Help Features Used to Advance: A Way to Cheat?

People use help features as a way of advancing themselves in MMORPG game play

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Introduction

As people become more and more involved in playing MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games) video games, they also become more susceptible to cheating during these games, or as many people would like to refer to it as using "help features". These help features come in many different forms; there are live chat windows within the actual game, there are websites that feature message boards, there are addons that can be downloaded into the game, and many other resources that people can use. These features can not only make the game simpler to play, but also help those players who simply want to advance themselves to the next level as quickly as possible.

For inexperienced players alike with experienced players, help features can add to the players enjoyment of the game by allowing them to feel accomplished when a goal is met. In the game World of Warcraft, a highly played MMORPG, which was released by Blizzard Entertainment in 2004, players take the role of a fictional character, live in an imaginary world, fight with other characters, accomplish quests, and move up levels within the game. In doing all of this, help features have become part of the game play, and many players will admit to using these features every time that they play.

In World of Warcraft, players are given certain tasks or quests as they are called within the game, which they must accomplish in order to move up a level or to move on to the next step within the game. Some quests can be rather simple, such as killing animals such as boars, while other tasks require that the player travel long distances to search for something to return

to the quest-giver. These more challenging tasks can be quite complicated, unless the player knows how to use help-features.

Some of the most highly used help features are websites that contain information about the game that players can look up and find the information that they are looking for. In difficult quests, many people use websites such as wowhead.com, which has a search box where a player can type in the name of a quest and get the exact coordinates of where what they are looking for can be found. Of course, in order to find those coordinates while playing the game, the player must also have an addon to the game which tells them their player's coordinates.

In an article written by A. Fleming Seay, William J Jerome & Kevin Sang Lee, they found that CSCW features (Computer Supported Collaborative Work) did help people who played MMORPGs and are found to be "satisfactory by the small group of players we interviewed" (Seay, Jerome and Lee, 6). Essentially, CSCW features are help tools that help the players accomplish their objectives. These tools can be addons, websites or certain features that are actually found within the game itself such as chat features. The research that was performed looked at the different way in which people used these features, specifically when playing in a guild (a group of people playing in MMORPGs together, specifically in the game World of Warcraft), and how they helped those players advance within the game (Seay, Jerome and Lee, 6). Their results concluded that CSCWs did help players, although not all of the tools that were needed could be found within the actual game world and players often needed to use outside sources (Seay, Jerome, Lee, 1).

Help features have always had a way of allowing players to advance within the game, and World of Warcraft help features are no exception. With the wide spread availability of websites, addons for the game, and discussion boards, it is no wonder how people can reach such high levels in the time that they do. Although the game is supposed to be a game which strategy is used, it is clear that many people do use the help features, and that they are a great help.

Methods

In order to obtain the information in order to deduct a conclusion for the research, a survey of seven questions was composed using surveymonkey.com, a website which allows people to easily design and collect surveys online. The survey included questions regarding how often they play World of Warcraft, how long they have played it and if and how often they use help features within the game. The survey was distributed via e-mail among two different writing classes based upon World of Warcraft at the University of Denver, and was also sent out on many different gaming websites. These websites included blizzard.com which is the developer of World of Warcraft, and also contains many message boards where the survey was posted, and was also posted on facebook.com, which is a social networking site. The survey was also sent out on several websites that simply discussed different video games.

Results

The data that was recorded came from 21 separate participants, of whom 76.2% were male and 23.8% were female that responded to the survey. The reason that is believed to why more males took the survey than females is that according to a previous study, "Male players

were significantly more likely to be driven by the Achievement and Manipulation factors, while female players were significantly more likely to be driven by the Relationship factor" (Yee, 2) and the survey was about help features, which helps to advance players within the game (aka achievement). The average age of participants was 22 years old. 38% of participants recorded that they played the game every day, 38% recorded that they played less than five hours a week but not every day, and 24% recorded that they played more than five hours a week but not every day.
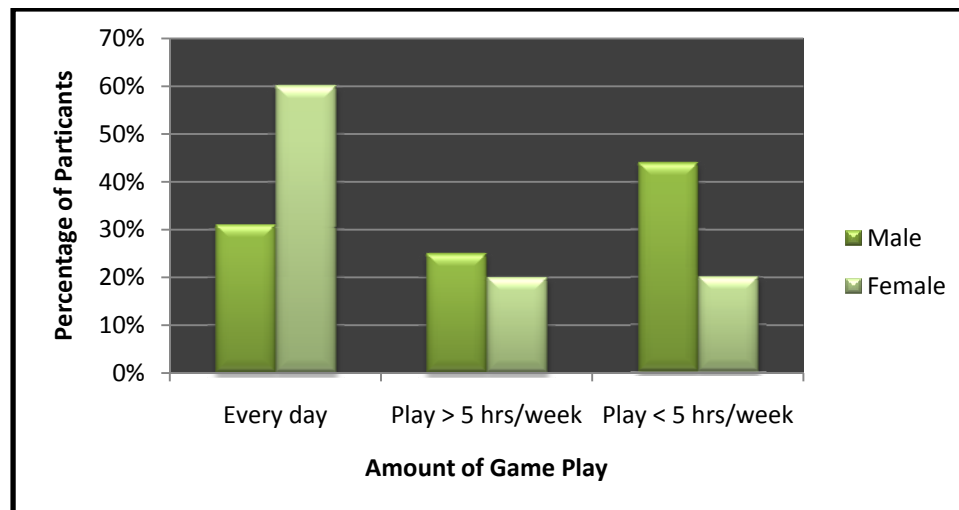
The graph above shows the percentage of participants who play every day, greater than 5 hours a week, and less than 5 hours a week

In the game, people used many different help features to help them advance. In the data recorded, a 19 year old male player who recorded having played the game for three years and plays for 2-3 hours a week documented that he uses the addon "Quest Helper" because it "makes leveling much faster". "Leveling," as he referred to it, is simply the amount of time that it takes a player to get from one level from the next. In the beginning levels, "leveling" is quite simple, especially since there is an abundance of animals, such as boars, around that can be killed to gain experience points, thus also gaining points to move up a level. As a players

levels increase, the difficulty of the levels increase as well, and this makes the higher levels more difficult to beat.

In the data collected, 81% of participants also recorded that they used different help features while playing the game, of which also included addons to the game. Out of those 21 participants, 57.1% recorded that they used the chat feature within the game to ask a question or to ask for help with a quest, and 42.9% said that they never had used the chat feature as a help element for the game. The chat feature is an automatic addon that comes along with the game and is downloaded into the game when the game is downloaded on the player's computer. For those that used the chat features, a 19 year old male who has played for three years said that he uses the chat feature "not often, I used it a lot more when I first began to play." Another participant, a 17 year old female who has been playing for 6 months and plays every day, recorded that she did use the chat tool, but only "occasionally. I usually Google anything I need help with."

Websites and addons have proved to help players accomplish tasks within the game, and can also help while they are playing in guilds. Addons are simply plugins for the game that have a direct impact on the game itself since they are downloaded directly into the game screen. A 24 year old female who has been playing World of Warcraft for four years said that she uses the chat feature, but "just within guild chat". This is a helpful resource that players use while playing within guilds because it allows them to communicate with one another in order to strategize their game play.

As far as the addons to the game go, 17 of 21 participants (81%) said that they did use addons in the game and the most common one seemed to be quest helper.

Percentage Use of Certain Add-ons
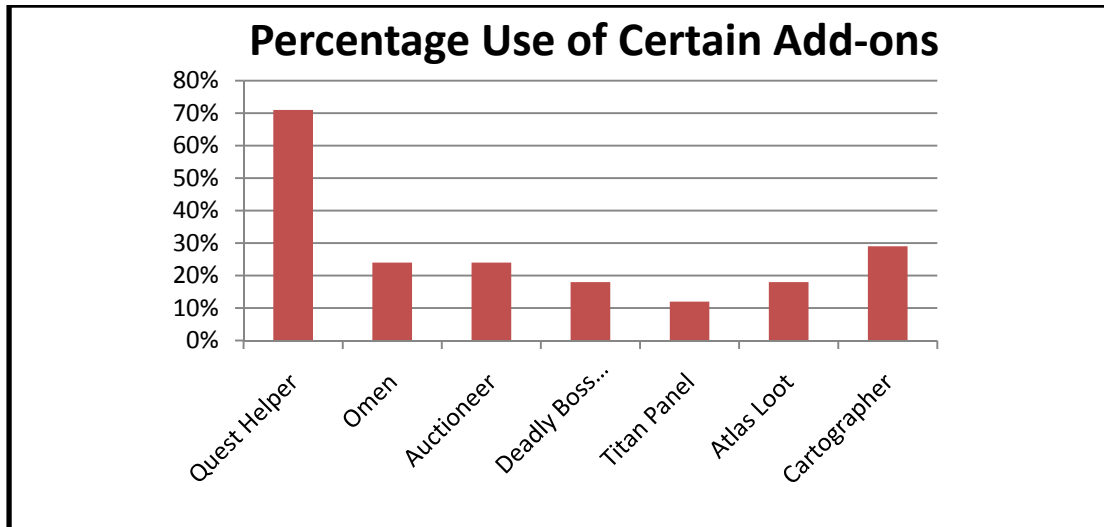
The graph above shows the percentage of participants who used certain addons

There are also other tools besides addons that many players use in order to help with their challenges within the game. There are countless websites that can be found simply by typing in "help for World of Warcraft" in the Google search field. Google search came up with 40,000,000 results for the search basis, and the first ten results are all different data bases where players can find forums, quest walkthroughs, item lists, spells, and overall information for beginners who are interested in learning the basics of the game. Players can find specific websites that hold information on one specific thing, or websites that contain almost anything that they are curious about.

One particular addon, Titan Panel, is an addon that added a bar to the top of the screen that showed the character's coordinates. This was an extremely helpful addon, and was useful in finishing quests in order to move up to the next level. When using a website such as wowhead.com, which 47.6% of participants that used websites for help use, a player can type in the name of a particular quest and the quest information will come up. If the quest requires that the player go somewhere to gather something for the quest giver, or deliver a package of

some sort to another character in the game, this website will give the coordinates of where the

player needs to go, and where they need to return to if the quest is done for the quest giver.

On the top of this screenshot, addon Titan Panel can be seen which shows the coordinates of
the character in the game

In researching how many of these websites work, they all seem very similar to the

format of Google. One website, Thottbot.com, claims that it is a "World of Warcraft Database"

which helps players find out information regarding quests, as well as search for armor and

weapons, and also contains a drop down menu that holds information about the many different

classes, professions, news about World of Warcraft, forums, and miscellaneous items.

←A screenshot of Thottbot.com

Websites seem to be the most popular used tool used in World of Warcraft besides

addons that players have to download themselves. According to the research performed, 95%

of participants who use help features have used websites to help them when they need help during the game. Whether it is a forum website to post a question or a website that has information on how to accomplish quests, these participants used them to help advance them in the game. Compared to the 81% of participants that use addons every time that they play the game, this is a large amount of people who use the internet for sources of help. Those participants who recorded using more addons in the game also seemed to have been playing for a longer period of time, such as a 23 year old male who has been playing for two years and uses 7 different addons, but rarely uses websites for help besides posing on forums and says that he does use the chat feature, however "not very often".

Since World of Warcraft is a MMORPG, it must be played while connected to the internet, so it is no wonder as to why these help websites are frequently used. They all contain different information, and people find that each one has a specific use for every different situation. However, the most frequently used website throughout the world of World of Warcraft seems to be worldofwarcraft.com, a website that is run under Blizzard Games, which is the developer of World of Warcraft.
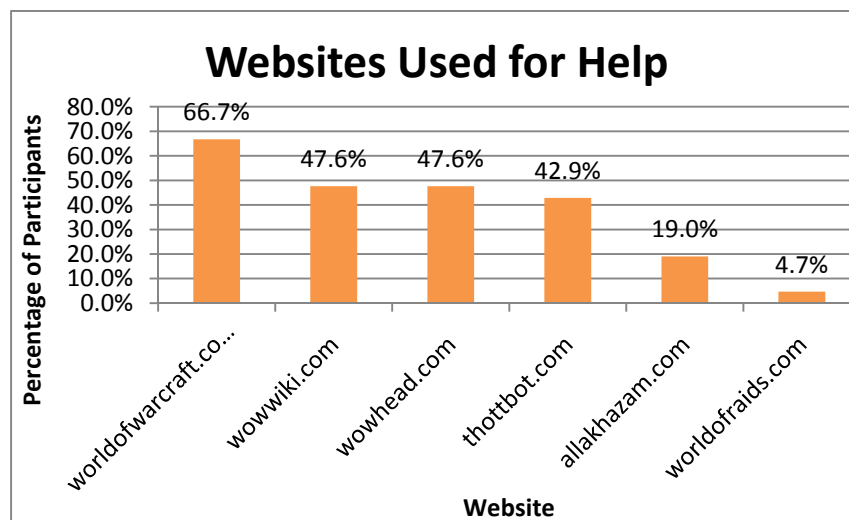
The graph above shows the different websites that are used by the participants in the survey

Many of these websites are not developed by highly paid professionals who know all of the secrets to World of Warcraft and games alike, but are players of the games themselves, and have had to play the game in order to figure out where certain things can be found, and answers to specific questions that other players may have. After these things have been discovered, these people will post on a forum or add information to the search results for something as a quest. As found on wowwiki.com, the equivalent of Wikipedia.org, but for World of Warcraft, anyone is able to edit information found under the results and add their opinions.

Discussion

The results that were collected showed that many people did in fact use help features while playing MMORPGs such as World of Warcraft. Many of those people recorded that this is due to the fact that help features such as addons, websites and chat forums hold information that can help people advance in the game more quickly than if they were to play the game without any help.

The results found that more experienced players use addons more than they use websites for information, and those less experienced players used websites to look up help information (for quests, etc.), used the chat feature, and had less addons than the experienced players did. Message boards seemed to be used almost equivalently by both kinds of players, some who used them to ask questions, and others used them to answer questions.

Help features are a tool that has changed the way that people play MMORPGs, and will continue to advance as developers learn more about the game. As long as player keep on

playing the game and responding to the way that things work inside the game, addons and help websites will continue to expand and people will keep on advancing to the next level at a quicker rate.

Bibliography

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2) Yee, N. (2006). The Demographics, Motivations and Derived Experiences of Users of Massively-Multiuser Online Graphical Environments. *PRESENCE: Teleoperators and Virtual Environments*, 15, 309-329.