

Gotta Keep Playing!:
Enticing PvE Aspects in World of Warcraft
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Abstract

World of Warcraft (WoW) is a fantasy world in which gameplay is split into two scenarios - Player Versus Environment, and Player Versus Player. We decided to range over the immersive features of PvE gameplay to potentiate a conclusion on whether or not there are aspects more enveloping than others. 20 WoW players were asked six interview questions through whisper chat in Orgrimmar on realm, Area 52, and in Stormwind on Realm, Hakkar. The interview data was organized into the subsections, dungeons, raids, community, quests, location of play, and solo play, with respect to how these factors enticed players to play WoW. Collected in 2015, relevant data was organized based what was needed to answer our research question. The survey data was tabulated with percentages of the respondent's answer on a likert scale based on the categories of gaming achievements, story immersion, and social interactions. Based on the survey data, It was observed that social interactions were the main PvE metric that enticed players to continue playing WoW, while story immersion showed a lower popularity as an enticing PvE factor. Gaming achievements were in between the other two metrics as some aspects of achievements were popular such as dungeons and raids, while other aspects of achievements were less popular such doing quests.

General Terms

Interviews

Key Terms

MMORPG, World of Warcraft (WoW), Guild, Guildmaster, Leadership

1- Introduction

WoW is a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG). The term is used for many large open world online games and is not specific for World of Warcraft. This means the player creates their own unique fantasy character to roam throughout the neverending online world filled with challenges, magic, and endless opportunities for adventure. The game allows players to choose different fighting styles depending on the class that they select. When logging in for the first time, players are given an opportunity to choose between two opposing factions (Horde or Alliance) to fight for dominance in the fictional game world of Warcraft, Azeroth. On one stands the “noble” Alliance which is composed of humans, dwarves, gnomes, night elves, draenei and worgen while the “mighty” Horde respectively owns the orcs, tauren, trolls, forsaken, blood elves, and goblins (Blizzard, 2016). When one is creating their individual hero, choosing class and race outlines the lore, zones, and interactions the player will assume. However, choosing a class is a more gameplay-oriented choice as choosing a race can be fueled by social preference or game design (as Alliance and Horde are thematically different). As a hero, the world needs the player’s help through the means of questing, where valor and strength as a character and player is tested. But the real test of player ability is through the trials of dungeons, and end-game raids.

It has been noted that interactive gameplay with social aspects are influenced by the presence of human-controlled enemies and allies (Weibel et al., 2008). This brings the player enhanced presence, flow, and enjoyment which suggests that players enjoy competing against other users. As opposed to a conventional NPC-run computer game, online games that are usually filled with human-controlled opponents are accepted to have more feelings of presence, flow, and enjoyment. From this research, we can testify that playing games against or with other users provides different (perhaps better) experience as opposed to playing with computer-controlled opponents and allies. It can be further suggested that the components of presence and enjoyment in a game are mediated by the “flow” of content. One of the two styles of play in WoW are player versus player (PVP) and player versus environment (PVE). PvP allows players to combat other players within the game while PVE allows players to combat the virtual enemies that spawn in the environment of the game. PVE content in the WoW is vast, explorative, and not limited to the same six arenas and abilities given solely to one’s class. This game style gives the player countless opportunities for experience, presence, and enjoyment.

Previous research has explored whether or not highly-immersed WoW players lessen their sensory-realistic interfaces to fully immerse themselves in the game. (Golub (2010) However, the author argues that it is a matter of how much a player concerns themselves with “knowledge-making activities” and to what extent they “create collective projects of action.” Though there is still limited research on which aspect of PvE is more enticing than another and why, our research question is to further explore: what aspects of PvE make the World of Warcraft enticing to players?

2 - Methods

Our sample population included twenty WoW players who were interviewed between April and May 2016. Interviews were conducted with players of characters of varying levels, experience, genders, and classes. The interviews were conducted in-game, in Orgrimmar, the Horde capital city, on the PvE realm Area 52 as well as the Alliance city Stormwind on the realm Hakkar. Interviews we conducted were through whisper chat and asked potential participants whether they would voluntarily consent to an interview, and then asked them questions and recorded their responses. (See Appendix)

The interview data was organized into subheadings to show 2 different trends of gameplay that we explored: aspects of PvE that were present whether one was playing alone or with others.

The survey questions were compiled by 15 students in a first-year writing and research course at a private university in the Western United States to address a descriptive research questions about the attitudes and practices of World of Warcraft players. The anonymous survey was administered through the Qualtrics application, and a link was posted on select internet forums and Twitter. The survey was kept active for 1 week and had 53 usable responses (excluded responses included those who reported under 18 years of age and respondents who did not complete the majority of the questionnaire). This 2015 survey data was coded into tables with means and standard deviations.

3 – Results

Interview data

Playing World of Warcraft with people:

3.1-Community

WoW is a widely played MMORPG that breeds community. The participants of these interviews couldn't create a stronger picture of what community means to this game. A majority of the participants (85%) stated that they would rather play with someone else in the game, than play by themselves. A small population of the participants (10%) stated that they came back to WoW specifically for the community, and to catch up with old friends. Bloodyshot, a level 100 hunter, had this to say specifically about community: "The PvE that makes me keep going is the social/ community and how well they work together or playing with friends but I also do like when the game is challenging and actually makes you have some sort of strategy."

3.2-Dungeons

Dungeons were a topic that continually came up within the interviews about what in PvE makes World of Warcraft enticing. About half of the participants (45%) stated that dungeons were a major enjoyable factor for PvE in WoW. These 45% of players enjoyed the challenging aspects that dungeons provided. These players also stated that they like the cooperative nature of dungeons that forces them to work together and play as a team.

While dungeons overall did get a positive response to WoW PvE, many participants stated that dungeons simply put are just less fun raids.

3.3-Raids

Raids are the largest PvE situations in WoW, and for the same reason they are the favorite of the participants we interviewed. The major of the participants interviewed (85%) stated that Raids were an enticing component to PvE in Wow. Nothing negative was reported on raids during the interviews conducted in the second protocol. Kaaz, a level 100 troll druid, stated: "Raiding/ Challenging cooperative PvE content. Wow raiding is really unlike anything else in any other game. Most games have you working together to defeat another player controlled team. Not a big Bad Boss"

Playing World of Warcraft without people:

3.4-Quests

The interviews concluded that quests were in fact the least favorite form of PvE. A minority of participants (20%) stated that they enjoyed questing and kept them fighting monsters in WoW. Epic quest lines give satisfaction after completion.

A small population of participants (10%) also stated that they see questing as a necessary but unpleasant part of the PvE in WoW. Whether these quests are catching the player up on the story or giving them character experience (which one uses to level up), they are an inherent part of the game.

3.5-Location of Play

The majority of interview participants (40%) stated that they enjoyed playing in Alliance areas. A smaller pool of participants (35%) stated they enjoy playing in Horde areas and the minority of participants (15%) stated that they do not care whether they play in a horde or alliance area.

3.6-Solo Play

A small portion of participants (15%) stated that they would rather play alone versus playing with someone else. These participants have all played longer than 5 years, and have a more aggressive attitude towards the game.

Survey Data

Based on a 5-point likert scale, participants indicated that their motivation to continue playing WoW, where 5 represents that the motivation is always important and 1 represents that the motivation is never important. From the data in table 3, survey respondents (n=52) said that achievements (M=3.94, SD=0.86) was their most important motivation for playing WoW. Survey respondents (n=52) also indicated that socializing was their next highest motivation for them to continue playing WoW (M=3.71, SD=1.04). Respondents (n=51) said that story immersion (M=3.59, SD=0.91) was their lowest motivation for playing WoW.

In a survey for the social interactions of WoW players, participants (N=49) responded that social interaction is a large part of their gameplay (M=2.94, SD=0.8)

Respondents also acknowledged their heavy socialization during active gameplay. Therefore, it is observed that social aspects are the factor that entice players to continue to play WoW, day after day.

The majority of WoW players do not play to immerse themselves inside the reality of the virtual game. Most survey respondents (n=51) were not motivated by story immersion (M=3.59, SD=0.91). This suggests that story immersion is not one of the popular metrics that entices PvE players to play WoW.

Respondents (n=52) also said that raids were their motivation once reaching the level cap (M=4.17, SD=1.09), as opposed to the daily quests (n=51, M=3, SD= 1.1) and dungeons during the level cap (n=51, M=3.16, SD=0.87). This suggests that raids are generally more enticing than daily quests and dungeons.

Table 1. The extent of socializing when playing World of Warcraft, 5-point likert scale, 5 always, 1 never.

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number of Participants (N)
To what extent do socialize in WoW?	2.94	0.8	49

Table 2.) Time spent on PvE aspects at the level cap 5-point likert scale, 5 always, 1 never.

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number of Participants
Dailies	3	1.1	51
Dungeons	3.16	0.87	51
Raiding	4.17	1.09	52
Create/leveling a new	3.26	0.89	50

character (5)			
Role-playing (6)	1.52	1.1	50

Table 3.) - Motivations to continue playing World of Warcraft 5-point likert scale, 5 always, 1 never.

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number of participants
Achievement (Dungeons, Raids, Quests) (1)	3.94	0.86	52
Immersion (Story, character development) (2)	3.59	0.91	51
Socializing (friends, guild) (3)	3.71	1.04	52

4 - Discussion

In our interview data, we attempted to explore whether Alliance or Horde zones were more preferred among WoW players to PvE in. With the split results of 40% pro-Alliance and 35% pro-Horde, (while the rest of the sampling population remains unbiased) we cannot deduce that aspects of presence, flow, and enjoyment are more prominent when playing in Horde or Alliance zones. When further considering solo PvE play, we must incorporate the factor of comfortability/experience with the game environments players throw themselves into. For example, players are more likely to

surrender themselves into game environments where they have seen peril and challenges previously.

Findings from our interviews further emphasize the tedious dimension of questing. Players found this mode of PvE significantly monotonous as time and game experience progressed. This could be another variable in choosing Horde/Alliance zones to grind levels, as other players could determine elsewhere to play based off unstimulating, familiar content.

Raids were the most sought after PvE component of the game. Seventeen out of twenty participants all said that raids were an enticing part of PvE in World of Warcraft. Of the 3 participants who did not mention raiding, one did not have a high enough leveled character to enjoy raiding and possibly did not know what he was missing out on yet. Players spoke about how challenging raids bring people together to work cooperatively on the same goal all at once. Aethren, a level 37 undead warlock with a max level of 100 on a different character had this to say about raids:

I've seen a few things while playing and playing in a group is fantastic if the group meshes properly. If it becomes toxic than the group can just fall apart, friendships can crumble and the fun can just stop suddenly. Nothing beats hearing 25 or more people screaming in excitement when you down a boss.

This cooperation is what drives people, and allows them to continue playing WoW. That feeling in a raid is like nothing else in the game. In the raid, players constantly try to make sure to reach their peak damage per second, heal a injured ally or hold aggro on that final raid boss. The feeling of being in a raid is intoxicating.

Dungeons have been a part of the game since the beginning, and many of the people we interviewed still enjoy their time in the game in these dungeons. However, dungeons have changed throughout their time with Blizzard. Designpatent, a level 41 orc mage (max level 100) who has been playing WoW for 8 years believes that the PvE in WoW has begun dropping off. Dungeon finder has made it so that players no longer have to stand around in front of the dungeon entrance and therefore easier for players to find a group for dungeon they've never done before. It removes a lot of the satisfaction from running a dungeon. You no longer have to run all the way Scarlet

Monastery as an Alliance. While this may make it easier on the players to level up and get gear, it removes some of the challenging aspects from dungeons that players enjoy.

5 - Conclusion

The study conducted was aimed to answer the question “What aspects of PvE make the World of Warcraft enticing to players?” Our group gathered data assuming a mixed method research tradition. The data was collected through interviews and survey data. The interviews were held in game through whisper chat during various PvE activities such as questing and dungeons. No interviews were held during raids due to the lack of a geared character, and challenge of interviewing while in a raid.

The interviews concluded with two different topics. Those who liked to play with people, and those who liked to play without people. Most of the people who like to play with people responded in a very similar way. General statement “We like to play with people because of the social aspect it creates; challenging raids are amazing, but we hate quests.” The people who liked to play alone varied drastically in their responses to those who enjoyed playing with people. Solo gamers enjoy the quest lines and feel a need to be caught up on the game's lore through the quest chains.

Our research includes observations at what percentage of players enjoy the various PvE aspects. However, it does not highlight the context behind why each factors are more enticing over another. For example, players found daily quests less enticing than raids, as seen in the results, but it is not mentioned what makes daily quests less enticing than raids to these players. Another interview question or more detailed interview questions could be useful in determining the reasons why certain aspects of PvE are less enticing than their counterparts.

Although we conducted our research on a PvE server, potential restrictions to our data collected could be the involvement of PvP for players potentially bored of PvE to be a factor of continuous game subscription. Another potential restriction to our research could be that players are likely not going to answer an absurd number of questions - thus we were forced to tailor ours to be as concise and informative to our topic as possible. Potential study improvements for the future could be to make more in-depth qualitative analysis to deduce which aspects of PvE are more immersive than others.

This study has found that community drives players to continue to play World of Warcraft in a PvE environment more than other game factors. Players enjoy the challenging content that requires players to work together in order to achieve success. This creates the question do people enjoy the collaboration in PvP as much as they do in PvE? This study has strictly looked at community in a PvE environment.

6 - References

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Appendix

Interview Data

1. How long have you been playing WoW?
2. What about PvE makes you continue on playing world of warcraft? Explain? (Social?, Community?, Challenging?, Enjoyment?, Story?, Game itself?)
3. Do you prefer playing alone or with people?
4. What forms of PvE do you prefer (Dungeons, quests, raids, etc.)(Elaborate)
5. What is the highest level character you have?
6. Do you prefer PvE in horde or Alliance areas? And why?

