

Motivations for Gameplay

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In asking what general factors motivated players to indulge in virtual entertainment, such as *World of Warcraft*, it is important to note the differences between massive multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) and other game consoles. Because the established qualitative research is centered on the *World of Warcraft*, this research focuses on and describes the characteristics of gameplay associated with specific genres of gameplay, making the distinction between online role-playing games and game consoles. Through our research we found that MMORPG motivation is generally motivated by three factors: achievement, socialization, and immersion.

While many MMORPGs can vary in several aspects, the most obvious appeal derives from the elements of achievement in these environments. They cater to players who enjoy accumulating wealth, skills, and tangible power. Researcher, Nick Yee, breaks achievement into three separate aspects of advancement, mechanics, and competition (Yee). Advancement, typically, is the driving force behind games. Without leveling, it is hard to gain the experience, strength, and wealth needed to do anything significant within the game. Interestingly, out of the five interviews completed of *World of Warcraft* gamers, none of them voiced concern or mentioned advancement as their priority. However, in the case of *World of Warcraft* and the associated subjects, it is likely that this lack of direct concern with advancement can be contributed to the fact that many have already undergone considerable amounts of training and that the game system is specifically designed to make leveling an integrated aspect of the game. Among quests, item hunts, and exploring, grinding becomes a minor objective. In other MMORPGs this is not, necessarily, the case. For example, games such as *Priston Tale* and *Final*

Fantasy XI are prime examples of popular massive multiplayer games that focus on the basis of group grinding experiences.

Many of the newer players found that their main drives for playing were largely centered on understanding game mechanics and basic concepts. Interviews of students who recently began to play *World of Warcraft* for their class indicate that those students who are continuing to “learn the basics” are also characterized by low playtime and general interest in the game. When asked what their main motivations for playing *World of Warcraft* were, many responded that “they play to satisfy class requirements” and to “figure out how the game works.” Although they did express that they were interested in the game, there was little indication that they had intentions of further pursuit of gameplay beyond their perception of what was required of them.

Interestingly, the fact that they knew multiple friends who were active in this virtual world had little to do with their involvement and determination.

The other main appeal derives from the ability to chat, make friends, and interact with social groups such as guilds. This trait tended to be characterized by opposite motivations for gameplay. Interviewed players, such as Christopher Stjernholm, typically had high level characters, strong attachments to guilds, and a variety of friends who interacted within the game. His main reasons for playing the game revolved around gaining items and prestige, but the majority of his time spent within the virtual world is used to help guild member and friends.

Many players also find appeal in becoming immersed in a fantasy world and becoming part of a story that is being told. While non-role-playing games do provide some levels of temporary immersion, MMORPGs are renowned for their life-like features that provide an escape from real responsibilities and displeasure. Characters have the freedom to move and interact freely with their environment. This aspect of personal choice influences how the game is

perceived by each player, giving it similar freedoms to those found in real life. These outlets can provide a respite, but also threaten to take up valuable time. Tyler Martin, a student at the University of Denver and an avid gamer, identified the *World of Warcraft* as an alternate “dimension” to life. It is a world that runs parallel to the social and physical laws of our own, yet actions and direction of the “life” course of the avatars are largely unhindered by these societies. In this way, *World of Warcraft* and other MMORPGs create an idea of escape from worldly responsibility and restrictions that is real enough that the player derives meaning from playing. Although the interviewee currently plays on a player versus environment server, many immersion-oriented players are involved with role-playing servers to capitalize on the aspects of the game that they enjoy.

MMORPGs are seductive because they have hooks for many different kinds of people and appeal to them through different means. To a certain extent, these worlds are derived from a society of players who are playing unique roles in a parallel environment. These are dynamic worlds because of this diversity of motivations and because players are ultimately playing the same game. Adventures, alliances, and betrayals emerge as players collaborate to achieve very different goals and, as a result, create an entire alternate world in which they can operate. Playing console games like Nintendo, Playstation, and Xbox are both similar and different from MMORPG’s like *World of Warcraft*. They can be similar due to the fact that students play both types of games for fun or to get away. However, we have found that the type of people who play Nintendo and other game consoles are usually not *World of Warcraft* players. This leads to the idea that the type of people who play MMORPG’s and the type of people who play consoles play for different reasons.

Reasons for playing *World of Warcraft* and other MMORPG's differ from reasons for playing game consoles. Specifically, *World of Warcraft* has three main reasons for play. One can play to level, role play, or just to fight other players. In more depth, people might play to collect or sell items at the auction house, meet and play with people, or simply kill time. Our research indicated that game consoles are used for similar purposes, but each game or genre is unique to another, causing variances in motivational influence. For example, one may play *Zelda* on Nintendo, play *Halo* on Xbox, *Top Spin* (tennis) on Wii, or *Guitar Hero* on PlayStation. *Zelda* differs from *Top Spin* because *Zelda* is an adventure game while *Top Spin* is for fun and action. *Guitar Hero* differs from *Halo* because *Guitar Hero* is more for actively engaging in some of favorite songs while in *Halo* you're sole mission is to blast all living things on the screen, complete objectives, and finish the game. So we see that game consoles allow for more specific ways to "have fun." At the same time, we recognize that many games are available across consoles, such as *Guitar Hero*. From our results, it seemed that the type of console had little impact on the perspective toward the game, but that all consoles had similar results or restrictions compared to MMORPGs. Even games like *Halo* that focus on multiplayer aspects of gameplay are effectively limited by both storyline and a lack of an in-game, dynamic world that players will be able to interact in and make choices that will alter their continued gameplay.

We find that MMORPG's and game consoles are the same in the way that people have different motivations for playing them. However, the difference is that MMORPG's are much more in depth and organize a completely different world in which people are allowed to freely interact, while specific games fit focused goals on game consoles. After several interviews, a recurring theme began to develop in regards to what people found to be their motivations for play.

We first asked students what games they played and on what game console. The sample data ranged across a multitude of gaming platforms including responses varying from *Super Mario Kart* to *Star Wars*. But, generally, each student had played a little bit of it all. Then we followed up by asking why they like to play these games and one student, Chris, a participant in the *World of Warcraft* class responded, “Usually I just play it for fun, my sister and I will be bored and say, ‘hey lets mess around with some game.’” Another student, Tyler Morton, who plays sports games responded, “Because their fun, I don’t really play them that much.” People play games because the process of game playing is engaging. In fact, the top two reasons people say they play interactive games, according to the Interactive Games Association, is because they are challenging and relaxing.

Of course, all games revolve around entertainment whether it is *World of Warcraft*, *Everquest*, *Super Smash Brothers*, or *Guitar Hero*. This led us to analyze why these games are fun and what are the differences in entertainment value. For those who enjoy playing games to quest or complete missions then you will, most likely, want to play games ranging from *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, *Jack and Daxter*, to *World of Warcraft*. Instead if your idea of fun is playing sports then one might play *Madden NFL 08*’ or *WWE Smackdown vs. Raw*.

Main motivations for playing adventure games on game consoles are usually based off of a yearning to complete an intricate story line and “beat” the game. We find that with new games that come out, avid players will try and end the game as soon as possible (Prensky). This attitude acts as a temporary addiction where the player must play to get a fix. They are drawn to and compelled to play in order to satisfy their curiosity or other entertainment goals. Joshua Rogers, a student at the University of Denver, who plays *Halo* explained why he plays and how long it took him to complete the game. “I get to do missions and it’s exciting to beat the game. I beat

the last game that came out in 2 days.” This can be common among gamers, however, there seems to be a dichotomy. One end of the spectrum will play at a rapid pace spending hours on the game until it is complete, while another will spend only small increments of time involved in gameplay to pass bouts of boredom. Generally, we found that avid gamers tended to gravitate toward action adventure games. This genre gives people a sense of accomplishment through completion and that is what makes the game fun for them.

When people play sports games they, too, play for fun. However, the idea of “fun” relies more on the motivation to win. They also feel like they are more connected to the sport although they cannot really play professionally. Joshua Rogers likes to play *Madden NFL 08*. He told us, “It’s just fun. You can play for an NFL team and it is my favorite sport. You can get your stats up and get an online reputation. It’s like really playing football!” Whether a gamer is playing an interactive game or not, one still gets the same emotional stimulus, just from different motivational factors.

Deeper than fun, we looked at why it is fun. After listening to responses from interviews, we found that games allow people to be in another world for that moment. Alexandria Santistevan who enjoys playing adventure games concludes, “When I play these games I can escape from the real world and be somewhere else where there are no troubles, well nothing I can’t beat at least!” This aspect of immersion can simply be a release from responsibility or a goal to complete a defined objective.

In this way, massive multiplayer online role-playing games differ from console-based gameplay. Often the idea of immersion results in virtual responsibilities due to player to player interaction and, although quests offer common goals, the sheer variety and availability of choices makes the game much less story-based, but reliant on the cultural alignment the game instills.

While MMORPGs focus on achievement, socialization, and role-based immersion, non-MMORPG game motivations tend to be comprised of more spontaneous involvement and person-to-person interaction or competition. Games such as *World of Warcraft* and *Final Fantasy XI* garner player satisfaction through long-term achievement goals. As players constantly compete to be better, a variety of factors create player gratification. This tends to be a nearly infinite process because each is trying to “outdo” the player next to them. Contrary to massive multiplayer genres, games like *Halo* or *Zelda* focus on significant, instant gratification at major points of achievement throughout the game and in its completion. These differences can largely be attributed to the continuously evolving environment in online games and the short-term, static environment created by console-based games. Any expansion of the story line must be created through the addition of a sequel game. Although, MMORPGs also rely on expansion tactics to continue player interest, game consoles are far more reliant on game hardware to expand storylines and create new points of interest. In these games, storylines are often only loosely tied to the previous edition and characters are begun anew.

Due to increased MMORPG trends, many platforms have put forth games that “bridge the gap” between the massive multiplayer worlds and the story-based interaction of adventure games. Popular examples including *Phantasy Star Online* and *Final Fantasy XII*. With well over 3.8 million copies sold, each game had a great deal of success (Square Enix). These games incorporated aspects from both genres of gameplay in an effort to appease the majority of players. However, both games resulted in similar dead end results. *Phantasy Star Online* never gained enough intricacy within the online environment. The idea of grinding only lasted so long and players tended to tire of the game over extended periods of time. At the same time, *Final*

Fantasy XII only simulated player-to-player interaction and, although, it provided superior freedom to gamers, the storyline comes to a definite and final conclusion.

Ultimately it is the inclusion of a definite storyline and player interaction that defines the differences in motivation between MMORPGs and other games. Player worlds are formed that allow for maximum freedom and infinite possibilities through players' choices. Each choice will impact other characters on the server providing a constant stimulus for change and increased excitement. While motivations vary by player they are all tied to these two aspects of MMORPG gameplay. These factors also seem to explain the eventual "death" of the non-MMORPG games. Each relies on at least one form of achievement, social interaction, or immersion to motivate gaming in either short-term or long-term satisfaction.

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