

Communities of Practice in MMORPGs: an entry point into addiction?

Karsten D. Wolf

Universität Bremen

wolf@uni-bremen.de

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Abstract

Massive Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Games (MMORPG) have become increasingly popular over the past few years. The most successful MMORPG “World of Warcraft” to date has 7.5 million subscribers.

The forerunners of MMORPG, Multi User Dungeons (MUD), have long been attributed as a place to build and maintain communities, providing a social space (Turkle 1995, Bruckman 1998), but never found their way into the mainstream. Now with millions of people playing MMORPG it is of interest if these environments are providing new means to build meaningful online communities, or if they are games specially designed to create an addicted user base. Two questions are answered based on an online survey with 1100 World of Warcraft users:

- are MMORPG a supporting environment for communities of practice?
- is there a danger to become addicted to the game while trying to become a part of the community?

MMORPG seem to support the creation of communities of practice to some extent, although players have to play 20 hours or more per week to feel a strong sense of belonging. Especially members with an aspiration for knowledge need to invest a large amount of time to become experts because of the game’s size and complexity and run risk to become addicted. The big appeal of MMORPG from a CoP point of view seems to be, that even new players can experience a feel of community in the game. It is questionable, though, if WoW supports all aspects of a community of practice.