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The Add-On Phenomenon

Introduction

Within the gaming world of *World of WarCraft*, there is a unique aspect of game-play

which allows a player to download a game alteration which changes how the player perceives,

interacts and functions within the game; these are commonly referred to as Add-Ons. Add-Ons

are program files that are provided for download and implementation within *World of WarCraft*

from third party sites (that is sites independent from Blizzard entertainment, the makers of

World of WarCraft). Add-Ons range from altered heads-up-displays (HUD) which show the

WarCraft Avatar's respective stats: Health, Mana, Rage, and also those aspects of targeted

enemies, action taskbar manipulators which allow for the customization of the game screen

and accessibility of avatar abilities and items, to in game hints and walkthrough guides.

Fascinated by these unique game alteration programs our research team was hard

pressed to find any literature that is research pertaining to the use, success, marketability or

any other aspect of the Add-On concept anywhere within the scholarly community. This lack of

foundation or any previous direction by other researchers left us to pose our own inquires as to

the affect and nature of third party site Add-Ons. Our primary inquiry which we have pursued

is firstly how commonly used are World of WarCraft and how effective are they for players?

Method

In order to receive as many responses as possible about Add-Ons and their interactions

with players, we created a survey. This survey questioned the player's favorite/most useful

Add-Ons and if they believed Add-Ons helped them manipulate the game in their favor. The

survey also included a question asking what the player's main character class was. The player's

class could have a correlation to the type of Add-Ons they use as certain ones can be beneficial

for some and not beneficial for others. After creating our survey, we posted a link to it on

various *World of WarCraft* online forums, most notable being WOW Forums. We also inquired

as to the length of time that those surveyed had been playing *World of WarCraft*, believing that

this too might be a factor in Add-On usage and player's attitude toward Add-Ons. Similarly we

asked how many characters within game a player had, searching for a relationship here as well.

To keep players anonymous, we posted a link where it would take them to the survey. We

wanted to target players who utilized Add-Ons regularly. In the end we were able to receive 54

responses from players who did use Add-Ons; however almost all of the players were level 80.

Results

Veterans and Novices

In order to find relationships between the number of Add-Ons of a certain player and their respective satisfaction with said Add-Ons in relation to their ability to enjoy the game and other aspects of their gaming experience within the *World of WarCraft*, we took our survey data and reorganized it searching for possible relationships. The first variable that we examined was satisfaction with gaming experience and number of Add-Ons in relation to number of months those surveyed had been playing *World of WarCraft*(Figure 1).

This data appeared to show a distinct spike in the number of Add-Ons used after about a month of game-play following a gradual increase from 4-11 months of playtime. Players at this level of game-play averaged up to 70 different Add-Ons. But interestingly enough the trend did not continue to increase with the months played by each individual surveyed; around three years of game-play the surveyed amount of Add-Ons leveled off at 10-15 Add-Ons per player after a gradual decline between a year and two and a half years playing World of WarCraft.
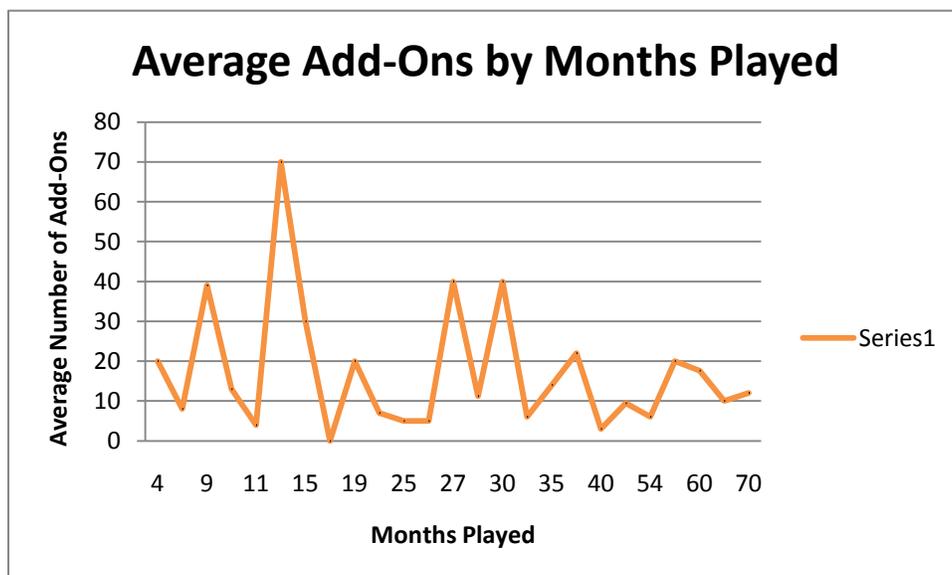

Figure 1

Next we compared the amount of play time with Add-On Satisfaction (Figure 2). This comparison yielded results that showed a consistent satisfaction (that is a

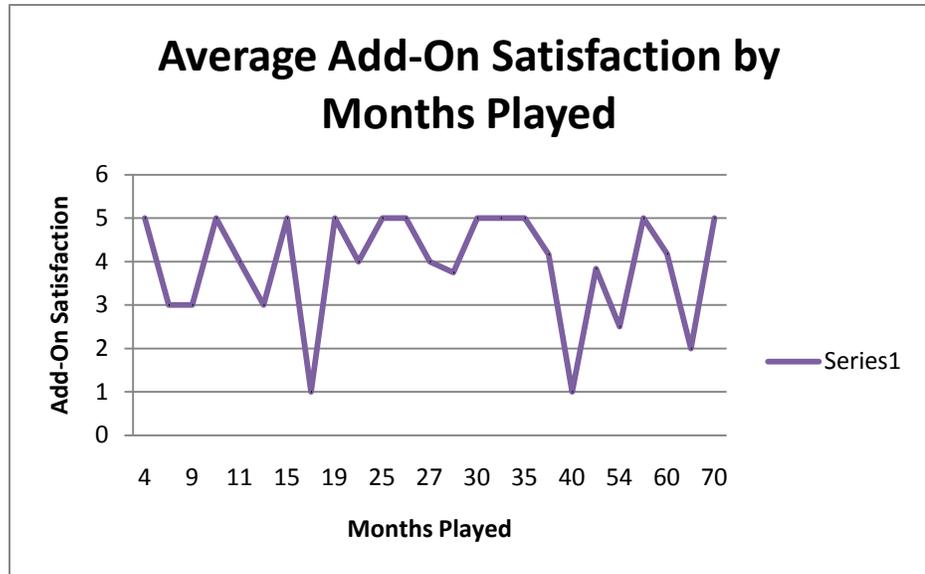**Average Add-On Satisfaction by Months Played**

Figure 2

response of *agree* or *strongly agree* to the survey inquiry: *Add-Ons are required to play the game (World of WarCraft) the way I want to play it)* across the whole of the spectrum of months of game-play responses, with dips (that is to say responses of *disagree* and *strongly disagree* to the survey inquiry) at the months played marks 18 and 40 months.

Multi-Character

A second variable that was tested in order to determine a probable cause for and general feeling toward, third-party site Add-Ons was number of characters within the game. With a World of WarCraft subscription and account, a user is able to create and develop a total of 50 distinct and unique characters with the game across multiple servers or realms[1],

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[1] Realms or servers refer to the ability of beginner players and more experienced players to enter worlds more appropriate to their skill level, therefore the realm in which one plays varies as to the other users who play there as well. These servers are divided into four distinct variations: PVE which stands for Player Versus Environment which is a server tailored to beginning players, PVP which stands for Player Versus Player, a more challenging and intermediate level tailored server, RP which is meant to be understood as a Role-Playing server in which there are strict rules as to communication in game: these are the upper level players who fully assume the mantle and character of their avatar in the game, and finally there is the RP-PVP server which applies the Role-Playing principle of the previous server and the Player Versus Player aspect of the one before that.

therefore our research team investigated whether or not this statistic (number of multiple

World of WarCraft characters) was in any way related to a player's amount of Add-Ons and said

player's satisfaction with those Add-Ons.

When compared to the amount of characters on a single surveyed player's *World of WarCraft* account, the average quantity of Add-Ons gradually increased as
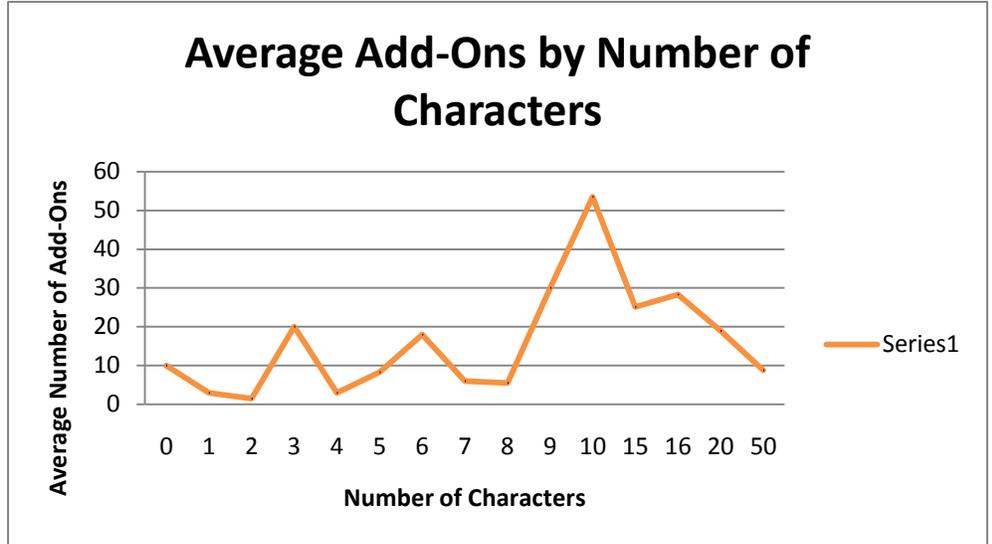
Average Add-Ons by Number of Characters

Figure 3

the number of characters increased from 1 up to 10 different characters (Figure3). However at

this point in the data, that is the data representing players with greater than 10 different
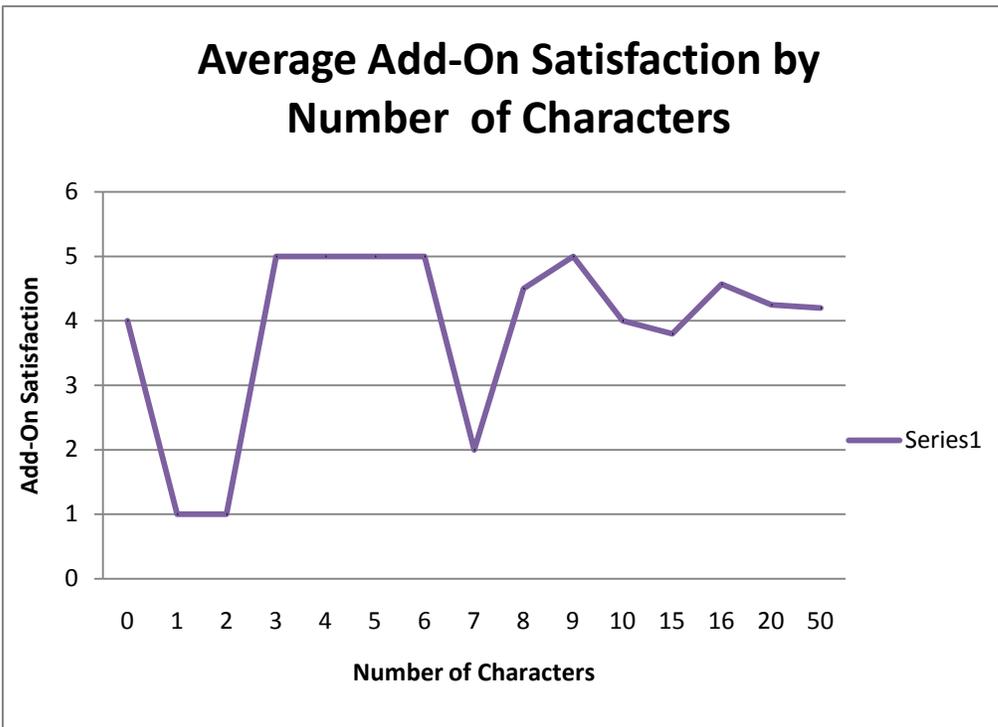
characters on their account, the amount of Add-Ons began a drastic and abrupt decline.

As to the relationship between Add-On satisfaction and number of different characters within the

Average Add-On Satisfaction by Number of Characters

Figure 4

game, we find a very similar trend to that of the previous data set related to months played of World of WarCraft (Figure 4). In a very real sense the spectrum of surveyed responses asserted a consistent satisfaction (again responses of *agree* and *strongly agree* to the survey inquiry) with Add-Ons with exceptions among those players surveyed who had 1-2 and 7 different *World of WarCraft* characters.

A Class Diversity

The third and final line of our research team's inquiry as to the use of and satisfaction with third-party site Add-Ons had to do with finding a relationship between our two focus variables and a player's chosen class[2] with regards to his or her primary avatar. This is an interesting aspect of *World of WarCraft* game-play which reflects up the player's personality and our research team thought it might have an impact as to a player's satisfaction with and use of Add-Ons.

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[2] A *World of WarCraft* Avatar's Class refers to the primary style of play which an avatar is able to participate. Gamers are allowed to choose between 10 separate class titles, Druid, Hunter, Warrior, Rogue, Mage, Paladin, Warlock, Shaman, Death Knight and Priest. This choice determines the armor and weaponry an Avatar can equip, in addition to the potential abilities, powers, skills and spells one can learn within the World of WarCraft.

When we compared the surveyed amount of Add-Ons to the surveyed classes of our test subjects, we found what appeared to be a uniform average across all Class types of 5 to 20 Add-Ons per player (Figure 5). However participants who indicated they played a Warrior were shown to have two times the amount of Add-Ons of every other one.
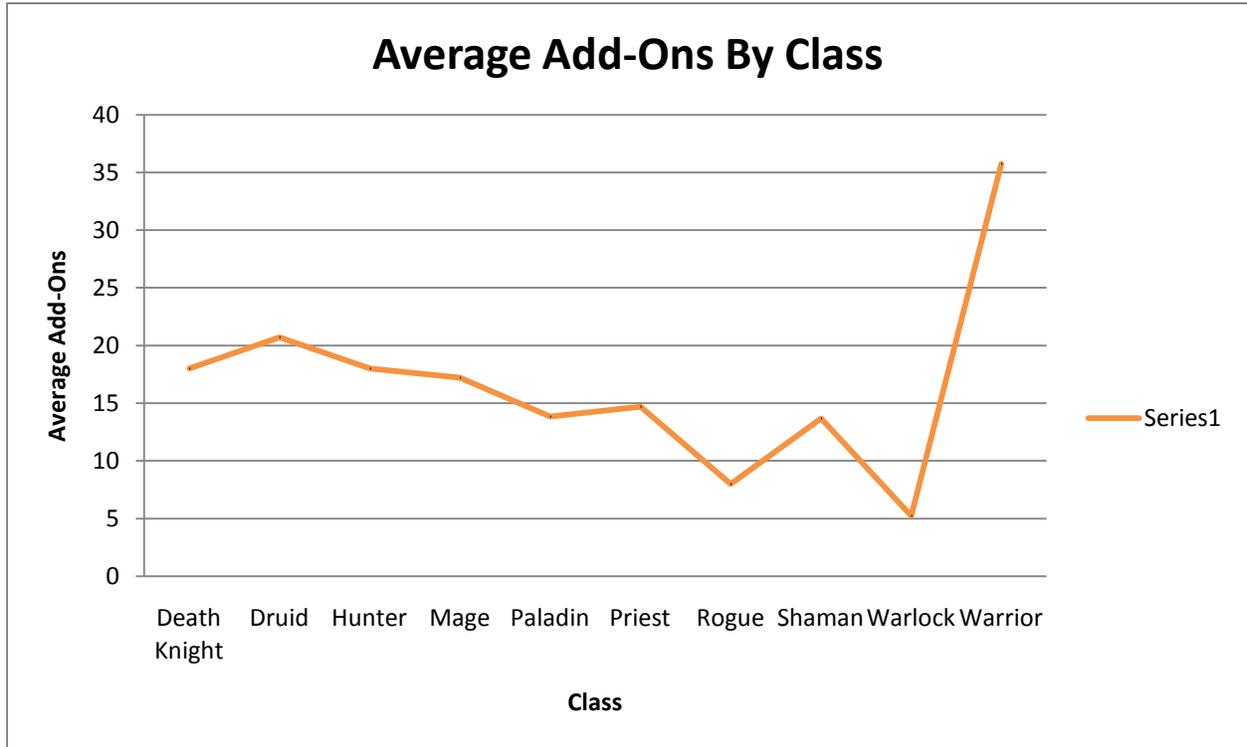
Average Add-Ons By Class

Figure 5

Finally when compared with the average satisfaction of third-party site Add-Ons participants indicated a uniform satisfaction by class of agree or above with the exception of Hunter class whose average indicated a satisfaction of disagree responses (Figure 6).
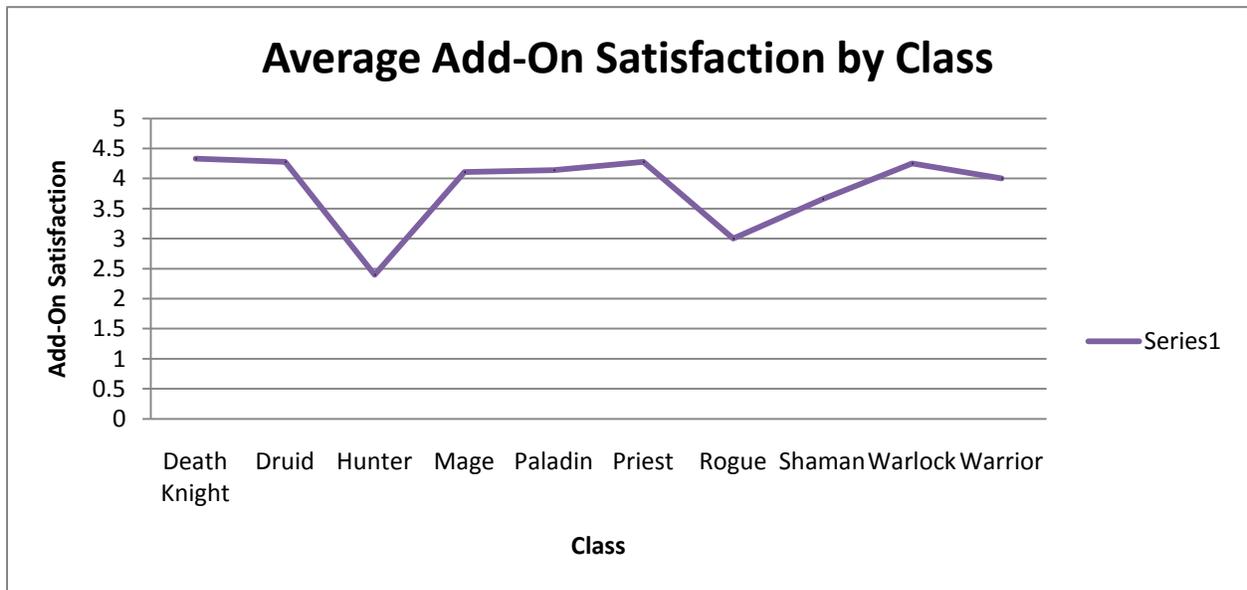
Average Add-On Satisfaction by Class

Figure 6

Analysis and Discussion

So What?

Our research team's findings can be used to infer relationships and possible motivations for the trends that they seem to represent. The gradual increase, spike and leveling off trend shown in Figure 1 is very interesting and our research team has analyzed this strange trend and come up with this assessment: we believe that as a player becomes initially introduced to *World of WarCraft* there is a certain learning curve period in which the game is played in its unaltered, Add-On free state, and as a player continues to learned the facets and inter-workings of the game Add-Ons are added gradually once a firm foundation as to the nature of game-play is established. This would serve to explain Figure 1's initial gradual increase over the first few months of game-play. After this foundation period we believe that players install and implement more and more Add-Ons (as indicated by the spike at the twelve month mark in Figure 1) in an attempt to try and experiment with different combinations and alterations of

the *World of WarCraft* user interface to figure out which of those Add-Ons best suit the type of gaming experience said gamer wishes to experience. This theory would be supported by the dropping and leveling off of Add-On usage for players of several months experience in that these users would have determined and narrowed down their individual Add-On preferences to a more succinct and selective grouping of interface alterations.

The data exemplified by Figure 3 shows a similar gradual increase, spike and leveling off form though this time our tested variable was that of multiple characters within game. This spike could be caused by the variable previously discussed, however if one isolates the relationship solely to the amount of multiple characters a surveyed player has this trend seems to indicate that players with ten different characters use the most amount of third-party site Add-Ons. Why could this be? Our research team has come to formulate a theory as to this relationship's form and it is as follows: being that the ten character mark is relatively small on the scale of what is possible of a *World of WarCraft* subscriber (players can have up to 50 different characters) this spike may be an example of a cause similar to that of the above proposed theory, that is to say that there is a certain learning curve period associated with that of multiple character use with the *World of WarCraft* as (was proposed) with months having played the game. So a player who has gradually worked up to ten different *World of WarCraft* avatars would be experimenting with several different Add-Ons in order to determine, for example, how different characters and gaming experiences (varying by the class, race, and server of each character) are affected by the wide array of third-party site Add-Ons available. If this is in fact the case then after a "weeding-out" period those players with more multiple

characters would reduce the number of Add-Ons that they implement within their gaming experience.

The final analysis of the average amount of Add-Ons pertains to the individual character class of the surveyed population's main *World of WarCraft* avatar. This was by far the most interesting comparison yielded by our research in that the average Add-Ons among the surveyed players averaged between 5 and 20, with the exception of the warrior class which averaged 35 different Add-Ons as seen in Figure 5. This research team has formulated two possible causes for this fact: firstly this could be evidence of an outlier and a single unique player who has a number of Add-Ons that is not representative of the entirety of the Warrior class of avatar which would have skewed this particular instance of data. Leaving that aside though, this could indicate an universally more interesting quality of the class of warrior specifically. One could postulate that a player needs more Add-Ons inside the warrior class gaming experience to compensate for the bare nature of said gaming experience[3].

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[3] A unique property of a *World of WarCraft* Avatar's class is their ability to serve different in game functions, these refer to the role an avatar can take in battle whether on one's own or with regards to raiding. The there are three different such roles: Tank, Healer and Damage Dealer. The tank role is meant to allow for an avatar to take significant damage in order to wear down a foe, a healer can restore health to its self or those battling with them within game and Damage Dealers are designed to get in and do as much damage to an opponent as quickly as possible. Now many of the Classes one can choose with *World of WarCraft* allow the potential for a player to serve every single one of these functions in game, however the Warrior class in particular allows an avatar to only serve as a Damage Dealer. Keeping this in mind in order to effectively succeed within the game as a damage dealer exclusively one must have the best possible gear in order to do the most damage in the least amount of time, that would indicate a need to complete more quests which award a player gold and gear with increase their capacity to deal damage as is their function. This being the case, there are countless Add-Ons which are designed to aid in the completion of quests and further the acquisition and management of gear within game. Therefore a character with the Class Warrior would want to implement more Add-Ons than that of another class.

We chose to analyze the three separate relationships of our test variables with regards to what we defined as Add-On satisfaction together and last because the findings seen in Figures 2,4 and 6 are particularly interesting.   There appears to be no distinct or significant relationship as to the satisfaction of a user and their class, months having played *World of WarCraft* or the amount of multiple players each player has. There are no identifiable trends or patterns which would indicate that any of our test variables had a causal relationship with the satisfaction of a player. This seems to be making the assertion that Add-Ons are viewed as useful or as satisfactory towards the end of experiencing the *World of WarCraft* the way in which a player wishes to, solely based on the nature of the player's preference, or more accurately, if the case were to be made, their satisfaction is determined by a variable that was not tested by this study.

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