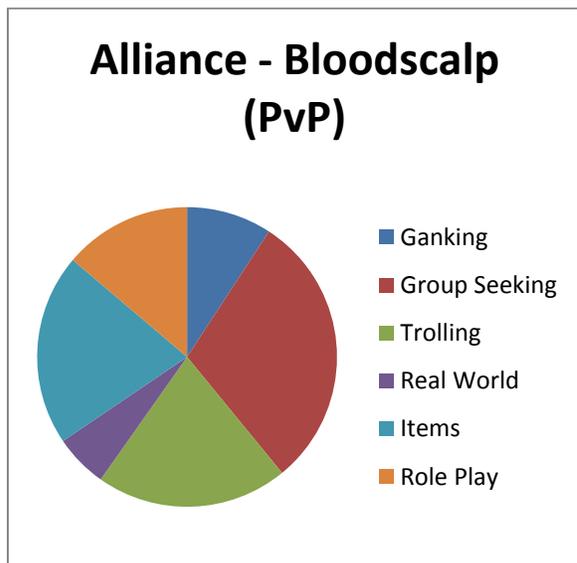


Figure 11 PvP realm Alliance Bloodscalp



Figure 12 PvP realm Horde Gorgonash

When comparing the PvP realms of both Alliance and Horde, it is clear that they both share high instances of group seeking chat. This is because both factions were actively seeking players for rated battlegrounds and arenas, as well as high levels seeking raid groups. On the Horde side, this group seeking chat took up a majority of the chat data, while on the Alliance side it was a majority, but not a total majority like on the Horde side. The Horde realm had a noticeable lack of trolling chat while the Alliance was

subjected to quite a bit due to “anal spam”. In fact, the Alliance showed a variety in chat topics while the Horde side primarily focused on the group seeking chat. Alliance chat displayed what we thought was characteristic of PvP realms: high group seeking, trolling, and ganking chat. The Horde lacked majorly in this variety especially, in ganking chat. This was mostly likely due to the areas where we quested and the amount of high-level players in a given area. The discussion of real world topics on both sides was the least prevalent form of chat this was due to the high prevalence of group seeking chat on both sides as well as the high amounts of trolling and transaction chat on the Alliance side. They both shared some form of role-play chat; this was primarily due to the boasting of player’s achievements and items as well as high amount of duel challenges spoken.

Discussion

Throughout this study, we monitored WoW chat boxes in hopes of finding differences in patterns of chat across realm types and between Horde and Alliance factions. We accomplished this via in-game observations and with the use of the /chatlog function, which creates an external log of all chat during the period of play. Three of the four main realm types were observed, with the exception of the RPPvP realm type, which simply combines RP and PvP elements. Our results showed that there were indeed differences in chat topic across realm types, with certain types of realms logging more of particular chat topics than others.

But not all chat topics appeal to all players. Some players are bothered by RP topics, or alternatively, a player may choose to stay away from real world topics in chat. Whatever type of chat is going on in the chat box may influence a person’s decision when

choosing a realm. If they themselves want to participate in chat, they will want to make sure they are engaging in interesting and appropriate topics; with knowledge of the chat patterns, players can prepare themselves for the chat of their realm. If debating whether to choose a PvP or RP realm, for instance, one may want to see which chat style they will fit in with most; if that player is interested in playing in groups more than they are interested in the complexities of role playing, they may choose the PvP realm over the RP realm.

This information on chat patterns can be particularly useful if an individual is interested in certain acts, such as item trading or group seeking. These individuals will want to seek realm types that focus more on their chosen paths, allowing them to deal in wares more easily or find a group readily. These players will choose realm types with high traffic chat on their topic, like PvP realms with group seeking chat.

Because our study was the first to look at chat patterns across realm types and factions, there are some limitations. The first was the playtime; we were limited in the amount of time we could play the game, thus logging chat, and therefore gathered only a limited amount of data. Another limitation to our study was the number of realms used; we observed only a total of 5 realms from about 200 total. Future research on the subject of chat patterns will want to widen their horizons and explore more realms. Greater amounts of data should also be collected using more characters and longer observation periods, on a more controlled schedule.

Limitations also exist within our coding system; for instance, we did not distinguish between types of group seeking (raid, dungeon, questing) but merely created one category for group seeking in general. We also did not include an “other” or “miscellaneous” category, so random chat or chat jargon phrases such as “lol” were

categorized as real world topics. Others seeking to duplicate this research should be aware of these flaws in the coding system and elaborate more on their potential topics.

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