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Effects of WOW on First Time Players in WRIT 1133

This quarter in WRIT1133, “Academic Research,” students were given the opportunity to learn from a unique perspective. While, most WRIT 1133 students were busy reading novels and research papers, the students in Professor Colby’s class based all their research on the hit MMORPG World of Warcraft (WOW). For some students in this course, it provided an opportunity to learn more about a game in which they had already played. For others in this class, the game provided us with the chance to learn about the online game that has attracted massive followings worldwide. There is little doubt about whether or not the students who played WOW before taking the course will continue to play. But, what happens to the students who were “newbies” when they entered the class room on day 1? Will they continue to play? The purpose of our research was to determine whether this class has created a new crop of WOW buffs which would continue to play now that the course is over.

Method

The best way for us to get the quality answers we were looking for was to use a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. We also had to determine which students qualified to be interviewed. The criterion we used to select our participants was “*any student who did not start playing WOW until they enrolled in this class.*” Using this criterion, we were able to get data from six students in our class out of 14 whom met this

criterion participated). We also wanted to look beyond whether or not these students would continue to play at the end of the year. We wanted to know what race, class and professions they chose. The reason for this was to see if we could draw a link between certain character choices and the effect it might have on those who continued to play. To do this, we asked six questions which focused on character selection, progression, and whether or not they would continue to play after the class was finished. To get answers from the students, we conducted in-class interviews with them which lasted for approximately 5 minutes each.

Research and Results

The first question we asked of our participants was what type of character they chose when they started the game. The most popular characters were night elves (one third of those interviewed) and then assorted types of warriors (also one third of those interviewed). We felt this question was necessary because it would allow us to possibly draw a connection later on, to see if there was a relationship between character and continuation of play beyond the course.

Secondly, we asked the students how far they progressed in the game. On average, the participants got to level 16.5 with level 5 being the lowest and level 41 being the highest. It should be noted that the player who only got to level five said they tried three or four characters throughout the class. Also, the player who got to level 41 drove up the average since the next highest player got up to level 25 and after that no one got beyond level 11. It is also interesting that the two players who levelled up the most were both night elves. At the same time, the two players who levelled up the least were both warriors (a dwarf and a tauren).

We then asked our participants if they chose any professions. If so, which ones did they choose and how skilled did they become. Much like the data from the second question, the two players who levelled up the most (night elves) chose skinning and leatherworking and progressed the most in their professions. The other four students, meanwhile, did not choose any profession and therefore did not level up at all.

After taking the results from the first questions, we asked a question that was vital to our research: “*are you going to play now that the class is over?*” This question became a two part answer as we needed to also find out why they were or were not going to continue to play. This was also the qualitative portion of our research. Two of the six student said that they will continue to play WOW now that the class is over while the remaining four stated that they signed into WOW for the last time on May 28th. The two players who said they will continue to play the game were the two night elves who levelled up the most.

The answers which the six players gave were pretty similar depending on which group they fell into:

- 1) Will continue to play WOW once class is over.
- 2) Will not continue to play WOW now that the class is over.

The two players who fell into the first category both stated that the main reason they will continue to play is that the depth of the game is very attractive and that is what makes it so addictive. One player also stated that the ability to stay in touch with friends online was a great feature of the game.

The other four players gave a more broad range of answers. The most common answer was that the game was just too expensive. This also tied into the second issue,

time. Three of the four students said that they just did not have enough time to play the game and because WOW charges a monthly fee, even if they did have some time it would not make sense financially. From this point the answers were anything from “I just don’t like the game” to “I prefer Mavino.”

Implications and Discussion

After analyzing the research, we noticed three important points.

1) Continued play.

This course was able to attract one third of its students enough to continue playing the game once this class is over. Although it may not seem that impressive, imagine the implications of this if just 100 students were to take this course throughout the school year. It would mean that Blizzard would have 33 new players. If Blizzard were given this data, a nice donation to the WRIT department would likely serve as a good investment. For people who enjoy this game a lot, a strong funded WRIT 1133 class would help them not only enjoy the game more, but better understand it as well. This would prove to be a great scenario because the students have fun in class, and work hard on their research, ultimately improving their writing skills.

2) Night elves seem to have a higher retention rate.

Since the two players who continued to play the game were both night elf hunters, it is possible that this character was more attractive to our class’s first time players. This is evident in the amount of extra time these players dedicated to levelling up and learning professions. Perhaps the other players may have enjoyed the game more if they would have chosen a different class, race, or profession.

3) The impact money has on future play is debatable.

While a lot of the players stated that the monthly fee was the main reason that they would not continue to play, this is somewhat questionable. The players who have decided not to continue playing the game also levelled up the least. This leads us to believe that they never really got into the game. If money was the main reason, it would be expected that they would have levelled up more throughout the course of the semester since they had already paid for the three months. The overall thought about money being an issue, is that it really is not a very legitimate reason. \$15 dollars a month is the equivalent to going out to eat for one night. It is not that big of a burden. If this was an excuse for people not playing, they might not be saying what they really think about the game because \$15 is not that big of a burden to continue to play.

Limitations

The main limitation with our research was that we were only able to interview six players. Although it was one hundred percent of the players in the class who met the criteria, it was probably still not enough to get a significant idea. If there were multiple World of Warcraft writing classes at the University of Denver, it would be easier to interview more people, but since there is only one it is hard to find enough people to have a strong pool of interviewees.

The second limitation seems to be that many players perhaps used the money excuse as a way out. Implication number three suggests that these players may have just been hiding what they really thought. It is quite likely that in the classroom setting many players were afraid to admit in front of their peers that they just did not like the game.

Any future research would probably get more accurate responses if they were given away from the ears of others.

Future Research

Aside from future research needing to have more participants, we believe there is some research that could be conducted to build on what we have learned. The implications that class and race have on a person's interest in playing are important. We did not explore that much into this idea, but a good idea to research on would be the correlation between the race and class a player uses and whether or not they will continue to play. In addition, the profession a character has plays a role in the interest in the game. More research could be done on what type of professions make a player want to play the game more. Lastly, if the payment for the game is really an issue, it can dictate whether or not someone plays. A strong idea for future research regarding this would be seeing how many more people would continue to play if Blizzard created a different payment option, such as pay as you go. Fully understanding why these players desire to play the game or not is difficult, but if more people researched these ideas, they would help people understand why the classmates will or will not continue to play.