

World of Warcraft Players and Their Background in Video Games: Does It Make a
Difference?

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Abstract

Research has been done on addiction, player types and player motivation within the World of Warcraft, yet little has been done on transferable skills within the game. Transferable skills include strategies on leveling up, actions performed within the game (such as grinding, questing, etc.), abilities to understand and comprehend in game commands and use them to the player's best ability (macros, hot keys, etc.) and any other in-game techniques that the player uses to better perform with their character. We observed and interviewed three case studies with different video game and MMORPG experience to find if they found WoW (World of Warcraft) to be hard or easy with their differing backgrounds.

Introduction

Blizzard Entertainment currently has roughly 10.3 million players subscribed to its online game, World of Warcraft (WoW) (Plunkett, 2011). With this massive number of players signing on daily, it can be assumed that it is drawing in new players on a regular basis from other video games and MMORPGs. In an environment this large and diverse, there is no way that all of these players can be hard-core gamers. Players come from a variety of different backgrounds, whether they are young adults, students in high school or college, or are employed with a full-time job. Just like these different backgrounds, gamers also have different experience levels that they bring into the game. Some players have been playing World of Warcraft since it was released in 2004. They are experienced and familiar with the game and have multiple characters within the world. Other players come in with previous MMORPG or video game experience, hoping to find the same addictive element within WoW that other people are finding. Some come in with no experience in a virtual world at all, drawn in by the popularity of the game. We wanted to discover if World of Warcraft caters to all of these different backgrounds and experience levels.

We found this research gap while reading multiple studies on player types. The most famous of these studies is Richard A. Bartle's "Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades: Players Who Suit MUDS," which focused on players within MUDs (multi-user dungeons). Bartle's study, like many others, covered motivations and types of players within the game. In this study, Bartle defined four different types of players- achievers, imposers, explorers and socializers (Bartle, 1996). Each of these players has different goals within the game. For example, achievers like to complete in game quests and goals,

while socializers spend most of their time interacting and talking with other players. Bartle analyzed the way these players interact with each other and within the game, finding that each group is just as important as the others. They all together give balance to the game. Yee conducted another study after Bartle's among MMORPGs (Star Wars Galaxies, EverQuest and Dark Age of Camelot) called "Motivations of Play in Online Play" (Yee, 2007). Yee found that there were three components within the game. There is an achievement component (much like Bartle's achievement type), a socializing component (again, much like Bartle's socializing types) and lastly an immersion component. Each describe what a player does within a game and why. Tychsen, Hitchens and Borlund later did an even more in depth study that found there were specifically twelve motivations of players within role-playing games. However, as they concluded to say, these twelve motivations fell into two generally broader categories. One was focused "towards tactics, optimization, [and] competition" in players' characters. The other category was "socializing, depth of character and role-playing" (Tychsen et al, 2008). Even further, they found that these two categories were linked by a single factor: escapism, the desire to be immersed within a separate world, which was a factor under Yee's immersion component. These findings had two similarities with Bartle's study, the motivation of character optimization and performance and the desire just for socializing or for role-play. All in all, players were commonly found throughout the three studies to play and keep playing for the immersion and escapism that the game gave them.

However, among these studies done for demographics and player motivations, very little, if anything, has looked at gameplay skills gained from player backgrounds.

We defined these skills as a general understanding and ability to use strategies within the

game to make a character perform better. These are strategies (such as grinding for leveling) along with in-depth understanding of controls (such as why macros or hotkeys are useful). A player who has an advantage because of a greater understanding of in-game strategies for leveling and gaining experience along with a better ability to use controls (macros or mouse) is more skilled. Are players who have experience within MMORPG's have an advantage when beginning WoW? Or does player experience have no effect on a player's ability within WoW?

Methods

We decided if we wanted collect data about transferable skills then we would need to collect details on character development. Also, we would need to know what strategies and techniques of gameplay each player used. Along with that data, we would need to see what players spent most of their time doing with their character within the game. In turn, we figured that with the amount of detailed information needed, it would be best to conduct research using three case studies, in which we could control the situations in which a player experienced the game to the greatest extent possible. We would also make each player use a consistent class and race of character.

Three students at a private university in Colorado were recruited, each with varying video game and MMORPG experience. Data was recorded by the players while each played World of Warcraft over a five-hour period. Our three players consisted of Layne, who had extensive experience within World of Warcraft. Our second player, Nick, had MMORPG experience but none in the World of Warcraft. Our third player, Jonathon, had no MMORPG experience at all. Through a time-log, players were asked to

mark when they leveled up, how many times they died, how much gold they obtained, and how many cities, villages and towns they discovered.

After these five hours, an interview was conducted where we asked players in-depth questions about gameplay strategies (e.g. questing) and skills (e.g. macros). The yielded data would allow us to determine the level of ease and enjoyment each player found within the class of experience levels that they each represent. We expected that more experienced players with knowledge and familiarity of World of Warcraft and several other similar MMORPGs would excel significantly over the players who have had no gaming experience.

Yee, Tychsen et. al. and Bartle all found important factors that can relate to our study. A player experienced in MMORPG's that is an explorer player type (Bartle 1996) might not level up as fast as a player who is new to MMORPG's but finds the achievement style of game play more appealing. We understood that while conducting our study, taking this into account was extremely important when assessing a player's character's development and leveling in the game. It's important to remember that these factors and types of gameplay described by Tychsen and Bartle were important factors in our study and affected how we analyzed the data.

Results

Players	Levels Gained	Gold Obtained	Quests Completed
Layne- Experienced in WoW	22	234	163
Nick- Experienced in MMORPGs	10	12	35
Jonathon- Inexperienced	6	5	8

Table 1. Quantitative Results of Players

Data recorded over the 5 hours of gameplay each gamer had completed in the World of Warcraft revealed experience with a similar interface is vital for enjoyment and successful play.

Layne was our gamer participant who is a decorated veteran in the World of Warcraft with years of experience experimenting with the game and was familiar with the unique MMORPG’s interface. As a result of Layne’s experience in the game and knowledge of how to operate efficiently. In 5 hours, Layne leveled up from level one to 22, gained 234 gold, and completed 163 quests.

Nick was our gamer participant who has never played World of Warcraft specifically, but has played similar MMORPGs such as Runescape and was familiar with a similar interface. Nick’s experience with Runescape and basic grasp of concepts as a guide, Nick leveled up from level one to ten, obtained 12 silver coins, and completed 35 quests.

Jonathon was our gamer participant with absolute no experience or familiarity with MMORPGs and was introduced into this unique style of gameplay with no prior gameplay to act as a precedent. As a result of his inexperience with the dynamic and

complex interface of World of Warcraft, Jonathan leveled up from level one to six, obtained five silver coins, and completed eight quests.

Analysis and Discussion

Layne, with his years of World of Warcraft experience, performed exceptionally well during the 5 hours and accomplished many criteria that indicate successful gameplay such as level, wealth, and quest completion. Layne leveled up 22 times, gained 234 gold, and completed 163 quests in the course of five hours. From experience and familiarity, it allowed Layne to approach this trial period with knowledge that would prove most efficient and successful by utilizing multiple gameplay aspects to elevate his success over others. Examples of utilizing his knowledge include his draw towards completing quests and training in dungeons because with experience, Layne knew it was the most efficient method to level higher. Layne also did not use customized macros or hotkeys not because he did not know how, but his experience allowed him to make the decision that it would be more trouble to set it up with the little amount of abilities his character had in five hours.

Nick is our participant with no World of Warcraft experience but is familiar with a similar interface from different MMORPGs. Nick's performance in the five hours was satisfactory, reaching level ten, obtaining 12 silver coins, and completing 35 quests. As a player of the MMORPG Runescape, Nick had similar gameplay style in a different format. Nick says that from Runescape, the core concepts are identical, the repetitive combat to increase levels and the concept of completing quests to gain more experience and items were skills and experience that was transferrable to World of Warcraft.

Although Nick had experience with Runescape, certain gameplay aspects of the World of Warcraft interface remained foreign to him and therefore was unable to be utilized fully because of its absence of anything similar in Runescape such as macros or hotkeys. Nick also did not fully understand how large the World of Warcraft truly was, believing that he discovered many cities and locations when he had really just scratched the surface comparably to Runescape where to most members only six major cities exist for most players.

Jonathon is our gamer participant who had absolutely no experience with World of Warcraft or any other MMORPG. Jonathon's only gaming experience comes from games like "Legend of Zelda." The Nintendo 64 is the most recent console gaming he owns. Jonathon was thrown into a completely new world with no experience of any sorts that is relevant in his situation to help him proceed with efficient success. Unlike Layne or Nick who had questing as a guide and priority, Jonathon's inexperience led him to ignore quests after the initial eight and begin wandering in the world. Jonathon in his five hours of gameplay in a world unlike any other he had seen or experienced before, reached level six, obtained five silver coins, and completed eight quests. Jonathon's interaction with World of Warcraft's complex interface and gameplay did not yield any productive efforts as nearly every button and even the explanations of each aspect of the interface through the early tutorial still seemed completely foreign to him. Even simple actions such as equipping new equipment was unknown as better equipment sat in his inventory, unused. As a result of lack of direction and any sense of priority or experience to tell him otherwise, Jonathon's gameplay primarily consisted of him wandering far off into

different cities and dangerous areas where he would often die from monsters that much stronger than him.

Transferable skills from other MMORPGs to World of Warcraft seem relevant and important compared to those who completely lack it in all aspects of the game. Observations made from Layne's gameplay indicated that Layne had intentions and priorities to complete quests and level higher, skills that define successful gameplay. While Nick approached World of Warcraft with the same mentality but was still overwhelmed with the increased complexity of the online interface. Jonathon, the absolute new gamer to MMORPGs, especially World of Warcraft clearly demonstrated he did not know what he was doing and began to explore the world, completely ignoring quests and criteria for successful gameplay. World of Warcraft's online gaming interface is familiar and similar to many other MMORPGs, but is unique in the fact that you can completely customize the interface. However, none of the players did this, including the most experienced, because of the short time constraints. The only experience and skills that may be transferable are the strategies that level characters up faster. This includes questing and grinding. Layne knew that questing was the fastest way to level up, and spent all five hours doing just that. Jonathon, on the other hand, spent most of his time exploring the world.

Through this experiment, transferable skills from different games into the World of Warcraft have been confirmed. By looking at the success more experienced players with a similar form of the unique interface World of Warcraft uses, it is shown that those who have played World of Warcraft before or other MMORPGs have a higher chance of success in terms of level, wealth, and quest completion than those who approach these

concepts with unfamiliarity, lacking guidance and purpose on what to do and exactly where to go in order to be successful. There seems to be a layered system of skills that players can use. There are the primary strategies, which consist of gameplay techniques, and the secondary skills, which consist of things like physical use of the keyboard and mouse. Questing, for example, would fall under primary skills. This come into play right away and will remain throughout the entire game. Questing is a strategy of gameplay that players can use throughout the entire game to level up and improve their character.

Grinding would also be gameplay strategy and would fall under primary skills

Secondary skills consist of things such as assigning macros and hotkeys. In general, customizing the interface of the game would fall under secondary skills. However, it is difficult to look at almost any of this. This study was conducted under a few constraints, and therefore lacks the ability to analyze a variety of strategies as well as generalize this to all players starting World of Warcraft. First, the players had extremely short time constraints. Five hours is not enough to record a full set of data and see players use strategies that don't come in until a player is further into the game. For example, raiding and battling were never seen among the characters, even though these are two of the most popular activities that players use in World of Warcraft. Along with this, players didn't have time to customize the interface of the game, which also gives insight in the ability of players to use "secondary skills" within WoW. As Layne said, it was not even enough time to set up macros and hotkeys, which is a key skill and strategy in the game that we wanted to observe. A study supplying players more time to log data would be needed to analyze even more details and strategies.

Along with this, the players were given one environment (character class and race) to play with. Further research like this should be done but should put players try players with multiple races and classes. This could reveal different results, or at least any variances among classes. There's no way to tell if Layne was just better with a hunter class than a different class. This study revealed interesting results and showed that there are skills that players bring from previous gameplay and MMORPGs, however further research is needed to be done to analyze more of the skills and strategies players can use.

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