World of Warcraft

Motivations that Keep Players Playing
Keith McNabb
23 May 2015

Introduction

People around the world have become habitual players of massive multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs). These games allow people to interact through characters or avatars through an online gaming platform in a socially interactive virtual world (Banks, 2013). MMORPGs are continually researched because of their inherent ability to motivate a player's return. Players obviously have a choice to continue or discontinue playing whichever MMORPG they enjoy the most; (Tychsen et al., 2007) however, there has been an upward trend of more players being so motivated to play that some refer to it as an addiction. (Festl et at,. 2015; Peters & Malesky Jr, 2008). MMORPGs allow people to step away from physical interactions, where limitations are so prevalent, and play in online worlds where possibilities can seem endless. With these endless possibilities players have demonstrated a wide variety of motivations towards MMORPGs. These games have certain attributes that give the game its motivating qualities. From accomplishing achievements, obtaining appealing gear, to creating virtual relationships, players are powerfully motivated to continue playing. These MMORGS allow players to find success, challenges, and relationships in a virtual social world (Yee, 2006). Online worlds allow players to grow and mold their character into whoever they want to be. Motivations in MMORPGs generally stem from social interactions to gaining higher status through leveling (Ho, Lin, & Lee, 2015). The majority of studies that focus

on motivation or addiction use quantitative data through survey questions. Other researchers look at how frequently or long people have been playing the game. Few studies have looked at qualitative open-ended responses from player's forum posts to motivations to play MMORPGs.

Method

Currently, the most popular MMORPG is Blizzard Entertainment's World of Warcraft with 7.1 subscribers (Blizzard, 2015). Their online communities are some of the most active, with the official website generating 100 to 80 million visits per month (SimiliarWeb, 2015). To gather my qualitative data, I visited the official World of Warcraft forums and searched for forum posts using the search terms such as "motivates" and variants such as "what motivates you to play wow" I then coded responses (N=100) found with this search query using an emergent coding scheme, and looked for patterns. One particular thread on the forums had 50 posts alone.

I categorized my data into the top five activities in the game for player vs. environment interactions and player vs. player interactions. These categories were derived from coding the data from forum posts (n=100) related to motivation and favorite aspects of the game and counting the most common activities that motivate a player. I found posts that had several responses (n=10) and would read the posts that had sincere answers and would take keywords and write them down. As I continued to scroll through different forums, I built up a set of keywords that became frequent. These categories allowed me to justify my reasoning behind motivation to play WoW.

Furthermore, my data is from looking at class and race in correlation with the five categories that I coded. I looked at 100 forum posts and recorded the forum posts that matched with one or more of the five designated categories and then analyzed the posters' identified class and/or race.

Results

From the forum posts data (n=100) I found that there were five prominent motivating categories. Categorizing the data into five most prominent motivational subjects allowed me to take qualitative data from these forum posts and code why players are continually motivated to play. A level 71 Dwarf explained, "To be able to constantly try to one up your friends with better gear, more gold, cooler pets/mounts and have fun is a great thing" (Nordiel, 2012). This quote sums up the five categories I coded for. World size, Gear, mounts/pets, achievements, and friends were the most prominent categories that I found to be the most mentioned motivational incentives to continue playing. The coded categories from most mentioned to lest were Friends, Gear, Achievements, Mounts and Pets, and the World

Friends

Friends were the most mentioned reason that players were motivated to play WoW. Through the vast world and amount of subscribers in WoW, players have created relationships that some claim to be just as strong or even stronger than physical relationships. A level 100 Monk Night Elf said that virtual friends "are a vast majority of the reason why I play any game - if they weren't around, I wouldn't be playing." In general players tend to play MMORPGS because of their friends. A level 100 Worgen

Druid stated, "I only play this game because of my lovely guild!" (Monsterbaby, 2012).

Players create guilds, which is an organized social community that motivates players to

login with regular meetings and different criteria to complete. Players explain over and

over how important different guilds are but also how the game is much more fun with a

bunch of friends. "Gathering a group of people to a dungeon, FOR FUN and working our

way through a long dungeon crawl, even if we got nothing out of it" (Archaos, 2012).

This player clearly shows that friends make one aspect of WoW much better when

playing with friends. Relationships are the strongest motivator for WoW players, which

leads to players wanting character upgrades that show off their talent or style.

Gear

Players will play extensively through arena and battlegrounds or level up to 100

to gain gear or equipment. According to Molina, players would spend hours to train and

upgrade their characters in a "repetitive, almost work-like fashion" (Molina, 2013).

Players play for hours to achieve higher levels. A level 100 Human Warlock posted,

"grind dailies, grind, dungeons, grind scenarios, grind rep, grind valor, grind raid queing,

for what… for the thing friendships break up over….the almighty… all important gear

upgrade" (Cassyandra 2013). Cassyandra explains a common pattern she fell into trying

to upgrade her gear. She would extensively play to accomplish many different challenges

within WoW to earn valuable gear. Players form guilds, which are voluntary associations

of players that gather to complete difficult dungeons and raids (Golub 2010). Doing this

they gain experience, valuable gear, and new game possibilities. Character Uniqueness

was rated the second largest motivator in Tychsen et. al's study. Character Uniqueness

ranged from early stages of creation to a character's clothing, armor and similar matches in style/theme. Players like to be unique, thus motivating players to constantly login.

Achievements

Achievements are for players that want more credibility and individuality from other players. Normally, they are done alone if one wants to exceed in amount of achievement points. Players can complete the same achievements, but can't group to complete one achievement together. Even though achievements points are individually earned other players can still see your achievement points. Blizzard even caters to players by having an Achievement section in the official WoW forums. While scrolling through an achievement posts, I found a level 100 Tauren Druid who had been asking questions about a "last scepter" for a few months. "Finally found that last scepter!" (Grassdemon, 2014). When his first post, "Where does one find the last scepter?" (Grassdemon 2014). This player had been searching for a scepter for months to complete an achievement. This type of dedication shows that achievements are a strong motivating factor in WoW. Another reason I found achievements to be a reason for continuous game play is because of the achievement collectors. Players will continuously play trying to complete achievements that add to their credibility and pride (See leader board in figure 1) since the world is so vast these achievements range from epic journeys to comical tasks.

Achievement Points Rankings

all | deathknight | druid | hunter | mage | monk | paladin | priest | rogue | shaman | warlock | warrior

< previous   next >

Rank	Character	Guild	Realm	Ach. Points
1	Eó (u)	Schwingen des Phoe..	EU (DE)-Zirkel des Cenarius	24940
2	Jikziah (u)	New Horizon	EU-Tarren Mill	24935
3	Афенар (u)	Открытость	EU (RU)-Ревущий фьорд	24935
4	Shew (u)	Sublime	EU-Tarren Mill	24925
5	Террокари (u)	У нас есть план	EU (RU)-Борейская тундра	24925
6	Cherisu	Fate	OC-Frostmourne	24915
7	Звездунишка (u)	Рассвет	EU (RU)-Пиратская Бухта	24915
8	Фартовыйвар		EU (RU)-Гордунни	24900
9	Папуасочка (u)	Аструм	EU (RU)-Гордунни	24900
10	Cleoboltra	Exiled Legion	US-Zul'jin	24900
11	Бэйлла (u)	Адамантан	EU (RU)-Борейская тундра	24895
12	Местидру	Престиж Гейминг	EU (RU)-Гордунни	24890
13	Klydjeremy	one lesson per day	US-Tichondrius	24890
14	Klydasaurus	Reckoning	US-Mannoroth	24890
15	Klyd	Dsylxeic	US-Drenden	24890

Figure 1. Leaderboard of Achoevement Rankings

Mounts and Pets

Mounts and pets are popular motivations because they allow a player to have a friend or companion without actually having to be social. Nonetheless, pets and mounts are a great source of pride and people like to show them off. A level 85 Dwarf Hunter said, "Usually my motivation comes from mounts and companion pets/rare hunter pets." I compared this forum post with McIntosh and Schmeichel's study about human collection and found that players see some mounts and pets as collector items and "Collecting is a common human social behavior" (McIntosh & Schmeichel 2004). Players around realms try to obtain the most unusual items in the game to improve their pride and credibility. This directly relates to habits of the "The Collecting Process" stated by McIntosh and Schmeichel. Collectors look for objects that are unrecognized or undervalued and treasure these items looking for a return. I found a level 71 Dwarf Warlock who posted about how having the rarest of something in the realm is his biggest motivation and in his posts his said, "Like a rare mount or pet that you'll only see me having on that realm" (Nordiel, 2012). He explains how collecting rare pets or mounts motivate him to play because it raises his credibility towards guilds and other players. Pets and Mounts are

strong motivators as a result of humans natural instinct to be infatuated or addicted by collecting. I found that The *World of Warcraft* tries to create an emotional bond between the environment and the game.

World

The *World of Warcraft* is a massive, virtual world where players can interact with the environment and other players online. This world is the basis of the game and allows for such a massive online culture to evolve. "To some, World of Warcraft is just another role-playing game, but to others this fantasy land is a way of life, engaged in the quest" (Parks 2006). This fantasy world is so expansive that players can deeply immerse themselves into the game to complete different aspects of the game that further motivate or immerse a player. Since the world is the basis for most of the categories that motivate players only a fraction of the forum posts involved talking about how motivating world is. A level 100 Human Warlock did state that, "Travelling great distances across the world when I go to different places on quests" (Archaos, 2012) motivates him to play.

Class/Race Results

Each of the forum posts had class/race labeled next to their posts. I determined whether these character variables were related to their specific motivation posts. Relevance was determined by number of posts that related to five major motivators.

Class
From the forum posts based class, I found that the five motivators were ordered the same way as above even when compared with class. Friendship was the most

frequently mentioned motivator (M = 2.91 SD = 0.83), while gear was not far behind (M = 2.45 SD = 0.2.62). Friendship posts were strong among all the classes, but I did find a strong correlation between Warriors and Rogues compared with gear (refer to figure 2). Warriors (30%) and Rogues (26%) made up 56% of the forum posts by class about gear. The Warrior and Rogue class are strongly motivated by gear to play WoW.
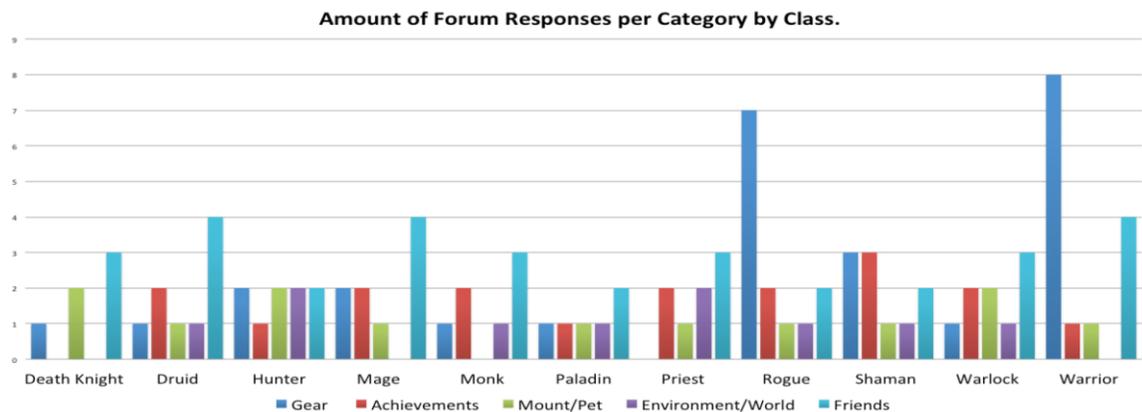

Figure 2

Race

Every race had a very similar amount of posts about friendship (σ=.48). The five motivators were coded in the same order as the overall results. Once again, I found friendship to be strongest motivator. The Orc's (22%) and Tauren's (26%) responses about gear made up for 48% of Race posts related to gear. I found that the friendship is the most frequently mentioned motivating posts (35%) and Orc's and Tauren's make up for 48% of the gear forum posts that make up for 22% of all the posts together.
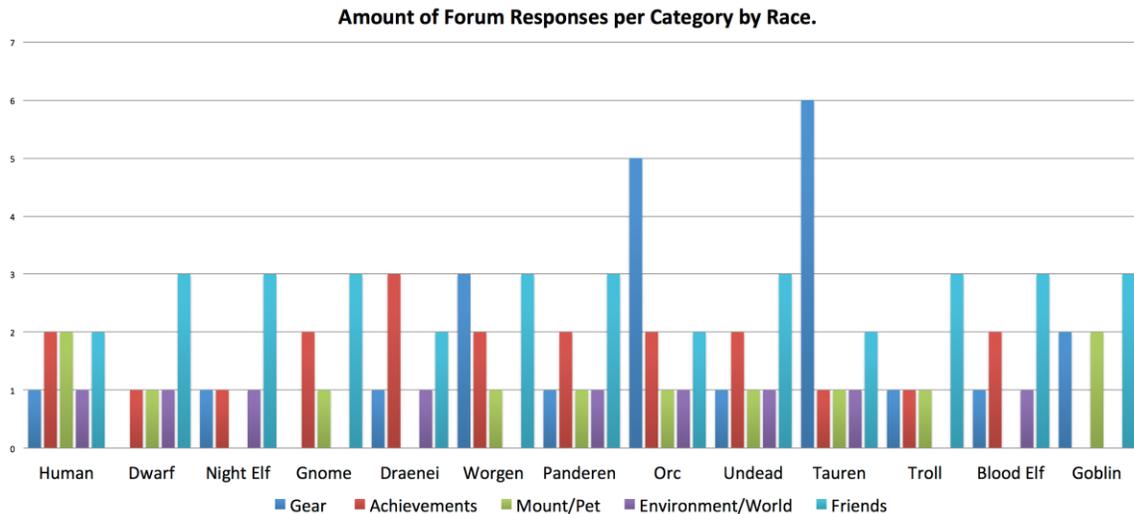
Figure 3

Discussion

From the data collected, I concluded that players are motivated by five general factors: Friendship, Armor, Achievements, Mounts and Pets, and the World. Tychsen et al. had three out of five of the save top five motivators for gameplay: Socialization (friendship), Character upgrades (armor), and Achievements. We had similar findings, however they found socialization or friendship to be the fourth most motivating aspect. Unlike Yee's study (Yee, 2006), which found relationships to be the highest motivator among the players he sampled. While Tychsen et al. has many similarities Yee's study has relationships or friendships as the largest motivator. I found that most *World of Warcraft* players are motivated by social interactions with others. The majority of the forum posts that I analyzed about social interactions talked about how friendships made aspects of the game better and more fun. Relationships establish a connection that players feel the need to continue.

Other online games favor virtual relationships and friendships just like WoW. *Halo, Call of Duty, and Destiny* are all online games that accommodate for players to game with friends and different online players in different game settings. *Halo and Call of Duty* let players that are in a party together to play on the same team. *Destiny* is similar to WoW in the sense of flaunting cool armor and weapons but also has gameplay that gets more motivating with multiplayer.

My researched limited me from actually playing alongside other players. I am a level 12 Monk Night Elf who started playing the game in the early spring and has progressed for research. Not having friends or knowing the best tactics to level up I was lost in a world where culture and relationships have already been established. For future research I would like to level up to a higher level (between 60-80) and look at different research topics regarding how game designers design their games to motivate players by accommodating for relationships or other favored game aspects.

Works Cited

Archaos (2012, February 1). "Why Play WoW?" World of Warcraft Battle.net Forums.

Retrieved from http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/3313031645#14'

Banks, J. (2013). *Human-technology relationality and self-network organization: Players and avatars in world of warcraft* (Order No. 3608115). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1501642585). Retrieved from

http://search.proquest.com/docview/1501642585?accountid=14608

Cassyandra (2013, January, 1). "Why Play WoW?" World of Warcraft Battle.net Forums.

Retrieved from http://us.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/7415136174#1.

Duvall, E. (2013). *I got PWNED: A phenomenological study on the appeal of the MMORPG world* (Order No. 3601552). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1466586777). Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/1466586777?accountid=14608

Golub, A. (2010). Being in the world (of warcraft): Raiding, realism, and knowledge production in a massively multiplayer online game. *Anthropological Quarterly, 83*(1), 17-45. Retrieved from

http://search.proquest.com/docview/216483031?accountid=14608

Grassdemon (2014, August 9). "Get That Achievement XIV." World of Warcraft

Battle.net Forums. Retrieved from

http://us.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/14526782619?page=1

Grassdemon (2014, October 24). "Get That Achievement XIV." World of Warcraft

Battle.net Forums. Retrieved from

http://us.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/14526782619?page=2

Ho, S., Lin, Y., & Lee, R. (2015). Exploring the effective help for social anxiety:

MMORPGs delivering online help. *International Journal of Marketing Studies, 7*(2),

10-18. Retrieved from

http://search.proquest.com/docview/1675860004?accountid=14608

Kowert, R., Vogelgesang, J., Festl, R., & Quandt, T. (2015). Psychosocial causes and

consequences of online video game play. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *45*, 51-

58.

McIntosh, W. D., & Schmeichel, B. (2004). Collectors and collecting: A social

psychological perspective. *Leisure Sciences, 26*(1), 85-97.

doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01490400490272639

Molina, D. S. (2013). *Wow! what an experience: A thematic analysis of the experience of*

male world of warcraft players (Order No. 3567456). Available from ProQuest

Dissertations & Theses Full Text; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

(1417764728). Retrieved from

http://search.proquest.com/docview/1417764728?accountid=14608

Monterbaby (2012, January 31). "Motivation to Play WoW!" World of Warcraft

Battle.net Forums. Retrieved from

http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/3313031645#3

Nguyen, K. (2007, Feb 07). 'World of warcraft' harbors a dark side among players --
      classic symptoms of addiction. *McClatchy - Tribune News Service* Retrieved from
      http://search.proquest.com/docview/456931697?accountid=14608

Nordiel (2012, January 31). "Motivation to Play WoW!" World of Warcraft Battle.net
      Forums. Retrieved from http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/3313031645

Peters, C. S., & Malesky Jr, L. A. (2008). Problematic usage among highly-engaged
      players of massively multiplayer online role playing games.*CyberPsychology &*
      Behavior, *11*(4), 481-484.

Parks, L. B. (2006, Sep 20). To some, world of warcraft is just another role-playing
      game, but to others this fantasy land is a way of life / engaged in the
      quest. *Houston Chronicle* Retrieved from
      http://search.proquest.com/docview/396279229?accountid=14608

SimilarWeb http://www.similarweb.com/website/battle.net

Scott, M. R. (2013). *Psychosocial variables as predictors of gaming behaviors and*
      gaming addiction in the massively multiplayer online game world of warcraft (Order
      No. 1521956). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text; ProQuest
      Dissertations & Theses Global. (1272148257). Retrieved from
      http://search.proquest.com/docview/1272148257?accountid=14608

Sheehan, E. M. (2013). *The good, the bad, and the MMORPG: An exploration of modern,*
      virtual fairy tales (Order No. 1522982). Available from ProQuest Dissertations &
      Theses Full Text; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1428143521). Retrieved
      from http://search.proquest.com/docview/1428143521?accountid=14608

Tamara Chuang, R. b. (2008, Dec 24). Blizzard's world of warcraft now home to 11.5 million players. *Orange County Register* Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/274057309?accountid=14608

Tychsen A., Newman K., Brolund T. and Hitchens M. 2007. Cross-format analysis of the gaming experience in multi-player role playing games. In Proceedings of the DIGRA 2007 Conference (Tokyo, Japan), 49-57.

Yee, N. (2006). Motivations for play in online games. CyberPsychology & Behavior, 9(6), 772-775