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Play or Pay to Win: A World of Warcraft case study

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ABSTRACT

The current research focuses on the video game World of Warcraft and tries to examine the terms of "Ludocapitalism", "Playbour" and the very idea of "Magic Circle" within the game. Since the start of the game until 15 years later people invented ways to make their gaming experience easier or more rewarding. It started with goldfarming were people would farm in-game gold and then sell it for real life money until today where people created communities and enterprises were they not getting only real life money but also gold currency as reward. A whole new economic model is now in the making, not only in World of Warcraft but in many games. Through this research an effort is made to understand how players understand and react to these boosting services and the new economic system but also examine the concept of commercialization in video games. The research collected the data by interviewing players of the game but also going through communities' servers and websites. After the end of the procedure, the researcher transcribed all the recordings for an extensive and thorough thematic analysis. Inductive and Semantic approaches were used for a deeper understanding of the transcripts. Highlights of the findings were the structure of the communities that now look like enterprises and the new era of online digital games. Now games look more like work opportunities rather a place to have fun and play. Playbour and loudocapitalism is implemented and the commercialization is promoted through World of Warcraft. Even if players are not familiar with more academic terminologies, they are quite aware of the playbour inducted in digital games that are now much alike a workplace. It is important to distinguish play and work and don't mask each other for more revenue and profit. Least but not last, the following question emerged from the research: " If only within an online multiplayer game so much income can flourish, then we can as well wonder how people that don't have an idea of how to run a company, can manage to run such services within a game. But also, how that situation impacts the society and the balance between leisure and working."

Keywords: Playbour, Pay to Win, Loudocapitalism, Digital Games

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1 Introduction

It is undeniable that with every technological advancement there was also a change or a new economy affecting the market. In the 21st century we witness the rise of a new economy through the cultural industry of video games. As Zimmerman (2013) claim in their Manifesto for a Ludic Century, "the 21st century will be defined by games" (n.p). Reflecting on this rise from a statistical point of view, there are more than two and a half billion people playing video games around the globe (Yanev, 2019). The industry that represents and caters to those people's needs, the industry of video games, is expected to reach 180.1 billion dollars in revenue by 2021 (Yanev, 2019). Getting deeper into the video game industry, the evolution of the Real Money Trading (RTM), gold farming and playbor lead to an even bigger industry and economy. These concepts will be the main focus of the current study. More specifically, the video game *World of Warcraft (WoW)*, situated within a ludocapitalist context, will be the focus of a case study. In addition, the possibility of an alliance between the company and the gaming communities, in order to create more revenue, will be examined. The present study will employ a qualitative methodology, by interviewing players of the game and will attempt to explore in depth their views and understandings of World of Warcarft around the concepts of gold farming, pay to win and playbor.

2   Problem Description

The rise of new economies through video games disturb the balance between realities like fun and work as well as their meaning. According to Przybylski (2011), fun in video games is "the attraction to playing video games and what makes them fun is that it gives people the chance to think about a role they would ideally like to take and then get a chance to play that role"(n.p). Job is defined as "a task or piece of work, especially one that is paid" (Oxford University Press, 2019). Most of the studies regarding ludocapitalism, gold farming and playbor, which focus on the game *World of Warcraft*, are limited to the early version of the game as its origin dates back in 2004. This results in a lack of new studies investigating the evolution of these terms and how they currently work. Therefore, there is a gap in the literature that this study will attempt to fill, as a better and updated understanding ludocapitalism and playbor is needed. One of the anticipated difficulties in studies exploring the views of this specific population is that players do not easily accept to talk about using those services; it is even harder to talk to players who provide them since the line between this practice being legal and illegal is very thin. It is needed to understand players' views and understandings of the game since the appearance of a new economic model and the creation of many communities were noticeable by playing the game. The study will try to understand not only player's understanding of the new forms of goldfarming and playbour but also why they have such a rapid increase. Those questions came from the researcher playing the video game along with studying previous studies.

3   Understanding World of Warcraft

It is of critical importance to explain the context, rules and characteristics of the game in order to understand the objectives of this study. *World of Warcraft* is a Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (MMORPG) released back in 2004 by Blizzard Entertainment. The original game, so far, has eight expansions that add new content and features to the game. The latest expansion was announced in 2019 and it is estimated to be released in 2020. Each expansion costs around 35 to 60 euros. Although players pay to buy the game and its expansions, a monthly subscription costing 12 euros is also required. It is estimated that a player playing this game since its release has paid about 2640 euros. This amount of money has been estimated without including any further paid game services or purchases from the game shop. According to a statistical analysis, there were about 5.03 million subscribed players in 2019 (Statista.com, 2019), a relative big number of players, playing a game after so many years after the release which make it more interesting to understand it since it's a vast population with different opinions that can go back since the start of the game.

The game is a vast open world with its own economy, items and achievements, based on Tolkien's fictional characters (Lord of the Rings). There is a variety of difficulties to overcome as part of a random team or one's own team. The difficulties are called "Looking for Raid", "Normal", "Heroic" and "Mythic". Players can also battle against each other and acquire rewards and titles in this context as well. There is a lot of focus on the development of the economy of the game since it has its own economic system with an auction house where items are sold daily with in-game currency. The prices go up and down based on the market's demand like in the real stock market. The "difficulties" mentioned above play out also in the economy of the game, as players that clear "Heroic" or "Mythic" difficulty, gain recognition and become more "famous" in the game's world. The result is that both items and achievements gained from these difficulties can be sold for in-game money but also real money. At this point, it must be clarified that any gold-farming or boosting service that is traded for real money is an illegal act, forbidden and punishable by the developers.

In the world of gaming, the terms "gold-farming", "boosting" or acronyms such as "Real Trading Money" (RTM) are well-known amongst the players. RTM refers to how "online game players paying real money for virtual services within the virtual

worlds they inhabit fuel an industry that deals in commodities that really don't exist"
(Gilmore, 2010). RTM conceptualizes the whole frame around the other services and
keeps thriving in the gaming world. According to Gilmore (2010), a gold farmer is a
person who plays games and enjoys that activity, but he also provides virtual services
and receives payment for them. Especially in *World of Warcraft*, gold farming was a
famous "job" and a way to earn money from a video game. "Pay-to-win" and "boosting
services" belong to the same context with RMT and they are used by players to describe
these actions. Pay-to-win refers to a player who pays her/his way to win or achieve
something in the game. Boosting services are the services provided by players in
exchange of money in order to help other players who are not able to achieve a certain
goal by themselves.

      Gold farming, at the early point in time in the development of *World of
Warcraft*, was a trend and the developers balanced the illegal acts with their own profit.
Since 2015 developers have added a token costing 20 euros, in their digital shop, which
players can sell in the auction house for in-game currency. Players can also buy these
tokens from the auction house and exchange them for a monthly subscription. The
entire concept of the token added fast a lot of in-game currency in the game and
somewhat restricted the gold farming practice but also changed the economy system of
the game. Selling boosting services became easier with all the in-game currency and a
loophole was made for boosters to thrive. It is important to mention that it is surprising
that, even with all that money that players pay to play the game, there are many that still
pay with real money for "pay-to-win" services with prices up to 3000 euros (see
https://wowvendor.com/eu/product-category/buy-wow-pve-raid-boost/buy-azsharas-
eternal-palace-aep-raid-loot-run-boost-carry-service/). Those terms about the research
occurred to the researcher since he is familiar with the subject and his personal
experience which lead to further researching about the terminology and similar studies.

4   Research Questions

Through the present study it was attempted to answer the following research questions:

➢ How do players make sense of boosting services in World of Warcraft?
➢ How do "boosters" make sense of boosting services in World of Warcraft?

More specifically, the study explored players' and boosters' motives, reasons and understandings of boosting in gaming, aiming at understanding how they perceive playbor and its ramifications inside and outside the game. The study's objectives are to explore (a) how "playbor" plays out in contemporary gaming in the context of boosting, (b) how it is related to the broader concept of ludocapitalism.

5   Theoretical Background

This research has a very social perspective since it involves so many players around the world that come from the physical reality and they all merge into a digital one. The aim is to better understand how people react in digital games nowadays in a more economic view. The economic view in digital games has changed in the recent years with the online digital games where players interact with each other and creating online communities and building economic models similar to the real world. To understand how the games work but also how players react to them, theories like Ludocapitalism, Playbour and Magic Circle are appropriate to explain and give an understanding. All of the three theories mentioned contribute to understanding of digital games and the new economic models that players use. The theories provide the research to understand the game not only as a game but all the layers within it and how an online game such as World of Warcraft can impact not only players but also the economy and the social aspect of a community/society.

5.1   Ludocapitalism

Ever since the 1960s, the word "ludic" became popular to denote playful behaviour and fun objects and it is often used in the video game industry. As Zimmerman and Chaplin (2013) claim in their Manifesto for a Ludic Century: "the 21st century will be defined by games". The writers attempt to explain how the ludic or more specifically the video game industry will affect the world economy and change it. Essentially, the idea of ludocapitalism explores the relationship between playing games, having fun/feeling pleasure, and creating value (in an economic sense). There are many cases where players develop mods or by playing the game, they produce income not only for themselves but also for the developers, creating a new market with its own rules.

Digital games are dealt by Dyer-Witherford and Greig De Peuter (2007), in their book, based on the concept of the "empire" of Hardt and Negri. Early in the book, the authors explain how the economy system of capitalism works in its digital form. Games such as Second Life (open-world video games with economic systems like capitalism) have revolutionized online gaming as players spend too much time online. Because the

game required a "proper" economic policy, it relied mainly on the Ludocapitalist model (ibid). According to Dyer-Witherford and Greig de Peuter (2007), ludocapitalism refers to the shift of the given capitalist model of economy inside the digital world. It basically explains the transfer of real world's capital to the digital one. In this sense, it is closely related to the practice of Real Trading Money, which, in the digital games' context, refers to players buying digital items or in-game money in exchange of real money(ibid). Ludocapitalism evolves the capitalist system by creating new perspectives and opportunities for the global economy through digital games. What makes ludocapitalism really interesting is the fact that when people trade their real money, they do it for commodities that do not really exist. The whole concept of ludocapitalism give rise to new forms of antagonism and expansion of the economy through digital games. In addition, the antagonism is not only between companies but now also between developing companies and all the third parties that rise through games creating their own communities and enterprises. Quoting Dyer-Wtiherford and Greig de Peuter(2007) ,"there is a battle between different forms of enterprises, corporate and criminal and also between different types of exploited workers. The legitimate Western players whose "free labor" fills Blizzard's coffers revile the Chinese gold farmers for spoiling "their" game."

5.2 Playbor

Playbor is a relatively new term that attempts to explain how fun activities such as playing a game becomes labour or, in other words, how leisure is transformed into profit. In his thesis "Precarious Playbor: Modders and the Digital Games Industry" (2005) Julian Kücklich attempts to make a distinction between the concepts "play" and "labour" through the industry of video games. The main focus was on the developers of video games who make profit over players. In many games, players can become content creators, sometimes even without realising it. Developers use or even abuse that content for their own gain. Games like *Elder Scrolls Skyrim*, *Counter Strike* or *League of Legends* released and sold content from either workshops or fan-art from the various gaming communities. Many games give the option to players to add cosmetics to their characters or to create their own. Those add-ons or the content players make for many is described as self-expression. Many players want their player to look better and be different from that of others. Playbor is suffused with an ideology of play, which effectively masks labour as play, and disguises the process of self-expropriation as self-expression (Pia, 2010). Video games and playing is becoming more and more important for the economy and so does "play". More specifically, Rifkin (2000, p.263) describes "play" as follows: "Play is becoming as important in the cultural economy as work was in the industrial economy". Lately, playbor is harder and harder to distinguish from fun and leisure. It has become a profitable way not only for developers but for players too. *World of Warcraft* is one of the best examples that someone can use to describe playbor. Players, by providing services or farming gold (in-game currency), do not only benefit the developers and their game economy but also themselves. More generally, it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish between play, consumption and production, life and work, labor and non-labor (Reid, 2007). Another aspect of Playbor is about the companies that introduce work as a game to mask the "labour" as "play" which is called gamification and nowadays it is a trend as Goggin (2011) says. Gamification is not only used for work placements but also in schools and every aspect of our life. It is always easier to introduce something that looks like a game in order not to intrigue people but also make them believe there is not leisure to it but instead there is fun. This can be helpful in many ways and introduce better ways of working and learning but as everything it can be problematic. Masking everything into a game can always lead to taking advantage of people and using them for profit. There must be a grey line of

understanding between the two parties of employee and employer of what is there to be done. It is undeniable that by making it like a game it is more appealing but also people must be aware of it.

5.3 Magic Circle

Magic Circle is a controversial theory that until today has followers but also those who oppose to his views. In his article, Jasper Juul (2008) writes in favour of the theory and explains that in order to play a game you enter a "magic circle" that merges the real and digital world. More specifically, people always carry something from the real world into the virtual one. Juul (2008) gives examples of things that may be rude in the physical world but are acceptable in the digital one. Those actions are transferred from the physical world into the freer digital world that give one the ability to become who one wants to be. One, for example, who would use his/her money or influence to achieve things in his/her life is more likely to transfer this into the digital world and pay to win. The paper argues against those who disagree with the existence of the circle and argues that they should surpass conventional criticisms based on binary distinctions. Furthermore, in order to understand a game but also the magic circle, researchers are encouraged to aim for the details and how a game is actually played.

6   Literature Review

The follow literature review is to supply the research with information to relative researches for better understanding of what has been found until today and help the current research to proceed even further on this field of area.

Starting with the article "China's New Gold Farm", Gilmore (2010) sets out to explain the terms Real Money Industry and the virtual services provided in the video game context. The article goes through a player's process to buy gold farming services step by step, like a small tutorial providing all the necessary information for someone unfamiliar to that concept. Furthermore, the article explores the views and life of a Chinese gold farmer and defines the differences between a gold farmer and a player. The article is more of an information guide to those who are not aware of the terms "goldfarming" but also trying to exploit the reasons but also the "work" conditions of the people that provides them. The article can give a primitive understanding to this research questions since it is referred to the same questions but with a huge time gap.

In the "Digital Imaginaries: How we know what we (think we) know about Chinese gold farming" (Nardi & Kow, 2010) the Real Money Trading concept and the life of Chinese gold farmers are analysed. Going through Ni Hao's personal story as a gold farmer it refers to playbor and the low wages a gold farmer gains using low tech. The article tries to take the place of the people that provided those services and share it to the people, in order they understand that those people didn't make that much of a profit but rather an average income for them.

Goggin, in his study "Playbor, farming and leisure" (2011), gives a brief historical account of the constructed terms of "play" and the relation of "work" and "leisure" through the theories around them. He explains the deconstruction of these terms as the boundaries are progressively "deconstructed" but also examines the merging of "work" and "play" combining the trend of introducing "fun" and playing games into workplaces for strategic production reasons but also to achieve the loyalty of the workers. The study conceptualizes the term of "playbor", explaining the labor dragged in the digital world and in the cultural world in general. Last but not least he investigates gold farming and the grinding of virtual items.

The study titled "Playbor and the Gamification of Work: Empowerment, Exploitation and Fun as Labor Dynamics" analyzes critically the incorporation of

playful thinking and game elements within the workplace among the industry as a result of worker empowerment and self-realization. The main focus is on gamification and playbor (Ferrer-Conill, 2018).

On a blog post with the title "I bought WOW gold" (2010), Suzina goes through her personal experience of buying gold in World of Warcraft. She explains all the negative impact that her action had on her game play experience. She felt guilty for doing something illegal and cheating her way on the game and that feeling was intensified when her online friends stop talking to her because of her actions. This post gives a point of view about gold farming and boosting services.

In "Chinese gold farming" (boingboing, 2009), like other articles and journals, the author goes through the life and daily routine of a Chinese gold farming and explains what they are doing, how much they are getting paid for and what the working conditions are.

The New York Times article with the title "The Life of the Chinese Gold Farmer" is constructing a brief journal of a Chinese Gold Farmer, taking the readers through a day of the farmer but also the things they face daily (Dibblel, 2007).

On the article "Don't Hate the Player, Hate the Game: The Racialization of Labor in World of Warcraft" the author examines the racialization of labor through World of Warcraft focusing on Chinese workers (Nakamura, 2009). It focuses more on Asian player-workers as unwanted figures in the Massive Multiplayer Online culture.

Through the literature review it was made clear that the spotlight was on gold farming and more specifically Chinese gold farmers. Most of the studies and articles that were found were studying or exploring gold farming through the life of a Chinese gold farmer. The review conclued in the realisation that even though there is a decent volume of literature, it is rather outdated, failing to paint a picture of the way things work now in digital games and more specifically in World of Warcraft. Furthermore, most of the articles and studies tried to understand how "Chinese" gold farmers were working or under what drove them to provide those "goldfamring" services. It is surprising that most of the articles refer to China or to Asia and they try to research through them the game and its players when the game is global and there are players around the global. The articles had more of an informative aspect rather researching the

reasons of the situation. What was the reason behind goldfarming or why did only a part of population was interested into provide them and the rest only wanted to buy them?

7   Methodology

The research aims at understanding and exploring the players' views about boosting services and goldfarming, by using a qualitative approach. This approach has been chosen since it provides a better understanding but also goes in depth regarding the views and experiences of the players (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The target population for this research are adult players of the video game *World of Warcraft* and they were interviewed in depth in an average time of 20 minutes based on the specific structure of the interview guide. Participants were asked to fill an online consent form regarding their voluntary participation in the study, before starting the interview. The interviews were conducted with the use of Discord, a teleconferencing software and were recorded with an appropriate computer software and by a phone app. The reason that the researcher employed an online approach to conduct the interviews is because participants were from different countries and the researcher did not have either the resources or the time to interview them face-to-face.

The sample at the beginning comprised by 20 people but was modified to 15 since saturation occurred earlier on the interviewing procedure (Malterud, Siersma & Guassor, 2016). The majority of the sample was gathered by a guild/team named "Absolem" who volunteered to help along with random players found through the general chat of the game. The researcher was introduced to the certain guild by people that play the game and knew the researcher. It is important to mention that the guild is just a group of different people playing the game. Members of a guild are not necessarily share the same views and opinions. For the purpose of the research and the interviewing procedure an interview guide was prepared and used to keep the interviews within the context of the study. The interview guide was informed by the concept of "playbour" and the various controversial or problematic issues of it. The interview guide would start by informing the participant about the research and continue by asking the interviewee for how long has he/she been playing the game and how much time on average spent on it too. The time that is spent on the game was important to the researcher in order to understand how time can influence the player about his understandings of the terms that would be introduced later on. The main part of the interview was focused on a discussion with the interviewee about how they feel or understand "pay to win", "boosting services" and "gold farming". Also, the participants

were asked not only to give their opinion but also to explain based on their experiend how the game is affected but also how the community reacts to it too. This part was important to the research in order to understand how players understand the terms "pay to win", "boosting services" and "goldfamring" and compare them later on with the theories of "Ludocapitalism" and "Playbour". The last part of the interview explores the views of the participants about the money that the game requires but also how they understand commercialization in video games. This helped the research to combine once again "Ludocapitalism". Last but not least there was a small demographic part where participants gave few information about themselves for a better understanding of their views but also in order to understand how "Magic Circle" works in the case of World of Warcraft.

Furthermore, the sample was divided by the researcher into four smaller groups of: a) boosters that receive payment in in-game currency, b) boosters that receive payment in real money, c) players who used boosting services, d) players who have not used boosting services. This decision was made so the researcher could understand if people from different positions react and understand differently to the given questions.

After the end of the interviews, the researcher transcribed all recordings for an extensive and thorough analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The transcripts were analysed by employing thematic analysis (ibid). Thematic analysis was chosen in order to create thematic categories from the interviews. That allowed the researcher to see the similarities between the interviews but also to discover possible new thematic categories. Also, inductive and semantic approaches were used for a deeper understanding of the transcripts. Inductive approaches were used because the research will not be influenced by previous studies or theoretical backgrounds; semantic approaches were used because the analysis will not go further than the own words of the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The reason behind this, is because this research aimed to understand the views of the players, therefore there were no reason to go beyond their own thoughts given from their interviews. The transcripts were coded according to their content later on, after creating narrow categories for better analysis. The words or phrases which were often mention were highlighted and were used for the creation of the categories and the analysis. In addition to the interviews, material that is relevant to the research, such as forums, Discord servers and sites was added. This

material helped the researcher to understand how the communities work, advertise, promote and the structure of their forums and websites.

8 Findings

8.1 Discord Server and Sites analysis

Adding to the material from interviews, a search in sites and discord servers was made to find and analyze pages that provide "boosting services" or any other service in the game such as buying in-game currency. By this research it was made clear that the most common servers/communities are people that provide those services and are getting paid by in-game currency. They have organized price lists (Figure 1) but also sections such as customer reviews (Figure 2). The communities have their own websites and a managing group that organizes the procedures. Players can either apply to provide those services (Figure 3) or apply/pay to acquire them. Furthermore, people from those communities that provide the services often advertise it through the in-game chat (Figure 4).

There are also many websites that provide this kind of services with exchange of real money. Those are less popular since they require real money but also because they advertise only through ads and their sites and not as much in-game. The reason is because real money trades are proclaimed illegal by the developers. The amount of money is considered reasonably high, considering that the services are within the context of a digital game. An example is the price of 2000 euros in exchange for a full clear of the latest content that the game has, called Ny'alotha, The Waking City Raid (Figure 5).

The structure of these communities gives the feeling of a real corporation and not a forum or server from a video game. As Reid (2007) mentions in terms of the theory of playbor, it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish between play, consumption and production, life and work, labor and non-labor. The appearance of corporate models and structures in digital games (Figure 1) proves the existence of ludocapitalism since people transfer their capital of real money for digital commodities that are just achievements in a digital world.

8.2 Interviews' thematic analysis

Interviews were conducted for research purposes, for a better understanding of the "pay to win", "boosting services" and "goldfarming" practices. The interviewees were players that play the game, but they were separated in the interview between those who provide and those who buy the above-mentioned services. During the thematic analysis, some common patterns and themes were identified among the interviewees' accounts. The analysis that follows is based on these main themes.

8.2.1 Socializing and having fun

Participants were asked for how long and how much they play the game along the reason that they play the game. The reasons were to understand not only why a people would devote their time to a digital game but also to understand later on, their reaction to the boosting services according to the time they spent on the game. Through the research it was noticeable that the participants are playing the game for the social aspect of it but also for fun, even though many of them mentioned that in the past they used to play in a more serious manner, trying to achieve the end-game content; now they play it more casually, hanging out with their friends. It also occurred that the game can be a great source of finding friends and socializing through the game, having fun the same way as if you would meet people in a coffee shop or a pub. For instance:

> Social aspect from ye, it is all where my friends are. (25 German Male, player)

> mmmm community, friends, a sense. Makes me feel good about myself. Achieving things on the game, makes me feel good with myself, playing with friends, achieving goals it's a nice feeling eh? (29 Australian/Swedish male, booster)

> That's t difficult question. What do you gain? Emm, a lot of enjoyment comes out of the game, is more who you play with, it's like the same when you go down to a pub who you have to talk with. It is more the social aspect of the game. (35 Uk Male, booster)

8.2.2   Working instead of playing

Participants were asked if they ever felt the game stop being a game but feel like a work. These questions were to understand not only how people feel about this game but also to try to connect it with Playbour. After all, playbour is masking work as play and vice versa. As the interviews proceeded, it became apparent that most of the players often reported feeling that the game feels more like working and not enjoying playing as much when it comes down to it. In the interviewees' own words:

> Yea, absolutely, em for a fair number of years, the last five to six years the game hasn't necessarily felt like a game but mostly like a work and it comes with progressing more into the game and… pushing for top ranks in the world and again boosting people for either in game money or real life money. It becomes quite stressful. (29 Swedish Male, Player)

At the same time, they acknowledge that the game becomes like work only when the players choose to focus on achieving their own personal goals in the game, so they do not blame the game for it.

> (Laughs), yeaa, yea well, I kinda guess it's the point yea, if you wanna , well it's up to yourself but if you wanna juggle more characters than one, it can get pretty time consuming not because its hard to do the things but more because you have to do one thing on a character and then you have to do it again on let's say four more and then instead being fun it just becomes time consuming because you wanna keep up with everything so that's the point where it gets fucked up for me and stops being fun and more like a job. (23 Danish male, booster)

> Yea of course, like everyone that plays wow or any MMO related game where there is a lot of grinding and stuff involved or in certain level you need to be able to do something then it starts to become work because you might have to do something that you don't enjoy, to do something that you do enjoy and that is the same thing here to be able to do the high content you have to do daily work which is not always to fun but you do it, shocking. (33 Dutch Female, player)

8.2.3 Contribution for a better outcome and self-advantage

In video games a well-known tactic of companies is to give out an Alpha or Beta version of the game where players get to try out the game and give feedback about possible problems, bugs or improvements to the content of the game. It is used on World of Warcraft also but even though players provide a service for the company, they do not get any reward other than trying the content ahead of the official release of the game. Players do not seem to bother about not getting any rewards; some of them do not even think that they should have one to begin with. Here we can see forms of Playbour, were developing companies taking advantage of their players in order to create or improve content without any reward. For players though, this is their chance to help improve the game or have a sneak peek or early advantage on what is coming next.

> I meannn, it gives me a sneak peek to the game, on the early weeks, before it releases. Which is, which is a good thing, you know? It's always fun to see new content and being able to be a part of the general game base community and help make a better game for everyone, it's good experience I reckon and it's quite fun to see the bugs and staff, jumping around early version of the upcoming games, you know? Can be quite humorous (laughs). (27 Norwegian male, booster)

> Well, am pretty sure most people do it, because they want to see it not because they feel like they have to, emm kinda when you want to get a sneak peek on upcoming content so you can kinda pre-plan I think, which most of the hardcore people, most people that enjoy getting a little bit before to see what is it about and then to see if they want to play that at that current stage, so I wouldn't say it's unfair. (27 Danish male, booster)

8.2.4 Having a voice in the community

In addition to the above mentioned category "Contribution for a better outcome and self-advantage", on this one not only a participant agrees that not reward is needed by the company but also that this is a way for them to have their own "voice" and say to the company while it develops the game. The participant doesn't consider it a way of Playobur or unfairness of his free work to the company but as a way to express his opinion about the game and make it collectively better.

> No, you don't actually get a reward, the reward that you get is pretty much as to be getting the game collectively better because obviously the community has a voice and the community has to be heard by the companies, so that's the best way I guess they can do it (28 Cypriot male, booster)

8.2.5 Paying to win will not give you the skills

Nowadays in digital games there is the term "Pay to win" and it is much discassable between the gamers according to the researcher who played digital games for a noticeable amount of time. Understanding and listening participants' opinion about pay to win was crucial not only to see what explanation they give to it but also to examine how "Pay to Win" is related to "Ludocapitalism" and "Magic Circle". Cause paying to achieve things in a game it is the transfer of real life capital for digital commodities which is an explanation for "Ludocapitalism" but also "Magic Circle" is related since people can either do what they want in real life and prefer to "pay" their way to win or repeat what they doing in real life. Magic circle after all tries to explain that not only people reactions matter in the digital world but also the construction and rules of he game (J, Juules 2011). Discussing in the interviews about pay to win and what it means to the interviewees, it was made clear that at some extend, they consider it unfair, since people can get a clear advantage by using their real money and save themselves a lot of time playing the game. In the end, though, they do not really care because people they can use as much money they want but, if they do not have the required skills to play

accordingly, the game will never reach the level of other players even if they keep paying.

> I don't think there is a function of pay-to-win in *world of warcraft* at the moment because the game is designed in such a way that even if you pay extra, let's say, well first off all the pay extra part you pay for is usually against the ToS which means that nobody should be doing it even though we have people doing it, but the game is structured in such a way that it (28 Cypriot male, booster)

> doesn't affect the outcome of the game in anyway, it's just down to player skills I would say, from then on so you don't really get a significant advantage over someone else because you paid (23 Austrian, male, player)

> Oh emm, well pay to win for me, it's mostly related you know to mobile games, eh mostly because you can pay almost for everything to be handed to you really but world of warcraft is kinda different but it's definitely implemented em you can, you can pay for a lot of things but you can't really pay for people to play with you if that makes any sense, you may be able to pay people to be in your group but if you're not good enough you will never get an invite by yourself to a group. If you pay a boost sure but then if you want to get shit done you need to do them yourself if that makes sense…….
> I have experienced that myself, even if its only cosmetic things like mount and staff, they would definitely paying a lot of money and some people are willing to pay a lot of real money for things that are only usable in the game where it's kinda weird concept to me but then again am playing world of warcraft and am paying for game time so.. it is definitely implemented. (27 Danish male, booster)

> Ah pay to win for me, at least with, with what I have experienced, is... there is two ways to look at it. You will have new players into the game who are too lazy to progress emm and get better and earn things by themselves and then you will have older players who might have alternate characters who are already experienced but just don't wanna do it again. You have two different people who wanna pay to win. My opinion one is acceptable and the other one is just being lazy. But at the end of the day, in World of

Warcraft you can pay to win as much as you like, you can buy all the
achievements in the world you can buy all the kills of the world but if you
are a bad player at the end of the day, you always gonna be a bad player. (27
Uk male, booster)

8.2.6   Making my game experience easier

Even though, the sample was separated between players that provide services and those
who buy them, there was a very similar reaction to the question what drove you to
provide them or acquire those services. The idea behind the question was to understand
why people need to provide or buy those services. Players that provide boost or
acquiring the boosting services or farm gold are mainly doing it just to make their game
experience easier and save time from the "grind" of the game rather put more hours to
it. By saying grind or farming, it means that the game for some of its contents requires
from its players to have specific equipment and consumables which they can acquire
either by buy that using their in game gold or farm them by playing many hours the
game.They mentioned in the interviews that, if with some money or some hours they
can gain what they want and spare themselves some money while helping others, it is
totally worth it since not everyone has the same time to put on the game or even the
same skills. From the other side players accordingly to their available time or real life
situations they prefer to to pay some extra money rather spent more hours on the game
to grind what they need or spent the hours they can play the game into that.

There is a reason that I did it, because I was raiding really hardcore, lot of
raiding, not enough time to farm, didn't wanna spent money on tokens
which means the guild as a whole could make money for resources,
consumables and stuff for progression which is nice and handy. So people
paying us for boost would help our progression, which is like pay to win
you get em gear etc but for the boosters I know am a bit torrent because I ve
done and probably I would do it again because right now in the game am
skimmed honestly I don't have any money. So if the opportunity came I
would do it but as a whole I don't actually agree with it but if that's
something that's happening then I personally I would take advantage of it,
for monitoring game. (22 Danish male, booster)

Yea, I guess it's a shortcut and the gold buying thing, yea, I buy gold, I cannot, I never did this before, actually this year is the first time I bought gold before that 14 years never touched it, I just farmed all my staff but now you don't have the time to farm all that staff and it requires a lot of time to farm and keep up with the game, to be able to play all you wanna play and then still find time to farm the gold you want, it just doesn't work, ye I think when you get a job children whatever, then all changes a little bit. Then the 20 euros that you gonna spent on buying gold or whatever its kinda nothing and you save so much time, on having to farm the staff you need so that's just it. (33 Dutch Female, player)

I agree ye, they certainly give a stepping stone, when you are freshly geared and leveled to get somewhere a little bit higher and get in to the game a little bit more, I agree with that I certainly do and even in the higher end players that completed , they can also offer these boost for an extra amount of in game currency(27 Uk male, booster)

8.2.7   Real life situations

In the conducted interviews, one of the things interviewees kept mentioning is free time and the time you put to achieve something in a video game. You need to "grind" for hours and hours to get your game's character up to a certain level to be considered high-end player or to play certain aspects of the game. Many people said that because of their free time, which they can spare, they do not need to pay anything but, on the other hand, people who have a busier life while working, having family or for any other reason, it become more stressful for them and they get to use those services. At this point, the subjects interviewed came to a clear conflict, divided between two opinions. The first party mentioned that in many cases, time is of the essence and they cannot spare more time to a game and they would prefer to pay some extra money, but if they had the time they would not need to pay but play instead. The other group is divided again on real life circumstances but in a different way. The second party tried to explain that there are people that see the game as a hobby and therefore if they can afford it, they will spend money on it as any hobby would require. On the other hand they tried to explain that once again real life situation get in the way and instead of buying something in a digital

game they prefer for example to spend them on their families. Therefore, we notice that the "Magic Circle" is different from every person within the context of the same game.

I think, if you don't have the time to put in, to the game no amount of boost is going to make you be really good player. Em in this game the gear is just a tiny fraction of what makes a player good. You see for example world first kills when a new raid comes out, the world first kill would be on super low items and then months down the line when people have extremely good items they keep struggling to kill. Em bosses that previously have been killed with no items at all so I don't think that any amount of boosts would help you if you don't have the time to put on it. That's what I think (35 Uk male, booster)

Yea definitely , definitely , I mean if you have all the time in the world, when you are between studies or anything then you can spend your hours on any game and spend all the time in a world you have or want to spent on anything you want, when you have very limited time because you have kids and a job or whatever you have then you wanna spend that as nicely possibly as you can therefore you try different ways to avoid the things you don't particularly enjoy and that is for sure how I ended buying gold, if I could and had time I would be invested in doing it myself but I don't, so I buy. (33 Dutch Female, player)

I get both, I have many friends in real life that play games as well and some people , oh my god we gonna play this again, I don't wanna spend those money and then am kinda like lets get that lets get this and me myself bought the new expansion and I didn't even buy the cheap version of it. So definitely there many different thoughts, my friends work as well and they don't wanna spend money on it and they kinda casual and they play for a bit and then stop again and so on, but I don't mind spend money on it. (21 Greek male, player)

I mean I can understand people that wanna spend their money, it's their money after all, right? But for me? For me its not the best way to spend my money since I have a wife and two kids to raise and I prefer to spend money

on them rather on a game where I can slowly get where I want. For sure I don't have as much time as I want to play the game but still I kinda prefer playing it slowly rather wasting any more money than needed on it. (29 Swedish male, player)

8.2.8 Boosting is beyond control

Boosting services, even though they started as farming in gaming currency, over time they evolved and now they look like enterprises with their own websites, marketing, google ads, etc. Through the interviews and document research, it was made clear that any service for real money as payment is illegal, but in-game currency trade is totally acceptable since it is part of the game. The difficult part is how the company can handle the situation with the players who provide those services for real life money. If they ban them, they lose a huge amount of their customers; if they do not, they lose money again since their customers are funneling their money to third parties. There was a long discussion with the interviewees about what the company is doing to prevent that and if an alternative could be that the company develops a partnership with third parties so that the latter are legalized.

> Interviewee: emm…….Blizzard turning a blind eye? Yes to a certain degree, I think because there is much of it going on right now, it is literally the game floated and I mean actually floated right? em by boosters I don't think they would ever be able to tackle it for one or prove which money you are getting paid and em extremely difficult to prove that you are getting paid in real life money but is also extremely difficult to prove that you are getting boosted in the first place, especially if you are playing your character and you don't have your character getting piloted by someone else. Emm I don't think they can just do random accusations. … so I think that's something you need to be extremely thorough with and they probably find it extremely hard to tackle, that's what I think. So I do think in a sense they are turning a blind eye but it's for a reason. Because they know they can't actually handle it.

At this point the interviewer asked if the participant ever thought that the boosting communities and the company could form a partnership as an alternative solution and if that could work.

It would destroy the game I think, because I do think there are people who may want to get boosted but I think they are holding back of fear of punishment so I think if it was open and there were not any consequences on it I think more people would be getting boosted . it would ruin the game in my opinion. (35 Uk male, booster)

I don't think it's turning a blind eye, I think it is almost impossible finding out if someone is getting boosted and it's kind of in the grey area in the moment. I'll explain some extra terms. So back in the day when I did the illegal part, you didn't have, the company didn't have the technology to find out whether the player was playing himself or someone else was playing the character. So that term is now just a no go. You both get banned from the game so the only way to boost for real life money right now is to let the player self-play the game while you're grouped with him and help him achieve their goal. So, in essence there is absolutely almost zero risk of being tracked on that way, but it makes boosting way harder also. (28 Cypriot male, booster)

Interviewee: I think that will only hurt the game cause it would attract even more people to achieve their goals in the game faster and easier. World of Warcraft is a game I play personally because the skill is kinda relative but if you attract that kind of thinking then I guess the player's skill doesn't have a meaning anymore. Cause the thing a person can achieve because he is better at something doesn't have a meaning anymore. (25 Finnish male, booster)

Interviewee: I think its more of individuals that make money out of World of Warcraft am not sure about this but trying taking out a company, they can easily fund, like 40 new accounts, there is no point to do that, because you can't, you can't keep people off of it really, but trying to shut down individual its not hard really, because am not gonna fund thousand of euros to accounts just so I can get of those that got banned but some companies might not mind losing some accounts and ye. I definitely think they try to lock down individual rather companies. (27 Danish male, booster)

Interviewee: I see being that more of a discussion to, ok you can partner up with certain people and get them to boost but why we can't do it as individuals do it, like to me that would be kinda unfair, if blizzard went and made money off of people boosting and then I tried to do it and got instantly banned that would piss me off a little bit, so it might be a thing but there are so many people out there doing it and blizzard if that was supposed to happen the prices would go high up cause they would have to split em and then some random company might come and be able to do it in half the price but there are companies do it cheaper about everything that exist out there. (27 UK male, booster)

8.2.9   Developing requires money

The *World of Warcraft* game requires a monthly subscription along with buying the various expansions that are released every now and then. Most interviewees did not think that the total amount is necessarily too much but also, they did not like much the idea of the game going free. They believed that where at the start the idea of a free game would sound good, at the end it would mean the beginning of the end, since, as they argued, the game needs money to be developed and the company also need to pay the employees. They also got asked what would happen in case the game went free, how that would work and what that would mean for the future of the game. This question was made in order to understand how players react towards the company. A time of 15 years of buying expansions and subscription time is a lot of time but yet again players think that a free version of the game would only make it a "pay to win" game since the company would need to have some income, therefore more items in online shop for real life money.

> I would be a little bit worried, because it's a big game so how would they be making their money and I would also wonder if the game was dying, if it's not gonna get the resources it needs to actually develop it in the way we are used to, as in keeping the high standard as it has. emmm but I would be happy too because if it was free then you would not need to buy the expansions because then you wouldn't have to pay and no one likes paying for shit. (29 Swedish male, player)

No this is a game that is in constant and constant work, everyone, these changes, these changes need to come from somewhere and in my mind a game that keeps changing you need to pay for it, if you gonna buy a new game its gonna cost you 60 euros but that's it, it'll never change, if you replay it is gonna be the exact same thing but if you play World of Warcraft in the first year and then 10 years after it's a whole new game, nothing is the same and I think that's where the money comes in. (25 german male, player)

No I don't think so cause then Blizzard won't be able to afford developing the game cause the game its huge and to up keep the game it's huge and only buying for expansions or monthly subscribe alone won't be enough.(Finnish 25 male,booster)

9 Discussion and conclusions

Through the process of researching the game, by visiting websites, communities, playing the game along with the interviews, many interesting aspects about the game were found. It is surprising how a fantasy world in a video game can impact real life and economy that much but also how people think and act in that world. *World of Warcraft* started back in 2004 and keeps going on which is fairly impressive for a video game that exist for so long, namely, to compete with new video games and introduce new content almost every one or two years. The most surprising fact, though, is the loyalty of its customers, that for 15 years now there are players who still prefer to play the specific video game. The social aspect of the game emerges as a motive but also the high-end competition amongst the players seems to keep the players in the game. Over time, the game developed its own economy which is not much different from the one in real life. One that wants to have a gear, consumable or anything withing a digital game or receive a service, then you must pay for it - which is basically how it works in real life too. Even though it's not clear for all the players or even if it is, they are not familiar with the terminology, it was made clear that theories such as Ludocapitalism or the Magic Circle exist in that game. Players were even familiar with the relatively recent term "playbour". Al three theories are useful for understandings the nuances of the game.

Starting with ludocapitalism, players give their real-life money to transfer them into a fantasy world and acquire commodities or non-tangible items or achievements of the game. Through the research it was found that ludocapitalism now works in a very different way. Blizzard, the developing company, implemented a token which players can buy in the online shop and they can trade it for in game gold currency. On the other hand, players can acquire that token by buying it with gold currency and trade it for items in the online shop. Therefore, a new way of ludocapitalism but also playbour is implemented since people now more than ever treat gold currency in a different way. Most boosting communities prefer to get paid by gold currency so they can be legal but also exchange their gold to the online shop to decrease their real life expenses on the game but also buy other games that the company offers. Adding to that, we can see a commercialization in *World of Warcraft.* Furthermore, a huge amount of real life money goes in and out through the game, either from the third –illegal to the company- parties

that provide different services to the game such as boosting or through the online, in-game shop of the company. The game supports its own auction house with the goods and in-game currency, and it is surprising how people find it so appealing and interesting and spend hours on it.

The Magic Circle has more to do with how people choose to act in the fantasy world. Anyone can always bring with him/her something from the real world even if that is breaking a rule or being whoever, they wanted to be. Concerning the main factors of this research, which are gold-farming and boosting services, people can choose to use/provide them or not, depending on what is going on in their real life. As an interviewee mentioned, one can choose to buy a service illegally or not either because you do not have the time that is needed or because you are lazy to play the game. Being lazy or not having time are things connected in the physical reality, but they are transferred and impact the reality of the digital game.

Playbour was much harder to discern in the game because it appeared in many forms and that is what makes it really interesting. There was the version of playbour where players, by being a part of the alpha and beta tests of the game's content, would "work" for the company for free and save them a lot of time and money. This aspect did not seem to bother players at all. The playbour on this situation was implicit since the players never thought about that or did not care for that matter. The motive behind doing it without reward was to satisfy their own curiosity about the upcoming game or to help improve the game they like playing. On the other hand, players felt the whole concept of the game and the "grind" that was needed to achieve things was suffocating and at times it felt like they were working instead of playing - not in the real life but in a fantasy world. For them it was a simulation of how work would look like in a fantasy world game. Another version of playbour within the game is the very ascend of all the boosting communities and gold-farming services. There are now so many third parties and communities of players working to "earn" either gold or real-life money while playing a video game. In this case, they have changed the fundamentals of the game into a workstation where people can go further faster because they have the money. Combining this with the magic circle, how is that much different from real life? People with money in a capitalist system can achieve their goals or contain situations better than those who do not have the capital to do so.

Summarizing this area is new but really interesting to be explored and for someone to research it. Through the literature review it was made clear that the studies for World of Warcraft on this field of area focus mainly back on the start of the game and about the lives of the "Chinese gold farmers". Nowadays this situation has evolved and entangled with new terms and concepts all based on the context of economy and capitalism. Studies need to explore more in depth how the societies in digital games now work and how it affects our everyday. New work opportunities through games or illegal communities it is only a small part of a bigger situation. It is important to understand that merging and masking play in digital games with work and enterprising infrastructure, impacts not only our digital signature but also our everyday life. It is really hard to distinguish how spending that money in a game can be a problem but then again, we might as well for example consider why gambling should be considered a problem. The fact is that we are facing a commercialization era not only in digital games but for everything. The antagonism between companies, players and third-party individual is growing every day. Its only normal people to try and take as much as they can for themselves. Ludocapitalism and Playbour are evolving into new forms such as boosting services or beta servers. Masking labor with play doesn't stop only to more income but also to a society of lies that use unsuspecting people for their advantage. In my opinion is important those uncharted areas to be explored and have a better understanding on how they work. If only within an online multiplayer game so much income can flourish, then we can as well wonder how people that don't have an idea of how to run a company, can manage to run such services within a game. Many new types of companies appear now not only in *World of Warcraft* but in many games and it would be useful to research digital games more on that aspect not because there are new work opportunities but because they emerge from games and many people aren't aware of their labor. Finally, we must consider how that impacts our everyday. We need to put a red line between fun and work. Digital games are for entertaining and enjoyment, we simply cannot use everything for profit.

9.1 Limitations and difficulties

This research from the very start had many limitations along with many challenges to overcome. To begin with, the sample was hard to find because players would not easily agree to talk to a stranger about their activities in a game. Especially those who were

providing or using services which were illegal. The researcher had to find players, contact them, and arrange an online call in the software Discord, where in many cases people changed their mind or never showed up at all. That was time consuming and in the context of an undergraduate thesis was hard to stay within the time limitations and have a sufficient sample. For that reason, this research cannot generalize its results or findings. Furthermore, a novice mistake was made by the researcher were some of the interviews were not recorded correctly and new sample had to be found. For a future research it would be useful to make an effort to conduct the company itself even if its hard to achieve but also an effort to understand how that impacts the digital but also the physical society morally.

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APPENDIX I

Figures

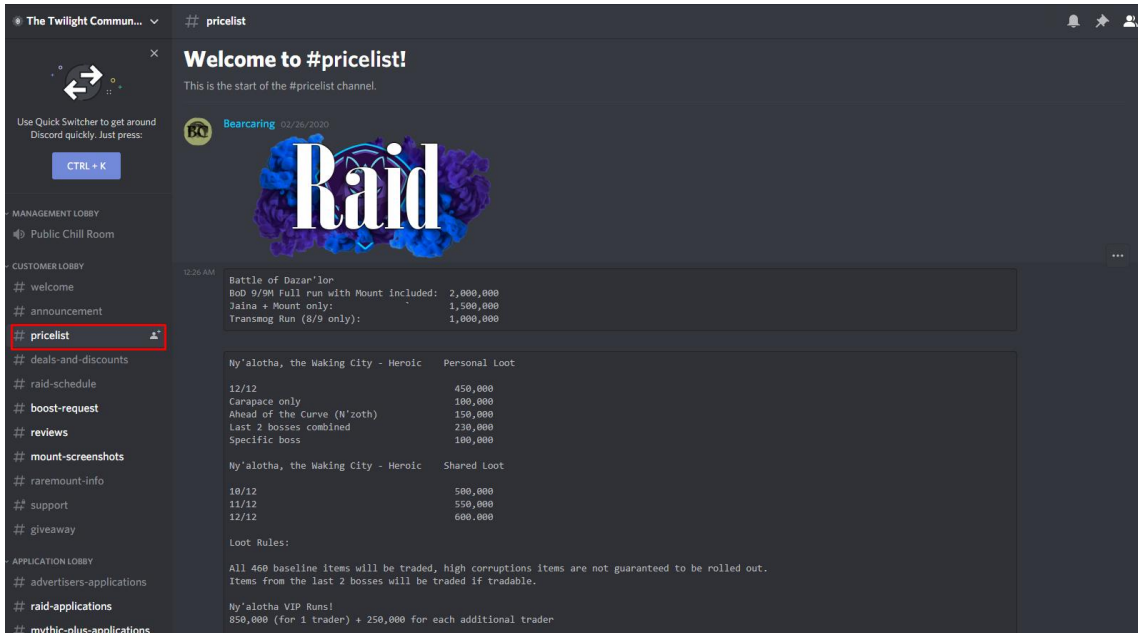Figure 1: The pricelist of a boosting community.

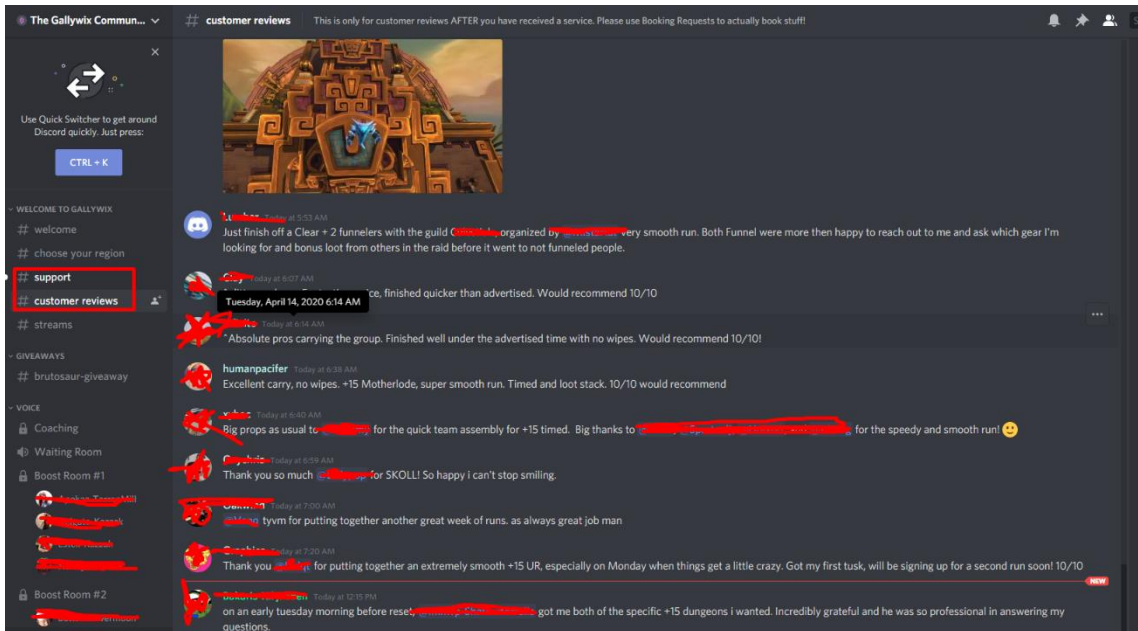Figure 2: Players that used a boosting service giving their review

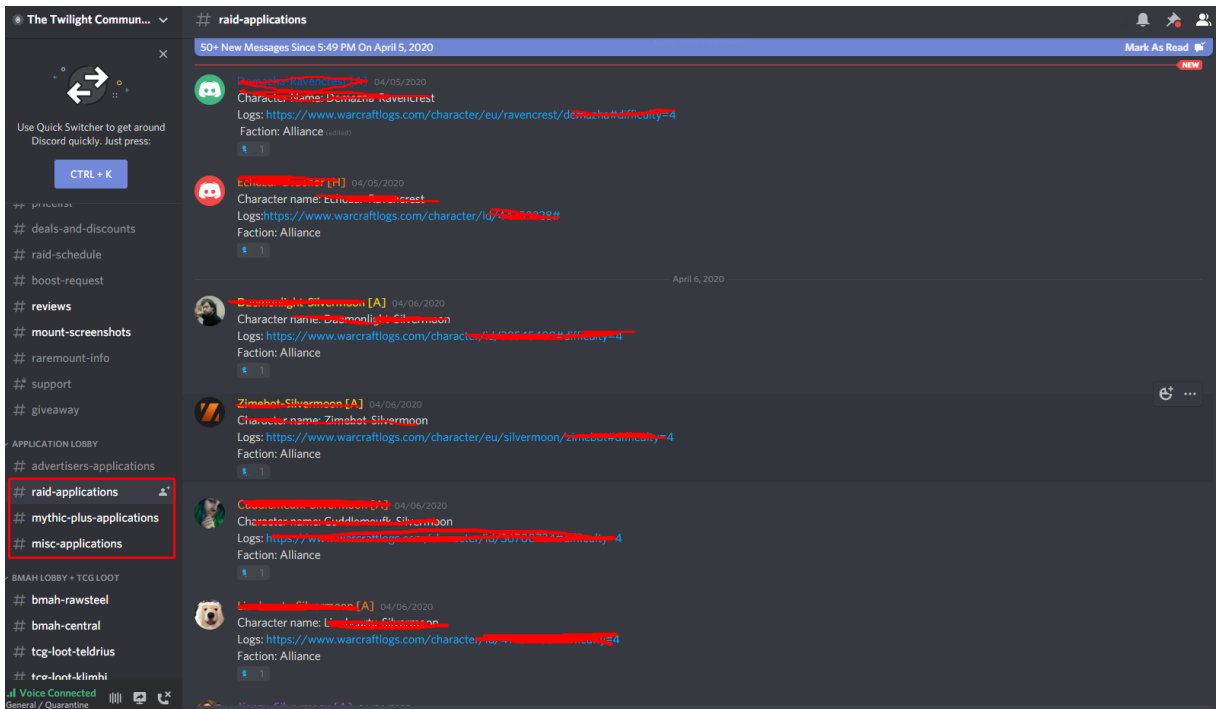Figure 3: Players that want to provide boosting services applying to the community.

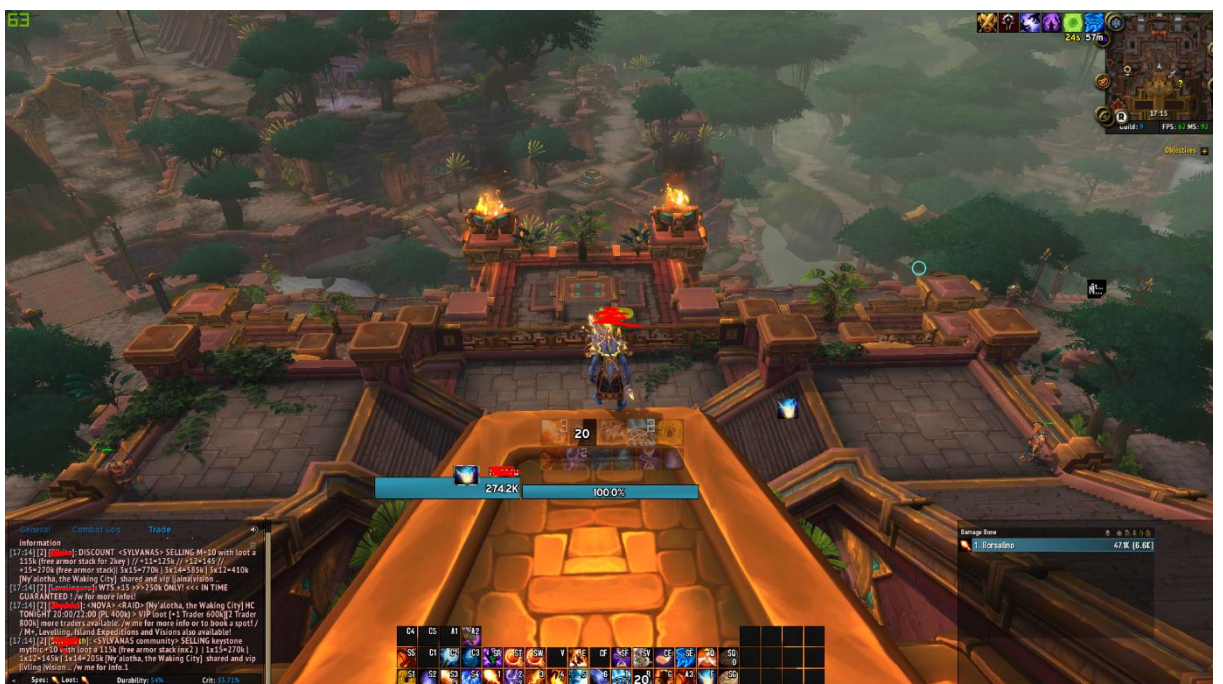Figure 4: Trade chat where people advertise their boosting communities and services

Figure 5: Boosting services for real life money

APPENDIX II

The interview guide for players who are providing boosting services.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1E2yWzeA9BPchzCvq3ExHH2zbmvvz4CgNSCJgh95sRlk/edit

APPENDIX III

The consent form provided to the participants.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1UYfo3_hnGeKK1VIRTUA3JH5n9EWiYYN1wHV6
JBEOc18/edit

APPENDIX IV

The consent form provided to the participants.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1UYfo3_hnGeKK1VIRTUA3JH5n9EWiYYN1wHV6
JBEOc18/edit

APPENDIX V

The interview guide for players.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1_9vlOzO-
Xgzqx0PdrN358V_R_2Gxq3Jsk0zXj_Kp7Ws/edit?pli=1#heading=h.6mv8fempaosc

Transcript

Interviewer: Well hello there, my name is Savvas Papaefstathiou, am an undergraduate student at the technological university of cyprus and am conducting a research for my dissertation about World of Warcraft and pay to win. As we talked before I know that you play the game and I would like to thank you for participating, first of all.

Interviewee: No problem at all

Interviewer: And I would also like to inform you that this is gonna be anonymous and the info gathered is only for research purposes. So first of all I would like to ask you for how long have you been playing World of Warcraft

Interviewee: How long have I been playing? 15 years

Interviewer: 15 years? That's quite the time. Are you playing daily?

Interviewee: Ye am playing daily

Interviewer: how much time on average you spent on the game per day?

Interviewee: ehh…maybe 9 hours per day

Interviewer: hm ok, so what type of player would you consider yourself. I mean like casual, hardcore etc

Interviewee: Right now, probably lean towards more casual side, I have played hardcore for a long time but I currently taking a break from that right now

Interviewer: ok I see. So, you ve been playing the game for a while, what is that you think that you gain by playing this game?

Interviewee: Absolutely nothing (laughs a bit)

Interviewer: Could you please explain that

Interviewee: What I mean is kinda just for enjoyment. There is … I guess the element of turning on somewhat of a job by boosting for real life money. Is not a huge income but I mean it is an option to do, if you actually wanted to make money while playing something that you enjoy

Interviewer: So its more or less combining fun, with some extra money?

Interviewee: Yea exactly

Interviewer: Ok so, many companies or games, use their players either to get feedback for their game or even add content,player custom content etc. For example, in World of Warcraft, there are the test servers, the alpha/beta servers, where players get to try out the new features of the game before the official release. I am not sure how familiar are you with that or if you ever participated on any activity like that?

Interviewee: I have played a couple of betas, I have not played alphas, but I have played betas. The last beta I ve played is actually BFA, which actually is the current expansion.

Interviewer: Ok and could you please explain me what players gain by giving that feedback to the company and developers?

Interviewee: em, well they re goin to be able to give their opinion how the game should be going, whether the game it's the way they wanted to or not. Em perhaps there is somethingto deslike something with their class that they play, they want it changed. They could get that point to cross

Interviewer: so basically you give your opinion on how to improve the game?

Interviewee: yes, yea kinda, there is also the fact that Blizzard, don't seem to make the best choices when it comes to the game sometime, so There is the option off having your opinion in on that also.

Interviewer: Do they offer any kind of award to the players that participate, to this kind of activities or?

Interviewee: No

Interviewer: So basically you are working for them but for free?

Interviewee: Pretty much

Interviewer: Does that bother you at all or?

Interviewee: well as I said, I have only played betas not alphas and alphas more directed towards bug fixes and stuff like that where beta would be more just giving an opinion. Em I don't necessary feel giving your opinion on something would mean working for them but if you were playing the alpha I do the think reporting bugs and stuff like that is actually working

Interviewer: hm. Have you ever had the feeling that the game stops being a game and feels like working. I mean you already mentioned that you do it for money sometimes?

Interviewee: Yea, absolutely, em for a fair number of years, the last five to six years the game hasn't necesaaryliy felt like a game but mostly like a work and it comes with progressing more into the game and… pushing for top ranks in the world and again boosting people for either in game money or real life money. It becomes quite stressfull

Interviewer: So there is a relatively, new term about what you described me, its called Playbor, where playing becomes labor and labor becomes playing. Many work placements, make work like a game so people can be more attracted to it and be more productive. On the other side many games, introduce work production through playing. On your experience could you relate that to World of Warcraft and how? Not sure how familiar with the term

Interviewee: ye, I wouldn't be familiar with the term but it is definitely accurate, that's how it feels

Interviewer: Pay to Win is another term connected to this research. What pay to win means to you and how would you define it in general or specifically on World of Warcraft

Interviewee: Ah pay to win for me, atleast with with what I have experienced, is.. there is two ways to look at it. You ll have new players into the game who are to lazy to progress emm and get better and earn things bythemselves and then you ll have older players who might have alternate characters who already experienced but just don't wanna do it again. You have two different people who wanna pay to win. My opinion one is acceptable and the other one is just being lazy. But at the end of the day, in World of Warcraft you can pay to win as much as you like, you can buy all the achievements in the world you can buy all the kills of the world but if you are a bad player at the end of the day, you always gonna be a bad player

Interviewer: Does that bothers you are pay to win just exist in the game for you?

Interviewee: It does and it doesn't. it does because sometimes you ll get paired or grouped with people that have been paying to win and you think there are good players because of the achievements gear etc and then depending on the actual content that you play so when you play mythic keystone and you are locked in with a certain group of

people and if one of those people are pretty terrible then that is a waste of time for the other four people. But there is also the element that I have made a profit out of it so it has benefited me .

Interviewer: Ok I get that, so you already mentioned me the boosting and gold famring services and that your familiar with them so moving forward. As you already mentioned you are ok at some extend with em since you are getting some profit but do you think that affects in general the game, does it make it worse is it occasional when you might find a bad player who is boosted

Interviewee: It does make it worse in general. Yea overall definitely takes away from the community. Everything in the game now seems pay to win. If you look at the trade chat now is boosting company after boosting company after boosting company advertising, advertising their services so its so widely available now, that anyone can do it and everyone is doing it. There is really no effort put into the game for the majority. It is, it is just out there to pay for it

Interviewer: What do you think that might drive those people provide those services, like you said yourself for you was some extra income?

Interviewee: ye pretty much there is that and there is also the fact some of the content now that it is not necessarily hard so its not effort at all to boost people throught the stuff that they want, like mythic plus 15 keystone. It sounds quite a lot but is extremely easy to boost so. Its almost you putting no work for profit

Interviewer: Would it bother you to play with boosted players out of the context where you boost em yourself?

Interviewee: I would hang out with them but I would not push harder content with them. In terms of like racing world rank kills or new raids or that kind of stuff or pushing higher arena score, but for sure if…….. they were….doing lower content lower keys, heroic raids then absolutely no problem. It would depend on the person then it would depend on them

Interviewer: In your experience to the game, how community treat boosters/boosted players in general in spite your personal thoughts?

Interviewee: Terrible really bad. It's, it's a cash 22, you pay to look like a good player and when you have to do actual content with people, people realize that you are a

boosted people because it is extremely , really apparent and then you get flamed for it. So its really waste of time.

Interviewer: In your experience as booster have you ever been flamed for doing this?

Interviewee: Not for boosting I haven't.

Interviewer: So its acceptable being a booster but not boosted by others?

Interviewee: yeeea

Interviewer: Talking about all those services and staff but am not sure, by your own knowledge are those services legally allowed by the game developers

Interviewee: They are allowed for in game currency… em it is against of the service to sell it for real life money

Interviewer: ok but you said that you are getting paid in real money some times. If that's ok with you, how does that work? Meaning that you just said its pretty much illegal but you play the game for 15 years

Interviewee: Me myself I work through a website and what would happen is that the website would be run by one guy in particular and then you would place an order for a service that you wanted through the website and then he would get in touch with the boosters through Discord and then we will carry on with the boost, he would get paid via credit card or pay pal and then our cut would be paid through pay pal

Interviewer: Ok thank you for sharing that, really interesting. An opinion is that "Boosting Communities" in a way keep players to the game by providing those services. Would you agree with that? That they keep the game alive?

Interviewee: No, I think it has the opposite effect because I think people get what they want too quick and too easy and then your left with nothing to actually achieve or they don't feel accomplished in the game. Because there is only a certain point you can get to where you have to put work in and then the rest will come with.. it ll come randomly. Either there is some small chance to drop or you must be really lucky. You can actually target a specific item or something that you want. So when you get boosted through the things you can actually target then you have nothing to do after except just sit around waiting, to get lucky basically. That's where people get annoyed or bored and quit the game

Interviewer: Previously you mentioned that the chat keeps getting spammed by companies that provide boosting services. Do you think that the company could be turning a blind eye to the communities and if so why would think that?

Interviewee: emm……..Blizzard turning a blind eye? Yes to a certain degree, I think because there is much of it going on right now, it is literally the game floated and I mean actually floated right?em by boosters I don't think they would ever be able to tackle it for one or prove which money you are getting paid and em extremely difficult to prove that you are getting paid in real life money but is also extremely difficult to prove that you are getting boosted in the first place, especially if you are playing your character and you don't have your character getting piloted by someone else. Emm I don't think they can just do random accusations….. so I think that's something you need to be extremely thorough with and they probably find it extremely hard to tackle that's what I think. So I do think in a sense they are turning a blind eye but its for a reason. Because they know they can't actually to handle it

Interviewer: Have you ever given thought that the boosting communities and the company could form a partnership as an alternative solution? Could that work?

Interviewee: It would destroy the game I think, because I do think there are people who may want to get boosted but I think they holding back of fear of punishment so I think if it was open and there were not any consequences on it I think more people would be getting boosted . it would the game in my opinion.

Interviewer: hm ok. But to summarize it a bit. Have you ever given the thought, how much money you spent on that game. Because on my own knowledge you need to buy all the expansions and pay a monthly subscription for it. Does it worth it, on your point of view?

Interviewee: emm, if you are only paying only for monthly subscription which is 13 euros and then the expansions, I think that's reasonable I don't think its too much expensive, it might for some people… but I think its reasonable. It's the in game purchases…em.. character transfers etc that cost a lot of money. So if you go with that root its not worth it but if you just paying for the game subscription itself, I think its fine.

Interviewer: Ok. What would u think if one day the company announced that the game is free now.

Interviewee: …….aaammm……..i I I wouldn't mind to be honest am not as heavy attached to the game as I used to be. Certainly a couple of years ago I wouldn't be happy about it but I think it might be fine right now

Interviewer: Soo do you think it should be free at all? How would that affect the game?

Interviewee: if they continue to make expansions like they ve be doing recently then I think it should be free because it feels like they put minimum effort into the game while whatever pumping a lot of items and cosmetics that you can actually pay for it, in the game. They ve put a hell of a lot less effort and they are looking for a lot more money. So I do think, I currently think it should be free. But I don't see it be free because this seems to be an extremely money hungry company.

Interviewer: ok but what would you say about that in games nowadays and more specific in World of Warcraft we facing a commercialization problem? I mean you already mentioned so many things regarding money. It has so many similarities to the real life. It has its own auction house. It basically sells everything.

Interviewee: ye its more like an online store and then you have that little game you can play when you finished shopping. That's what It seems like. It seems like the main focus going into the game is, you can buy this, you can buy this and this and then this would take your mind of the terrible content that's currently being put out. I can see that being a problem

Interviewer: Just to have a better understanding of what we ve discussed, could I learn a little more about you?

Interviewee: em I live in Ireland. Am 31, I work as in a kitchen as an assistant chef.i do have degrees in IT emmm I ve been playing this game as I said for 15 years , a lot of it has been top end so a lot of time has been outside of work. Was literally work and then come straight on here. But ye that's pretty much it

Interviewer: So in your opinion, a person who plays the game but has more free time, not currently working or vice versa could that might lead him to use or provide those services. Always considering their real life situation

Interviewee: I think, if you don't have the time to put in, to the game not amount of boost is going to make you be really good players. Em in this game the gear is just a tiny fruction of what makes a player good. You see for example world first kills when a

new raid comes out, the world first kill would be on super low items and then months down the line when people have extremely good items they keep struggling to kill. Em bosses that previously have been killed with no items at all so I don't think that any amount of boosts would help you if you don't have the time to put on it. That's what I think

Interviewer: So that was all the questions I wanted to ask you. You can ask me anything, If you want otherwise that is the end of our interview.

Interviewee: No its fine

Interviewer: I would like to thank you once again for participating on this interview and thank you for your time

Interviewee: Ye ye sure no problem, have a good one