

Player Types

Motivation to Play Different Types of Realms in World of Warcraft



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Introduction

A small sample of players from the massive multiplayer online role-playing game World of Warcraft (WoW) was interviewed to understand of why players choose to play on specific realms. A short interview composed of 11 questions was used to help collect data. The resulting interviews were brought together and the information was coded to determine the motivation factors for the types of realms players took part in. While mapping the data, correlations were found amongst the opinions of people who rated the same type of server the highest. There was also a correlation between the types of realms people were surveyed on and the types they play the most.

Keywords: Servers; Realms; Player vs. Environment ; Player vs. Player; Role Playing; Role Playing Player vs. Player; Ganking; MMORPG; Macro

On November 23rd, 2004, Blizzard Entertainment® released World of Warcraft, a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) that would become the largest and most played of its kind. It was the continuation of their Warcraft strategy game franchise, and was greatly anticipated by fans of the series. World of Warcraft created a whole new digital world, Azeroth, where players could embark on adventures with friends online.

The world is divided up into dozens of different servers, or “realms.” These realms hold a set number of players and can be one of four types: Player versus environment (PvE), player versus player (PvP), role-playing (RP), and role-playing player versus player (RPPvP). In PvE realms, players can go out and adventure in the world without fear of being attacked by the other faction. If they want to do battle with other players, they can flag themselves for PvP or go to set PvP battlegrounds. In PvP realms, players are always flagged for PvP and can do battle with players of the opposite faction at a moment’s notice. RP realms are similar to PvE realms, but the players are expected to stay “in character” whilst playing on these realms. Players are encouraged to identify themselves as their character and act as citizens of Azeroth when playing

in these realms. Typically, players who talk about real world events, such as politics, are frowned upon. RPPvP realms are a cross between an RP realm and a PvP realm. These different realm types have formed the basis for our study.

The research question being looked at is to figure out why people play in specific types of realms (PvE, PvP, RP). The RPPvP realm was not recorded for the study because it is simply a combination of both role-playing and player versus player realms. The motivation for playing on this realm type would come from similar reasoning for choosing a PvP and an RP realm.

Nick Yee conducted a study on motivation to play MMORPGs (Yee, 2007). Yee found that motivation factors are categorized into three different fields: achievement, social, and immersion. The research shows that players participate in MMOs for a variety of different reasons, including desires to improve as a player, socialize and play with friends, or learn more about the story that surrounds the game. However, Yee did not go into any detail about motivation to play different realm types within these online games.

Discussing the topic, it is theorized that people play PvE realms because they want to play without having to worry about being attacked by other players, whether it is within a solo or group setting. Conversely, people play PvP realms due to the challenge of constantly competing with other players. We also think they enjoy PvP realms because it gives a greater sense of realism to the game. Lastly, we believe people play RP realms, because they want to be immersed in the game without outside influences like politics, sports, or other things that can break this immersion.

Method

Before conducting our research, we knew that we would face similar problems that other video game researchers have found in the past that deal with quantitative versus qualitative research. This especially applies to the MMO genre because the experiment and most of our research must “be conducted remotely and anonymously” (Williams et. al., 2006). We were also presented with a time constraint. Our time given to develop the experiment and write the paper was approximately two and a half weeks. This made it difficult for us to gather a large amount of data. However, we feel that our method was sufficient to give us a general understanding of motivation to play the different types of realms.

Step 1 began with the process of creating characters. The task was to create one character for each realm type because it would present the opportunity to record observations of players across a wider spectrum of gameplay. We attempted to be silent observers and to hide in plain sight. We came to notice that if players noticed that they were being observed, they would often tell us to leave them alone or just try to get away from us. We found the best way to observe the players was to continue questing in their general area. In doing so, we came across as simply playing the game. Above all we were trying to see if players behaved differently across the various realm types.

Step 2 was to conduct short interviews across the different realm types. Due to the time constraint we aimed for five interviews per realm. We hoped to use the data gathered in these in order to get some quantitative data that could be used to help us see any trends, as well as some qualitative reasoning behind why the players preferred or disliked specific realm types. We always asked if players had played on other types of realms. If they had not played at least one other type then they wouldn't be able to effectively compare their realm to others. We created

macros (buttons that type specific text) in order to advertise our interview and efficiently ask the questions. We began trying to get people to participate by simply going around and asking players in game. This worked to an extent, but most players simply did not seem to have the time, and asking players individually came off as nosy and was also unproductive. We then decided to advertise the interview in general chat (general chat is displayed to all players in the same zone). We simply stated we were doing a study on motivation to play different realms for a college course, and asked if anyone was bored and willing to take five minutes out of their day. This method worked relatively well, as many players were bored while waiting to do other in-game activities. However, it was not effective in major cities. Those players were clearly busy and didn't have time for the interview, but by going just outside the city we were able to find players more willing to participate in the interview.

After finding out what types of realms the players were engaged in, we provided a disclaimer saying that all information will be kept confidential and they can choose whether or not to answer any question. We asked about what realm their main character was on, preferred faction, employment status, average game time, age, gender, favorite and least favorite realm type, and their reasoning for their choices. Lastly, we asked if we could use their character's name in our results. We then opened up our notes, went back through the chat log, and recorded their answers. We were able to interview sixteen players in total: five on PvE, five on PvP, and six on RP.

Step 3 was to look through the forums for relevant data on our research question. We looked for threads about favorite realm types, questions about choosing realms, and also some of the data on cross-realm zones. We wanted to get player opinions that were already on the web, to help validate some of the data we had collected. We found the best way to look for the forum

threads was to search battle.net (Blizzard's website for their major titles) for keywords about realms, favorites, and motivation. This helped to narrow down the search, but we still had to evaluate what we found in order to pick and choose relevant threads. In this regard, we read through individual forum threads, in order to see if they had any relevance towards the research question. Many of the threads were about technical support issues, suggestions for new realm types, or they simply didn't have any responses. We were looking for threads that specifically dealt with realm motivation or preferences. The threads needed to have at least 5 responses.

After collecting the interview data we began to code it and look for correlations. We took the data and split it between the three types of realms the players were interviewed on. We separated player realm preferences using a five point scale, where their favorite realm type received a five, their least favorite received a one, and anything in between could fall in the other numbers, depending on how many realm types they listed (some players listed only their favorite and least, while others listed the four types of realms along with new player as another type). We then took averages of player age, average game time, and their realm preferences on the raw data and over the three realm types we surveyed.

Results

After looking at all of the data, it became apparent that players chose their realm type for a variety of different reasons. There really wasn't any one overarching reason why anybody chose their realm. What we did notice was that the players who chose PvP and RP realms had more clearly defined reasons for their choices. PvE realms were usually chosen as a kind of default option. While players of the other two realms had specific motivations for their choice,

the PvE players seemed to be more fearful of the unknown aspects that the other realm types posed, whether that was the threat of attack or general ignorance of what RP realms really were.

Specific trends were found in the raw data of the interviews as well as observations made while collecting them. The first trend that was apparent was the opinions of people who rated the same types of realms the highest. The ones who rated PvE the highest tended to be rather one track, preferring PvE the most and splitting their preference for PvP and RP relatively evenly (Figure 1).

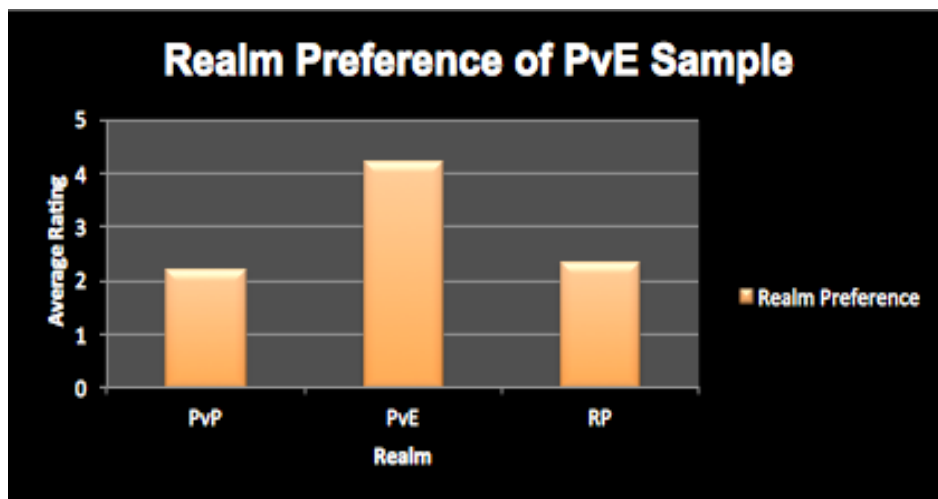


Figure 1

PvP players preferred PvP, with PvE second and RP in dead last (Figure 2). Every player interviewed on the PvP realm listed PvP as their favorite realm. It was apparent that PvP players like participating in PvP content more than anything. The PvE preference varied in the interviews from between the middle and the bottom of the list, but none of the PvP players rated RP above their bottom two.

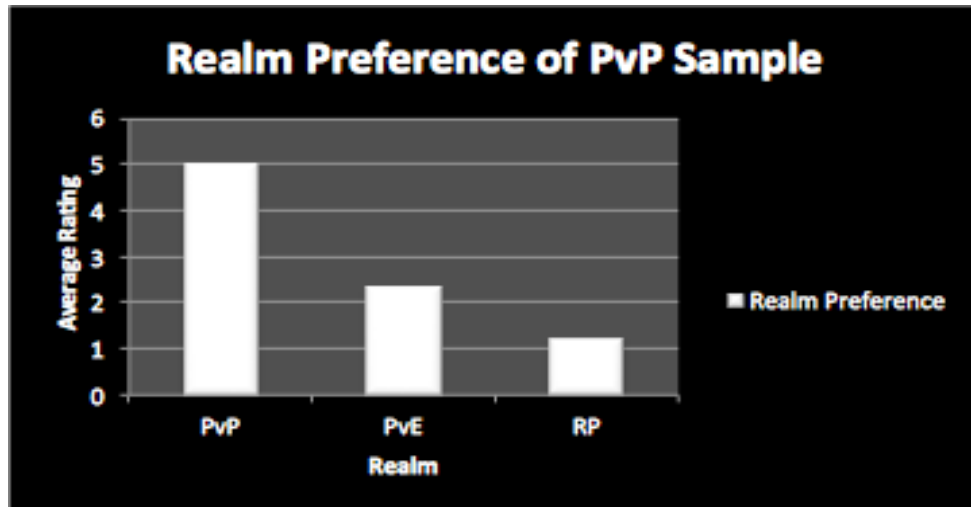


Figure 2

The RP interviews followed the same trend of preferring the realm in which they were on. They enjoyed RP the most, followed by PvE, and they disliked PvP realms for the most part (Figure 3). Of the players interviewed all but one of them rated PvP realms in their bottom two. The exception listed PvP as his favorite and RP as his least favorite.

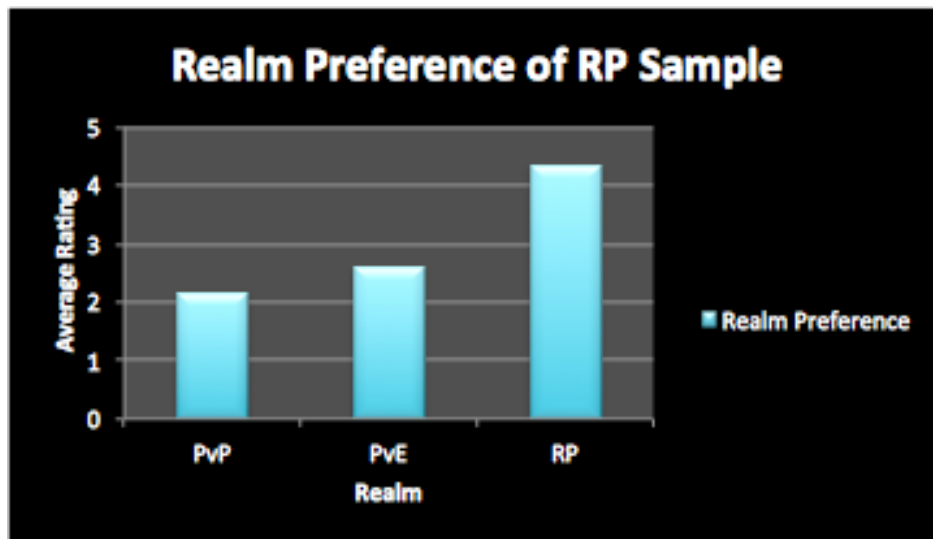


Figure 3

This data along with the information gathered on the forums has laid out the basis for our conclusions on motivations to or not to play on each type of realm.

Player versus Environment

The standard realm of WoW, referred to by many as a “normal” realm, tends to attract new players as well as those interested in the lore of the game. However, PvE realms arguably offer fewer things to do than the other realm types.

People seemed to prefer the PvE realms because as one player put it, they “tend to be a bit more relaxed”. The relaxed nature of PvE realms makes it primary location for new players to begin playing the World of Warcraft. In these realms players can just play the game without any fear of being victim of “ganking” (killed by a much higher level player) or having to stay in character. Indeed it seemed that the players who participate in PvE realms do it primarily out of some sort of dislike or fear of the other realm types, especially PvP. One reason is that PvP realms are sometimes considered too difficult to level through (Nohealzhire, 2013). Also many of those interviewed cited “ganking” as a reason why they preferred PvE as opposed to PvP. The players on PvE realms clearly preferred safety.

Playing on PvE servers also gives players the ability to choose how they want to approach playing the game. While playing a PvE realm, players can quest without any fear of being attacked. Instead of focusing on the war between the Alliance and the Horde, they can instead immerse themselves in the lore of the game. If they do want to do some PvP they can flag themselves, or join a queue for one of the many pre made battlegrounds. These PvE realms allow players to interact with the world and its inhabitants on their terms.

While PvE appeals to some players, many of those interviewed on other realms disliked PvE realms. Multiple players interviewed in PvP realms claimed that without world PvP they felt that they were limited in what they were able to do. Another of these players claimed that PvE realms were “too easy.” Also more experienced players didn’t like PvE realms with a heavy

population of new players. They said that these realms were annoying to level in, because the zones were far too crowded by players who didn't know what they were doing. PvE realms have their ups and downs, but they are the easiest realm for one to begin his or her journey in the World of Warcraft.

Player versus Player

PvP realms glorify the “War” aspect of World of Warcraft. They attract players looking for a challenge and a constant threat. They are the most dangerous of the realms, but to the faithful PvP players, that is all part of the fun.

Our PvP participants preferred PvP realms for the challenge and the realism. A big reason why many players enjoy PvP realms is because of “the ability to kill people out in the world” (Diesirae 2012). They enjoy the challenge of that comes from the threat of attack by another player at a moment's notice. Some players claimed that PvP realms attracted better players. This makes sense, because all of the top 10 guilds on wowprogress.com are on PvP realms (WoW Guild Rankings, 2013). Two of the interviewed players stated that they like PvP realms because it felt “more like Warcraft” and was “the way the game was meant to be played”. One player said that it broke his immersion every time he was in a PvE realm and just walked past a player of the opposite faction. He wanted to feel like he was really at war with the other faction, and not just simply inhabiting the same world. These aspects of competition and realism are what drive the PvP players.

On the other hand, many of the interviewees on other realm types disliked PvP servers. The competitive nature that encompasses the PvP realms can be very deterring to the more casual WoW players. One player hated “being killed without warning”, and another claimed “PvP brings out the worst in people”. Another reason is that PvP realms can be quite difficult to

level through (Chinpokomon 2011). Always having to compete against other players, or worse, getting “ganked” repeatedly by max level characters (Nohealzhire 2013) can be a powerful deterrent for many players. PvP realms are not for the casual or the faint of heart.

Role Playing

RP realms are a “whole different ball game”, so to speak, from PvE and PvP realms. They can be either of the other two, but with the added bonus of acting as if one is their character. These realms are for players who want to immerse themselves in a more social World of Warcraft.

Indeed the primary advantages of an RP realm are social. Players can come together and talk as if they are really in Azeroth (Frejya 2010), and so players aren’t confronted with people talking about real world issues. Interviewed players said they preferred RP realms, because the people “like to chat”, are “more well-spoken for”, and are “more mature”. Another interviewee liked these realms, because “it’s fun to be someone other than yourself”. These realms also contain player driven role playing events that range from weddings, to club meetings, and even epic quests. The mod “Total RP 2” (Curse) is a game add-on that was mentioned by an interviewee and it allows players to create their own role playing quests. RP realms are truly centered around players coming together to create a more social and immersive World of Warcraft.

While many players enjoy their time spent in RP realms, others won’t dare touch them. Many of the interviewees rated RP realms at the bottom simply because they were “too weird”. However, these players hadn’t spent a great deal of time, or any at all, in RP realms, but these realms still carry that stigma of being the “weird” realm. RP realms can be a bit much for the more casual, or even hardcore, players of WoW. In exploring these realms and talking to their

inhabitants, it became clear that they were playing an entirely different game. This fact is what draws the role players in, is also what keeps the standard population out.

Discussion

Over the course of the study, we came to notice some rather interesting player behaviors. While observing the different realms, player behavior varied greatly between the different types. On PvE realms, players tended to be more focused on questing and leveling. They weren't very social, except when in major player hubs like the Alliance capital of Stormwind or other major cities. PvP players were generally more talkative, but didn't have anything nice to say. They enjoyed talking down to newer players, and formed small cliques. The social hubs were mainly used to advertise for battleground groups. RP realms had a greater variance in behavior. While some were more eloquently spoken, many of the players in the social hubs were participating in heavy role playing. They were completely "in character" and were acting in a way that was consistent with the social norms of the RP realms, but in no way normal in any other realm type. These social behaviors were quite interesting and could lead to future research questions about in game behavior.

Due to the time constraints, our sample size for interviews was relatively small. We were only able to get 16 people to take part in our interviews, but with another week or two we would have covered a much larger sample size. Another issue that was common was finding players who had no experience outside of one realm type. This was much more common on PvE realms, but there were a few on PvP realms as well. Unfortunately, these people could not participate in our survey due to its inherent nature. Without playing on more than one type of realm, they had no way to juxtapose the different realms. We also had issues with people who would leave mid-

way through an interview. A more common problem came from players simply not having the time for an interview. This problem mainly persisted in PvE servers where there weren't a lot of players waiting around for content. In PvP realms, players were waiting for groups for rated battlegrounds, and in RP realms players were just simply hanging out and roleplaying. On the other hand, the players in PvE realms seemed to be much busier so there were less people willing to take the time to participate in the interview. However, these were only minor setbacks and the data we collected was sufficient for our needs.

The results of this study have helped open the door for future research in this field. Due to the nature of the study, we weren't able to give any special attention to specific realms in the same type. A future study could take a more in depth look at the RP realms. While conducting this study, we were barely able to scratch the surface of the what motivated players to role-play. One could look into the general mentality shift from new RP players to veterans of the RP realm. Another interesting question could be about the mentalities of PvP players. What drives them to fight? Is it a dislike for the opposite faction, or does it have more to do with a general love of PvP? As players choose their realms they make their decisions based on a series of varying factors as well as their own preferences toward their gaming environment. Though they have the choice to pick a realm that fits their play style, they are still contributing members of the World of Warcraft community.

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