Parents Playing World of Warcraft: A Case Study

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Abstract

Children have grown up using technology that is far more advanced than the technology used by their parents. This allows for a broad gap in technological abilities and interests. The author conducted a case study on a female parent, age 49, playing World of Warcraft and an interview to see how the technology gap made the game more difficult. Along with this, a survey was conducted amongst 31 people ages 40-60 years old on their technological abilities and interests in video gaming.

Introduction

World of Warcraft was chosen as the game to have the case study done with. World of Warcraft was released in 2004 and has since grown to one of the most popular computer games of all time with over 11 million subscribers playing the game (Blizzard). World of Warcraft sets up with a basic beginning, the early objectives of the game consist of passing small quests and slowly working up toward larger quests. This game is an MMORPG. Role-playing games are arguably the most collaborative games online due to the several instances where the player will need to partner with 1, 2, or even 23 other players to do something significant and challenging. This allows for interaction between the different players at all times. In contrast to the popular belief that people who play this game are kids and teens, the average age of a World of Warcraft player is 28.3 (Yee). This age is a good median between young players, the generation that has grown up with personal computer technology (generation Millenial, born between 1982-2000) and older players (generations Baby Boomer and Generation X, born between 1943-1981)

(Lifecourse Associates), those who have not grown up with personal computer technology.

Purpose

It is stereotyped by many that videogames are only played by kids and teens. But it is quite obvious that many people who play World of Warcraft are over the age 18, considered adults. The average male that plays World of Warcraft is 28 years old, while the average female who plays World of Warcraft is 32.5 years old age. Each of these genders play an average of 22.7 hours per week (Yee). In a survey done by the author about sleep and different age groups playing World of Warcraft, two respondents of the 37 were over the age of 40, one of who had a family of kids and wife. People of the generation between 40 and 60 years of age grew up with out the high tech computers, televisions, cell phones and video games that we use today. According to Time magazine, the first useable computer was invented in 1946. It weighed 30 tons, was the size of two semi trucks (60 meters) and required hundreds of people to run it (Golden). Today, many kids grow up using laptop computers. The size of a MacBook is 1.08 inches tall, 13 inches wide and weighs 4.7 pounds. In 1962, the first computer game was invented. It was invented by Steve Russel and colleagues at MIT and was called SpaceWar! computer game (Bellis). In 1975, the first personal computers were made (Knight). Now a day, more than 80 percent of American homes have a computer in them (The Nielson Company). Children in today's generation, the Millenial generation, have grown up with computers in their hands while their parents simply did not. According to survey

performed by Belinda Clayton in 2003 on children's use of technology, boys between the ages of 6-8 were spending 69 minutes per week day and 192 minutes per weekend day using technology. Girls in the same age category were spending 69 minutes on weekdays and 132 minutes of weekend days using technology. In the survey, technology was considered computer, television, or Playstation. Boys were spending 47.85% of that time on either a computer or Playstation and girls were spending 39.8% on a computer or Playstation (Clayton 40). While in the generation of parents, those aged 40-60 years old, many did not have a computer or videogames until much later in their lives. While boys and girls today spend an average of 43.83% of their time on a computer or Playstation (Clayton 40), their parents did not even have that same technology to use at that point in their lives. How does the generational gap in computer technology effect parent's abilities to play videogames, and what is their opinion on such games with such a large adjustment to the technology?

Case Study Method

The player who played World of Warcraft is a 49 year old female. She has three children, a husband, and works part time as an elementary school teacher. The player came from a technological background in which she self describes, "Pretty subpar with computers, televisions, video gaming and most other new technological devices." The player first starting using a computer as a freshman in college in 1980. The player explained that she uses a computer for e-mail most of the time, while

also using it to write papers and do online research for a graduate program that she is a part of. The player has never played computer games, but did say she occasionally will play online puzzle games such as scrabble or puzzles against other online users. The player has never played videogames on a video gaming console (Playstation, Nintendo Wii, xbox) seriously. The player did say she has attempted playing games on the Wii, but never alone for personal entertainment, only with her children for fun.

The study was performed in a private room in order to limit distractions from the game. The case study was two hours long. The player played used a MacBook computer, it was not the same as her computer she uses most but very similar. The player wanted to use a Mac because that was the computer she was most comfortable using. The player was allowed to ask the author questions on the game if need be, but it was preferred that she just sit down play the game while the author observed. The author did however have a task sheet of objectives and different tasks he wanted to observe the player doing. These consisted of attempting and completing at least one quest and having a conversation with another player in the game. The rest of the time, the author wanted to observe exactly what the player would do with the freedom of an MMORPG, and how she handled the game with her lack of previous technological abilities.

After the playing part of the study was finished, the author interviewed the player. The interview was conducted right after the game was played to insure that the player would have full memory of the game play.

The questions consisted of:

- Was the set up of the game difficult for you (picking of the character)?
- When you first started the game, did the controls come naturally to you or did you feel uncomfortable using them?
- Did you feel at a disadvantage because of the technology?
- Do you feel that the technology in playing World of Warcraft is similar or different the your specific computer uses?
- If you played World of Warcraft often, do you think that your ability to use technology would improve?
- When fighting the Gnomes, was it hard to fight them because you did not know where the keys that you need to fight them is?
- When playing, did you feel it was similar to the video games you had said you have played on Nintendo Wii?
- With you conversation, do you think that the person you were talking to knew your true age? And why or why not?
- Would you ever want to play this game again? And if so, would you play with your friends?

Case Study

The player opened up the game with ease and logged in using the author's account. The player was then directed to create her own character in the game. The player chose to be a female Gnome Warrior as part of the alliance. The player then proceeded to change facial features, hairstyles and add earrings to her character. This took the player about three minutes to figure out and choose the one that she

liked best. The player completed all of these tasks fairly easily. The player than wanted to make a name, but when the name was suggested as 'WomanWarrior' by the player, the author decided that for the purpose of the case study, it would be best to choose a generic name, in order to not allow any other players in the game to know background on the player before even approaching her. The player's randomized name was Focianna. After this was done, the player then read through the jobs and characteristics of a Gnome and of a Warrior. The player then hit accept and was ready to play. This whole process took about seven minutes long, but as stated earlier, the player did not have much trouble with figuring the technology.

The player was put into the Eastern Kingdoms, specifically in Dun Morogh in the Old Dormitory. As the player entered her realm, she insisted on watching the entire introduction video. The player was nervous about not knowing what was going, so she wanted to take the time to see everything and figure it all out before starting. Once the player got into the main game screen after watching the video, she quickly became very overwhelmed. She immediately claimed that there was 'too much going and she did not know what buttons to hit.' The author let her figure this out on her own without his help. After about one minute, the player started to move around using the arrow keys on the keyboard. The player then took some time to get comfortable with running around and using the controls. The player ran around the Old Dormitory for about two minutes. The player then asked the author, "What do I do? What is the point of this?" The author answered this question, knowing that it would be important in order to make sure the player made some progress in her 1 hour 45 minutes left of playtime in the case study. The author explained that the

player needs to find the character with an exclamation mark over their head and complete the quest that is asked of the player.

After about 45 minutes of running around looking for a character with an exclamation mark, the player found the character and received her first quest. In her 45 minutes of running around, the player was very overwhelmed by the amount of things going on. She often said things such as, 'too much is moving' or 'Where am I?' or 'Why won't these people help me?' The player's first quest required her to kill six Crazed Leper Gnomes. The player was excited to have an objective and proceeded to find the Gnomes. The player immediately saw two of them. The author did have the player pause the game and briefly explain how to start a battle with a character. After this, the player was ready to fight. She went in for the first kill, using her sword. The player got in the first hit, but when the Crazed Leper Gnome attacked back, the player became overwhelmed and was simply too slow with the keys to attack back with any speed. The player could not hit the correct buttons consistently and was eventually killed. The player then took her ghost back to her character and tried again. This time the player was more successful and after 25 minutes, had completed her first quest.

The author then wanted the player to have a conversation with another player. The author noticed that there not many people to talk in the Dormitory so the author set up the player with another account of a level 4 Night Elf named Bariness who lives in Teldrassil. The player walked around and looked for players to talk to. The player first attempted talking to another Night Elf, a level 3 named Sily. The player simply said, "Hi." But received a response of "Go away." The player was

mad about this encounter, but the author explained that she should try to find a common ground immediately then proceed to conversation. The player then found a level 4 Night Elf named Ithaline. The player asked for help, explaining she was very new to the game. The two talked and Ithaline explained some objectives of the game to the player for about ten minutes. The player then went to try to complete an objective for Bariness, but once again struggled to find the character to give her the quest. At this point the player had been playing two hours and the author asked her to log off and proceeded to the interview part of the case study.

The author asked the player to answer the questions with as much detail as possible, and assured the player that she could say whatever she pleases with her opinions on the game itself. The player explained that the setup of the game actually gave her confidence, that being able to set up the game fairly easily and pick a character had her thinking that this may not be so bad. The player then explained how overwhelming and difficult the beginning was. She put that blame on to two different subjects. First, she said it was most likely her lack of video gaming history (having never really played videogames), had her unprepared for that moment. Her not playing video games as a child and as an adult she did not know what to expect. Secondly, the player explained that with so much going on the screen, she was lost. She credited her being lost to lack of time spent on computers. She said she had never seen anything like the game play screen on a computer screen before. The player definitely felt at a disadvantage because of her lack of ability to use technology.

She explained that World of Warcraft was completely different for her than using the computer for research, writing, and e-mail. She did, however, say that with an increased amount of time spent playing World of Warcraft, her ability to use technology would greatly improve.

The player said that when fighting, she was at the most technological disadvantage because she did not know what keys to hit and once she did know the keys, she could not hit them quickly enough. The player said that she has never spent anytime needing to hit computer keys or click the mouse quickly like that before.

The player did not think that game was similar to her past minor experience of playing a Nintendo Wii. The player said that when playing the Wii, it seems as if there is less pressure and it requires less hand coordination because the Wii does not use buttons.

The player said then when talking to the other character in the game, she definitely felt as if the player knew that she was older. She said this was because of a generation gap between younger generations and older generations. She claimed that people in her generation type in full sentences and talk differently on computers than people of younger generations.

The player said that she would be willing to try playing World of Warcraft again, but she would really need to take time to get the hang of it. She believes that it would take her longer than younger people because the technology does not come as natural to her as she thinks her children or children's friends does. She said that she would most likely never play this with friends because her and her friends

would enjoy spending time in person more together than through a video game. She thinks that her and her friends just would not be as into video games due to the fact that they have never been into video games. She stated that the video game craze came after her generation and that she believes she never got into them because at that stage she was occupied with kids.

Survey Logistics

Along with the case study, the author conducted a survey of 40-60-year-parents. 40 surveys were given out to parents from different parts of the country in order to diversify the results. The survey was sent via e-mail to each of the respondents. Sending it via e-mail made sure that each respondent had some ability to use technology and that they had a computer. This also allowed for the survey to be sent out to parents around the country. Each person the survey was sent to be between the ages of 40 and 60, and had at least one child. Parents could be divorced or single parents. The only requirement for being asked to take the survey was having at least one child. 31 people responded to the survey. The survey emphasized parent's abilities to use technology and apply that to the use videogames and video gaming interest. The average age of a respondent was 48.74 years of (SD=5.04). The average time spent on technology per day (computer, tv, cell phone) was 93.87 minutes per day (SD=36.11). 17 respondents were women and 14 respondents were men. 27 of the respondents had more than one child, and 12 respondents had kids of each gender.

The survey consisted of basic demographic questions (age, gender, how many kids, where you currently live, and where you were raised or spent most of your childhood). The survey then moved into qualitative questions. These consisted of:

- Questions about their use of technology when the respondents were under 18 years old, the ages of 18-40, and at the age they are now.
- How the respondents having children have changed their use of technology.
- About how many minutes per day spent on technology.
- If they ever feel at a loss, because they did not grow up with the technology their children use on a daily basis.
- If they do/or would ever consider playing video games. And if so, do you think you would be, or if you play already, at disadvantage because you did not grow up with video games? And if not, is it because of a lack of ability to use the technology that video games may require?
- If role-playing games are useful ways of technology socially (it was explained that role-playing games allow players to communicate with each other).
- Do you think that video games are productive way to learn how to use new technologies?

Survey Results

Many of the respondents had similar answers to these questions. Most respondents claimed that because of their children, they are better with technology. One response stated, “When I first had kids, they were very young and we did not

use any technology. I feel that my technology abilities went down because of this. But as my children got older, they started to show me new technology and how to use it." Many responses were similar to this of children teaching their parents how to use technology. Many parents said that their main use for their computer now is e-mail and browsing the web.

Respondents were split between feeling at a loss for not growing up with this technology that their kids use daily. 18 responded with, yes they feel at a loss, while the 13 said they did not feel at a loss. The ones who responded with yes, mostly claimed that their children get to learn so much more because of this technology and they wish they could have learned at the rate their children do because of it. But the parents who said they were not a loss, generally felt that their children's childhood is disrupted because of this technology. Many claimed that kids do not have real fun or an imagination anymore because of this.

Many parents claimed no interest in video games, and only two admitted to playing video games. Many of them, however, said that they would have interest in the games if they had more time. Many explained a videogame "boom" happening too late for them; at that point they were already working and had families. Many said that they would want to play and the technological would not hold them back.

Many parents did not think that role-playing games provide social help. They stated that talking on a computer does not equate to talking in real life. They did say that it is better than other video games where you play alone, but that the act of playing role-playing games does not help people socially in comparison to actually seeing people and having conversations.

All of the parents said that videogames is a productive way to learn how to use technology. One male said, “Learning technology could be the most important thing for the new generations, and if playing computer games and video games means that the kids will learn the latest and greatest ways to use it (technology), then by all means let them play.” The parents were overwhelmingly into the idea of video games helping with technology.

Analysis

From the results of survey and the case study, each clearly show that parents are at a disadvantage playing video games because of their lack of ability to use computer technology.

The player in the case study and the respondents to the survey taken had similar opinions to how technology has an effect on playing video games. The player in the case study explained to the author how she only used her computer for e-mail, research and writing papers. Because of these limitations within her use of a computer, when she got into the realm for World of Warcraft, she was extremely overwhelmed with all of the different actions taking place on the screen. She stated that she had never seen anything like that before because of her limited use of computers.

This was similar to the claim that most parents made in the survey response that their main use for a computer now is to check e-mail and browsing the web. Most of the parents would have been in the same situation the player in case study

was in, overwhelmed by the amount of things going on in the screen just because of their non-use of those programs on computers.

18 parents responded to the survey saying they felt at a loss not growing up with this technology that their kids have now. These kids, who grew up with computers, use the computers for much more than just browsing the web or e-mail. 59% of children ages 5-17 years old say that they use computers for games, while 44% of the children use their computers for school work (papers and research). At the middle school and high school age range (11-17), kids use their computers 60-63% for games and 57-64% of the students use their computers for school work (papers and research) (US Department of Education). While parents use their computers at a limited level, their kids are using their computers for much more.

The generation of children has played computer games very often, more so than they have used computers for typing and researching on the web. This allows them to have a better grasp of the technology that it requires.

Of the parents that responded to the survey, only 2 even admitted to playing videogames in the past. This means that 29 parents had no significant time playing these games in the past. They only used the technology for basic computer needs. When the player in the case study was shocked and overwhelmed by the screenplay of the game, it was due to a lack of experience with the technology. Their children, who have more experience with personal computer technology and use their computers for games as well as the basic needs (typing and internet), are more comfortable with the screenplay of World of Warcraft.

The player in the case study and the parents from the survey each pointed out that they had missed the videogame "boom", a time in which videogames became very popular. Many of them explained being too busy with their own kids to spend time playing videogames. This factors into a lack of experience with basic game play. For example, the player in the case study complained that when it came to a battle in her quest, she simply was not quick enough with hitting the correct button. This is a basic motion in any video game. If the player had more experience with video games, she would have been more used to situations such as that and had an easier time. By all of these parents claiming they missed the gaming "boom" as well, most of them would have had this same disadvantage that the player in the case study did.

A lack of experience with computer technology and a lack of experience with video games in general was the general downfall of the player in the case study's ability to play World of Warcraft successfully. Most of the parents that completed the survey had similar background experience with the two as well as had similar answers in the qualitative questions as the player in the case study. These parents who answered the survey would most likely have struggled just as much as the player in the case study. The parents would have been at a disadvantage in playing this game due to a lack of use and experience with the technology required to play successfully.

Conclusion

While the data shows that many parents would struggle in playing World of Warcraft because of their lack of abilities in using the technology, more can be looked into within this subject. The author did a case study on one player. In the future, similar case studies could be done of people of different genders, ages within the 40-60 year old age group, and different backgrounds. This would give a more diverse group to study from along with show any differences in technological experiences. Case studies could be done on people with a lot of technological experience who have never played the game. This would allow the author to see how the player compares with a player who is first learning the game with no technological experience.

Testing could also be done on children. By these tests, the author could see how children of the Millenial generation, who have grown up with this technology, pick up World of Warcraft when first playing.

Lastly, every parent who was surveyed believed that video games can improve technology. This could be tested as well in order to see if the games really can help people improve their personal computer skills.

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