

Why Are World of Warcraft Players Bored?

A Study on What Aspects of World of Warcraft Cause Player Boredom

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Introduction

The Massively Multiplayer Online (MMO) game World of Warcraft (WoW) by Blizzard has been heralded as "one of the most popular massively multiplayer games" (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell & Moore, 2006) and is "one of the most lucrative entertainment media properties of any kind" (Schiesel, 2006). Numerous studies have been conducted to explore the addictive elements of WoW and the sheer number of players have opened up this online world as a new realm for social and scientific studies (Peters & Malesky, 2008). Despite many players' addictions, the age of WoW may be coming to a halt. The number of subscribers since the 2010 Cataclysm expansion has been steadily dropping; from October 2010 to November 2011 alone WoW lost around 2 million subscribers (Peckham, 2011). Amidst all the existing research on WoW and its addictive properties, scant attention has been given to what causes players to stop (Ducheneaut et al. 2006; Deeble 2008).

The impetus for our research was to uncover which aspects of the game drive players to stop playing. When looking through a survey administrated online by Richard Colby on the behalf of the collective WRIT 1133 World of Warcraft Rhetoric classes, we noticed that out of the 455 responses, a majority (393 players) reported taking a break from the game. The survey also asked participants what their reasons were for the break and one option's popularity stood out: Boredom. What about a game, so popular that there are help centers to break addicted users, illicit boredom in its players after extended game play? As researchers with interests in Game Development and Business, we felt it would be beneficial for future game development to uncover which aspects of the game, if any, lead to player boredom and ultimate unsubscription.

Methods

Our research was done in two parts. First, our group utilized quantitative research collected from a class-generated survey administered online. The survey allowed us to quantify the percentage of players in our sample of the WoW community who had at some point experienced boredom with the game. More specifically, these questions addressed whether or not players had taken a break from the game longer than a month, and if so, what caused them to stop playing the game. People's responses as to why they took extended-breaks from the game hinted strongly towards boredom as a primary motivating factor. The initial quantitative survey was significant because it gave us numerical support and allowed us to confirm whether or not boredom was an important factor in the game.

After observing the trends in the quantitative survey, we decided to conduct a qualitative analysis of numerous World of Warcraft forums on boredom in order to determine the rudimentary causes for player disinterest. We used the Blizzard search tool to find the forum threads we observed for this study: which were "I quit WoW" by Absurd, "People bored with Cata? The REAL reasons why" by Arkaan, "Bored?" by Deathfish, "Bored with raids and dungeons" by Delgar, "Bored with WoW? Try this" by Edyrem, "I am Bored with WoW" by Physique, "WoW and Boring, eek!" by Raymonoxide, "Has anyone realized how boring wow has become" by Sneakykitty. Because we were looking for specific content relating to boredom experienced in WoW, we did not have a specific date range criteria for what forums were being used. By analyzing unsolicited responses, we were able to obtain a variety of opinions without being encumbered by participants' unwillingness to participate in the study and the

constraints of time. For each forum post, we noted the name, level, server, and class of each character's posts so the posts about boredom could be attributed to individual participants and to allow an examination of any possible trends between character traits and boredom. The descriptions of boredom from each poster were also noted. Inductive coding was used to identify noticeable trends and create general categories that represent the main causes for boredom. We noticed four strong trends that repeated themselves throughout multiple posts: the amount of end-game content, difficulty and skill level, social interactions, and repetitiveness. The combination of our two datasets were significant in aiding us to get around biases of just the people who participate on the WoW online forums, by giving us the views from other WoW-players through the survey.

Results

Out of all of the responses to the survey conducted on behalf of the class (N=455), 86.37% ($n = 393$) had taken a break from playing World of Warcraft. Out of the portion of responders who cited boredom was the most significant reason: 33.84%¹ ($n = 133$) had taken a break due to boredom, 29.26% ($n = 115$) had taken because of school/work responsibilities, 17.56% ($n = 69$) left the game for other games/hobbies, 8.65% ($n = 34$) stopped because their friends stopped playing, 7.89% ($n = 31$) selected other and provided reasons distinctive from the options given, and 6.11% ($n = 24$) quit because of money/cost.

¹ Some participants selected multiple reasons so the number of responders for each category and corresponding ratios are not exclusive

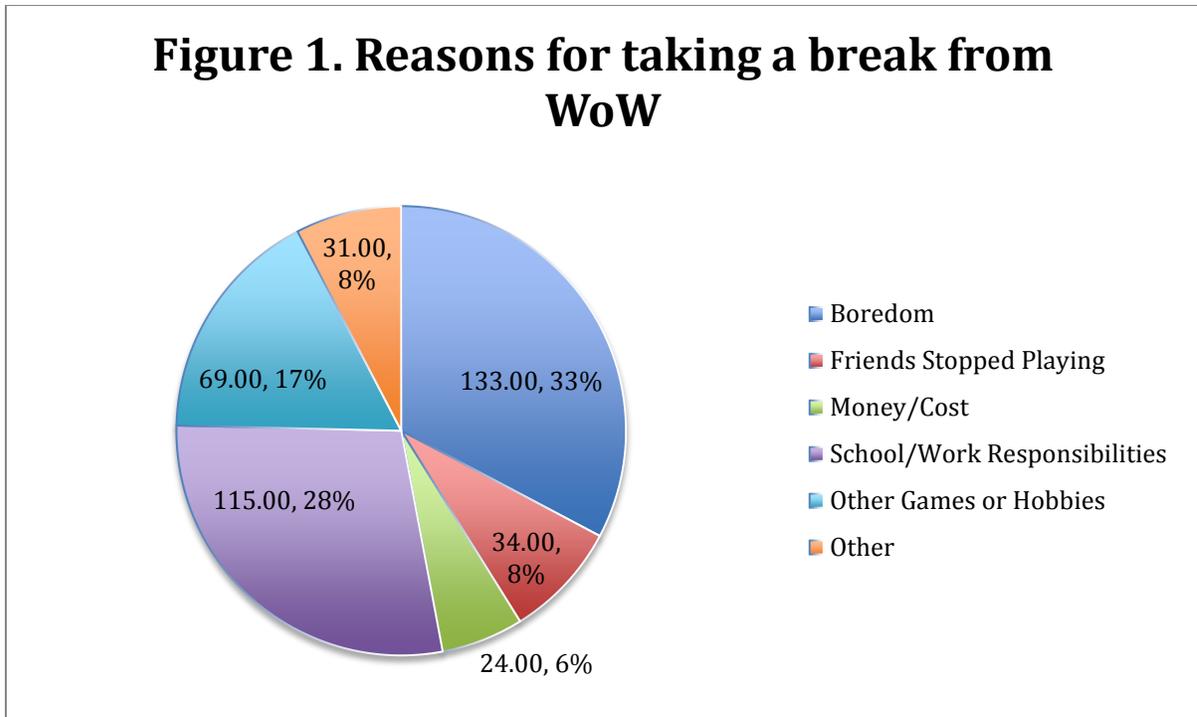


Figure 1.

The Boring Aspects of WoW

The Amount of End-Game Content:

While analyzing the forums discussing boredom in the World of Warcraft, we noted that many of the players complained about a lack of things to do once they reached higher levels. After an extended period of questing and leveling, the absence of exciting end-game content left many level 85 characters feeling bored with the game. Two examples of typical responses in this category are:

“A vast amount of time was devoted to the leveling game, but not nearly enough thought was put into end-game players” (Toast, 2011).

“Wrath [the second expansion] had 12 new instances, all heroic enabled.

Cataclysm has 7 new instances and 2 classic heroics for 9 total. There's literally

no content left to play, no variety and it's effectively rationed thanks to the new lockout system” (Veliladon, 2011).

Out of all the responses analyzed (N=84), 38.09% ($n = 32$) of the responses described a lack of end-game activity as a cause for boredom.

Difficulty and Skill Level

Another trend we noticed was 35.71% ($n = 30$) of the responses stated that certain aspects of the game were not challenging enough or were over-simplified. According to the responses, when gameplay became too easy, players lost the sense of accomplishment they normally received from completing certain tasks and raids. This category also included players who felt that it was too easy to attain achievements or reputation. Making these statuses easier to achieve similarly lessened the player's sense of achievement and eventually lead to boredom.

“With Cat out its boring, I can max out my valor points within a few hours and the last raid to kill DW is really boring once you get the mechanics down I can sleep walk in the new dungeons and raid. Blizzard you need to get some fresh ideas and make things more exciting instead of nerfing anything to death” (Delgar, 2012).

Out of all the responses analyzed, 35.71% ($n = 30$) of the responses described a lack of end-game activity as a cause for boredom.

Repetitiveness

Many players cited that perhaps the key reason behind their boredom within World of Warcraft was due to the repetition of quests, creatures, characters, and armor within the game. Specifically, players said that “grinding” or the act of killing or collecting objects on a large scale for experience, became boring very quickly because the lack of diversity in gameplay. Many of the raids and dungeons are the same from earlier levels, which takes away much excitement and the powerful “wow-factor” from the game.

“I just don't see the point to this game anymore. It has gotten to repetitive and the whole grinding thing is just like a job” (Tineth, 2011).

Of our observations, 35.71% ($n = 30$) of the responses mentioned that repetitiveness of in-game tasks and activities contribute strongly to their boredom with the game.

Social Interactions

Another problem that players note when talk about boredom in-game, is the way that players currently interact with other players. The game, throughout the expansions, has made it easier to group up with other random players to participate in group activities, i.e. raids, dungeons, and battlegrounds. Many players think that the social interactions of the game are breaking down with the accumulation of these new features. Players no longer have to look for other players within their realm to group up with to complete these multi-player events. With Blizzard's addition of the “LFD- Looking for Dungeon”

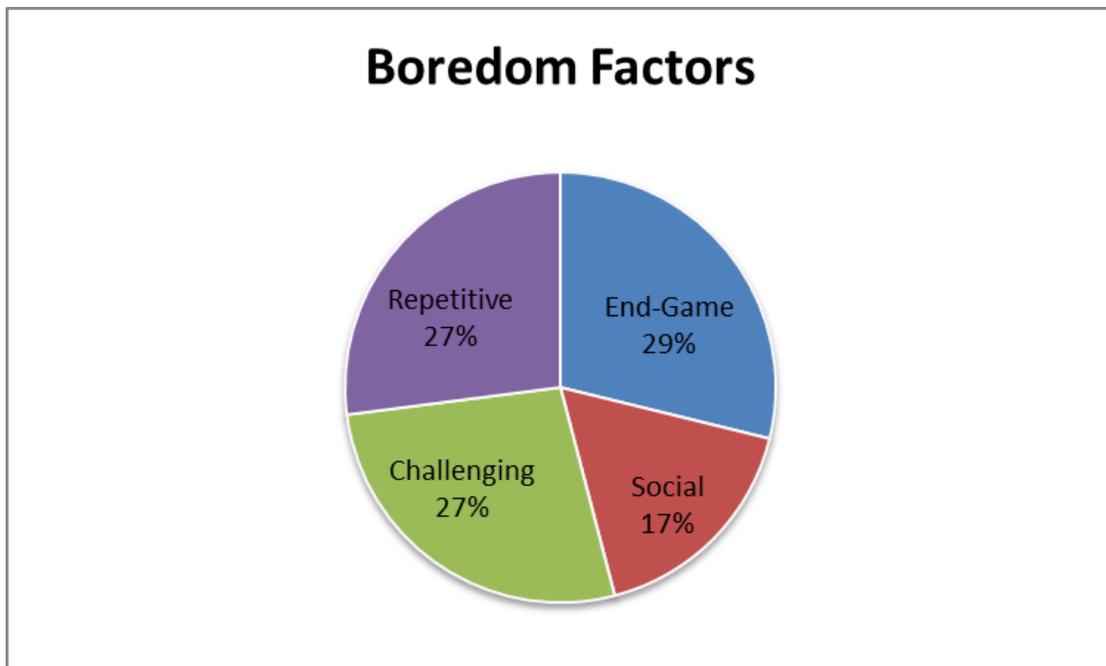
and “LFR”- “Looking for Raid” tools, the need to talk and interact with other players has nearly disappeared.

“It is a social game and despite how we all love to push for the next best thing, there’s no sense doing it if you can’t do it with people who make it fun”(Imbued, 2011).

Of the players observed on the forums, 22.62% ($n = 19$) of the responses included that they had problems with the current social-interaction formatting of the game.

Comparison of Trends

When compared with one another, no trend seemed to be considerably more significant than another in the World of Warcraft community. Although we had 84 responses, multiple players reported more than one source of boredom. To compare the four aspects of boredom, each mention of a problem was given its own weight, changing our total quantifiable answers to 111. Out of all the complaints ($N = 111$), the lack of end-game content was described most as being a cause for boredom ($n = 32$). Tied for second place, each of the Difficulty and Skill Level as well as Repetitive trends made up 27.03% ($n = 30$) of the causes for boredom. The trend mentioned least in the boredom forums was the lack of social interactions ($n = 19$). The following chart shows the amount of each trend in percentages out of the total number of causes for boredom.



Discussion

While researchers have addressed the elements of World that cause addiction, there has been a neglect of study in what leads to player disenchantment. The results of our study seek to provide insight on this gap. Because the game has such great depth to it, the reasons behind why people love or leave the game cannot be explained with the phrase, "it is boring". Our research from the quantitative survey has shown that there is a large number of players who are in some way or another bored with the game. Knowing why players leave a game is very important to game designers and businessmen alike. The research we conducted on this element of the World of Warcraft is significant because it could lead to improvements that attract and retain more players. In this discussion we will present what we have learned concerning what aspects of the game elicit boredom, which result in a loss of player subscriptions.

Of the trends developed in our qualitative research, the lack of end-game content was mentioned more commonly than the other responses. Once players reach the level cap at 85, they are suddenly faced with a lack of exciting game content. Even though many users temporarily quit the game due to these reasons, they are still dedicated to playing the game as shown by participation in forums. In summary, there are players who enjoy gameplay, but after reaching the level cap have nothing to do. Blizzard attempts to combat this by periodically releasing new expansions of the game with new content and higher level caps. Although exciting end-game content is clearly important to any MMORPG, it is questionable whether or not it is feasible to constantly provide enough end-game content to satisfy the community and prevent this sharp decline. It may be the case that avid players will always demand new content at rates which any gaming industry may have trouble satisfying.

Along with the frustration of end-game content, players were also dissatisfied with the simplification of the game. By making the game simpler, it becomes easier for casual players to get into the game, which allows for the potential procurement of new revenue. However, by doing so, it can be inferred from the forum responses that Blizzard sacrifices many of the more complicated aspects of the game enjoyed by veteran players. According to the forums, simplifying or “nerfing” (making weaker) different aspects of gameplay diminishes the epic feeling of importance and achievement one gets from defeating bosses or completing dungeons and raids. Is this wise for long-term income? We see that it is important to balance these aspects and that an equilibrium needs to be created between satisfying long-time players and making the game easier to pick up and

attract new subscribers. Such a balance will optimize the continued success and growth of this game.

Conversely, some players disliked the repetition of the game and the "grind" (a lot of repetitious activity) between levels. Repetition of the structure of quests, raids, and other game content caused many players to become disenthralled with the game. It was interesting to see how many players had such an opposing viewpoint (in comparison to those who stated the game was not challenging enough) of the difficulty of attaining certain achievements and reputations. Many players in this category stated that these reputations and achievements took too long or were too difficult to attain; resulting in a "grindy" or repetitive feeling that left them bored and disinterested. It can be inferred that a very fine line exists between making achievements noteworthy accomplishments and making them endless and tedious jobs. Once again, we see that creating a balance between retaining possibly more "hard-core" gamers and attracting new casual players is important for optimizing the success of an MMORPG.

Although most users' boredom originated in game content, some users play the game for its aspects of social enrichment. In order to make a game more realistic and exciting, some players need social interactions or communities. Many of the posts on the forums described this lack of social interactions as the cause of their boredom. Players feel that it is important to have a community of players so that they can "rely on them as an audience for their in-game performances" (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell & Moore, 2006). More specifically, posters complained that the implementation of LFD (looking for Dungeon) and LFR (looking for raid) queues was partially responsible for the disintegration of communities in the World of Warcraft. These queues group random

players across different realms that will most likely never see one another again; rather than forcing players to form relationships with others within their realm. To improve this aspect, Blizzard should introduce systems that encourage social interaction as opposed to systems with the anonymous properties of LFD and LFR, which discourage the development of relationships within realms.

Our research has shown that a large number of WoW players have taken breaks from the game at some point, and that about a third of these players have taken a break due to boredom. We have also developed major categories that seem to be the more major causes of boredom through inductive coding of various WoW forums on boredom. However, our research did not examine how long a player has stayed with the game before they get bored. For instance, players who have been with the game since the beginning may have more or less of a tolerance for the new changes. Our trends could also be used to examine correlations between other character traits and what the characters are discontent with in the game. It is possible that relationships exist between player levels, type of realms, player factions, player class and the reasons they have for boredom; further improving conjectures on how the game could be improved. Our research also has some limitations that may be addressed in future studies. We developed our trends solely from quantitative data on the WoW forums, rather than the entire WoW community. It is possible that this subset of the community has different perspectives that are not represented in this paper.

The World of Warcraft has been one of the most successful MMORPGs in the past decade, but that is not to say that it will be the most successful in the next. This research is important for the future development of MMORPGs to improve upon areas of

gameplay that are currently considered boring. Many of the results from this study can be applied to the improvement and success of other video games. While our study only brings this problem into light, further studies on how gameplay can be improved may have a huge impact on the success of future games.

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