

“The Value of the World of Warcraft”

By Scott Reed

When a person purchases a subscription from Blizzard, and logs on to the World of Warcraft, commonly known as WoW, they are buying a ticket into a world of endless possibilities. From marching alone in the Barrens of Azeroth, to playing alongside friends in the Battle Grounds, the ways that one can spend their time in WoW has no limits. This no limits experience costs 15 dollars a month. For this fee, players can immerse themselves with a never-ending story that they can become a part of with their friends.

The question presented is whether or not a 15 dollar per month price tag is fair and just how it stacks up to other forms of media. I will look at just how often the average World of Warcraft player plays and use interviews to see how other sorts of entertainment can be compared to WoW. Once I have this data I will break it down and see how much it costs per hour for each type of media. Paying an online subscription fee for a game is rare and almost unheard of to most video game players so some non World of Warcraft players will also be interviewed and their options will be looked at. In this study, value will have dual meaning and the essential values players can derive from playing WoW will also be evaluated. In a game that focuses greatly on relationships it should be feasible to link some key values to the World of Warcraft and it's players.

Method

To evaluate these research questions first two lists of questions for interviews had to be prepared. One interview situation was prepared for WoW players and on top of many things evaluated how much the player played WoW in an average week and how they paid for their WoW account. Knowing how they paid for their WoW account whether in 1 month, 3 month, or 6 month increments was key for the quantitative study because the interval in which you pay for your WoW subscription defines how much it costs. The interview also asked about how much each player played at the peak of his or her World of Warcraft play. Other questions in the interviews included questions about other sorts of media, which included Xbox live, and going to the movies. The last part of the interview questions asked opened ended questions relating to the 15 dollar a month price tag and also about the true values players instill in themselves through playing WoW. This survey can be seen in Appendix 1.

The second interview situation was briefer which is logical when thinking about the study. This interview had mostly reaction questions about how one feels about the 15 dollar per month price tag of the World of Warcraft. This interview also asked questions about what the person being questioned thought about MMORPG's in general and about the possible values players could get out of the games. This interview can be seen in Appendix 2.

After the interview situations were created then it was time to start hosting interviews. I set out to find a diverse group of subjects whom could give good insight on the topic at hand. A summary of the WoW players sampled can be seen in Table 1.

Overview of Sample for World of Warcraft Player Interview

	Person A	Person B	Person C	Person D
Occupation	Student, Internet Technetium	Student	Student	Student, Accountant Intern
Major	Computer Science	Engineering	Engineering	Business
Age	24	19	19	23
Time playing WoW	4 years	2 years	2 years	3 years

Table 1: Shows a general description for the sample of WoW players interviewed in the study.

As Table 1 shows, of the four World of Warcraft players interviewed, all four were students and two of the students had jobs. The two students with jobs were older than the other two students without jobs. Table 2 shows the selections for the non-WoW players selected for the interviews.

Overview of Sample for Non-World of Warcraft Player Interview

	Person E	Person F	Person G	Person H
Occupation	Student	Student	Resident Assistant, Student	Bar Tender, Grad Student

Major	Bio	International Business	Business	Business
Age	20	19	21	29
Avid Gamer	Yes	No	No	Yes

Table2: Shows a general description for the sample of people interviewed in the Non-WoW interviews.

One key element of the non-World of Warcraft player interviews was to get a fair sample of gamers and non-gamers; this was achieved which can be seen in Table 2.

The interviews were completed over the course of a week and were recorded to instill accuracy. A computer captured the audio and video of each interview. The interviews were conducted in private and the participants volunteered their time to the study. All of the interviews complied with the IRB statement for field research. The qualitative data taken from the interviews was then put into a spreadsheet where it could be analyzed. It was necessary to turn weeks into months in the results and to do so I simply made the conversion that four weeks are equal to the average month. Also I put “a trip to the movies” into a numeric amount of time so to do this we gave each movie a two-hour value. Once we had these numbers I then broke down the data into cost per hour for the three types of media we got from our sample. These were World of Warcraft, Xbox live, and going to the movie theatre.

Results

Overall I found that the value for playing WoW was very high compared to other sorts of media. This can be seen in Table 4. Table 3 illustrates just where the values in Table 4 came from.

Results of Quantitative Questions from Interview

	Person A	Person B	Person C	Person D
Average time playing WoW per week?	20 hours	30 hours	6 hours	14 hours
Peak time playing WoW per week?	35 hours	70 hours	6 hours	30 hours
How do you pay for WoW subscription?	Every 3 months (14\$)			
Do you have any sort of other subscription?	Xbox Live	No	Xbox Live	Xbox Live
Cost of other subscription?	50 dollars per year	N/a	50 dollars per year	50 dollars per year
How often do you play other subscription?	15 hours	N/a	6 hours	20 hours
How often do you go to the movies?	3 per month	3 per month	2 per month	3 per month
How much do you spend on an average trip to the movies?	20 dollars	10 dollars	10 dollars	15 dollars

Table 3: Shows the quantitative data taken from the interviews with the World of Warcraft players.

Average Cost per Hour for Three Types of Media

	Person A	Person B	Person C	Person D
Average cost for hour of World of Warcraft played per month	18 cents	12 cents	58 cents	25 cents
Average cost for hour of WoW played at peak play time, translated into months	10 cents	5 cents	58 cents	12 cents
Average cost for hour of Xbox Live played per month	7 cents	N/a	17 cents	5 cents
Average cost for hour of movie at movie theatre per month	10 dollars	5 dollars	5 dollars	8 dollars

Table 4: Shows the average cost per hour for three types of media. In the calculations 4 weeks was used for calculations with months, also movies were considered to be 2 hours long.

The quantitative questions in our survey gave us some interesting figures when analyzed. As seen in Figure 4, three of our four participants paid 25 cents or less for each hour of World of Warcraft they played. At the peak play times for these three participants, the most avid player paid just 5 cents per hour, this though is made possible when someone play for 70 hours a week for an entire month. Other players at peak performance paid 10 cents, and 12 cents respectively. The player that played WoW the least in our sample still only paid 58 cents per hour when

playing at an average of 6 hours per week, he also had no peak play time. When compared to a trip to the movies, which on average costs between 5 to 10 dollars per hour, it is much more affordable to play World of Warcraft. The results for Xbox live are comparable to WoW figures. Of the three participants who had Xbox live accounts, the most that one person paid was 17 cents per hour played and the least a person paid per hour was only 5 cents. In the interviews when asking players if they felt that the 15 dollars a month was fair, all of the WoW participants answered “yes” without hesitation. When the participants were asked to react to someone who felt that Blizzard was ripping people off with the 15 dollar per month price one person said,

If you think it is a rip off for 15 dollars then you need to reprioritize your spending

This was the general idea with all of the responses and the majority said they would have asked the person with qualms over the 15 dollar price tag if they had ever played an MMORPG because it is the consensus within the World of Warcraft community that 15 dollars a month is just a small fee to pay. The participants in the interviews were also asked about if they knew what the 15 dollars a month went towards and there were a few interesting responses. One person said:

It goes towards server maintenance, because it's a persistent server. You have not only server costs but also maintenance costs, update costs, and bandwidth because they have to run massive server farms to run their games. They make a lot of money but a lot of the money is needed as well.

Another response to this question was

I'm assuming some fat pay checks for their employee's, but for the most part

I'm pretty satisfied for what I get in terms of payment

Of the four WoW players asked this question, three said something relating to server costs and all defended Blizzard saying the 15 dollars per month was fair.

The responses from the non WoW- player interviews concerning the 15 dollar per month fee was more spit in opinion. Of the four people asked 3 felt the 15 dollars was ludicrous. One person said

I play a game that is very similar to the World of Warcraft which in my opinion is better and it doesn't cost anything. So I think it is ridiculous to pay per month

Most of the non WoW-players felt that once a video game is bought its crazy to have to pay to keep playing it. When asked about how they felt about the concept of an MMORPG, opinions swayed. One participant felt that it was a "very large waste of time" when another thought the concept was "interesting".

The questions about values yielded many responses. These questions were open-ended and participants were allowed to elaborate as much as they liked. One participant went far enough to say that gaming on computers and playing videogames gives you a leg up with computers and technology when entering the workforce. Here is a typical response from the interviews concerning values

I would say that you can pick up a lot on team work and working in big groups in a manner that is still critical to success. Everyone needs to work together to get really high-end gear in the game. Another thing that is important is that it can teach vocabulary; there are a lot of advanced words in the game. It really helps build someone socially too. Some people can find a lot more comfort playing the videogame and talking to people rather than talking to someone on the street.

Most responses from WoW players had friendship, teamwork, and communication skills as core values that one could attain from the World of Warcraft. Leadership, and success were other values mentioned as well.

When non- World of Warcraft players were asked if they though someone could attain values from a MMORPG their answers were similar. One non- WoW player said

Yeah I think you can attain values, good team work and strategy, at least your using your mind

Another non- WoW player said

To some degree but there are many other things you can get values from, and the values learned would be hard to translate over.

Non-WoW players seemed to latch on to the concept of the MMORPG and the fact that players were communication and working together towards a common goal.

Discussion

As seen in Figure 4, the values of playing World of Warcraft breaks down into only cents per hour. Comparatively it is a much less expensive hobby than going to the movies often, this can be seen in the Figure 4. At the peak playtime for the most avid gamer in our sample, it only was costing him a nickel per hour played when for our least avid player it was costing him a mere 58 cents. This is really nothing compared to the average 8 dollars per hour spend on a trip to go see a movie. It is comparable to the Xbox live costs, which three of our four WoW players also paid. However Xbox live is only as good as the Xbox games purchased and these games dictate just how much is possible to get from an Xbox live subscription. This isn't a problem with a WoW subscription seeing as how one is paying to play the game.

The culmination of the data shows that the World of Warcraft really is affordable and that WoW players have no issues when it comes to paying up to play. Non-WoW players on the other hand found the idea of paying to play a game appalling. This could be due to the fact that they do not understand just how much time can be put into WoW and how it can become an integral part of ones life. With greater education on the World of Warcraft I believe it would be possible to change the opinions of non World of Warcraft players. For future researchers this could be an interesting question, to see if it is possible to change the mind of non players just by educating them on the game and its following.

When WoW players were asked about the 15-dollar a month price tag and what it goes towards, the trend seemed to be that they understand the effort that goes into keeping the game afloat. Although players accept the fact Blizzard is

making a profit, they also know that they are helping to keep the game they love online.

When it came to assess the values one can attain from play in the World of Warcraft it seems clear that there were many. There was a consensus in the surveyed, with both WoW players and non-WoW players agreeing that teamwork and communication skills were key values one could learn from WoW. In an interview, one person went as far as to say that he would rather have his kids playing WoW rather than on an Internet site where an Internet predator could lurk. Perhaps there is a value of safety some parents see in WoW. While some non-WoW players said that playing WoW is a waste of time, none totally disregarded the fact that the World of Warcraft is a great medium for people to communicate and interact.

My research shows that the “value” of the World of Warcraft can be looked at in two ways. Players pay a small sum to immerse themselves in a world that helps them grow personally and intellectually. Teamwork, communication, and leadership skills all are associated with playing WoW and having experience with computers and technology is a huge benefit in the digital age we live in.

Appendix 1.

WoW player interview

1. Estimate how many hours you play World of Warcraft in an average week?
2. Is this number pretty average for the past year?
3. At the peak of your Warcraft playing how often were you playing per day?
Per week?
4. How do you pay for your WoW subscription 1 month, 3 month, 6 month?
5. Do you feel that 15-13 dollars a month is fair?
6. Do you have any other sorts of subscriptions? Xbox live or another MMORPG?
7. If so how often would you say you play on this subscriptions in a given week?
8. Is this number pretty average for the past year?
9. Do you buy your own cable and or satellite?
10. If so how much does it cost and how often would you say you watch in an average week?
11. Do you ever go out to the movies? If so how often and how much would you spend on an average movie night?
12. What activities do you like to do for fun?
13. Why are these activities fun for you?
14. If there were an entertainment activity that you couldn't live without what would it be?
15. How would you react to someone who said that Blizzard is ripping people off with the 15\$ per month price tag?
16. What do you know about what 15\$ a month goes for?
17. What values would you say one can get from World of Warcraft? Such as teamwork.. etc, etc

Appendix 2.

Non-WoW player interviews

- 1.The popular MMORPG World of Warcraft has a per month subscription fee of around 15\$ how do you react to this?
- 2.Do you have any sort of subscriptions, gym, movie, and or magazine? How much do they coast?
- 3.How do you feel about the concept of an MMORPG? People playing together online in a never-ending story?
- 4.Do you feel people could get values from a game like this?