Playing Multiplayer Online Games

Attractive Factors

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Author(s): Ander García Hernáez 820928-P933
Aritz Samaniego Orts 820214-P751

Supervisor: **Pär-Ola Zander**

ABSTRACT

Since the birth of Internet a few decades ago, playing computer games has become a social action that involves numerous users. There can be several reasons that can explain this behaviour but not many studies have been done on the topic. This thesis provides a discussion about the features that make multiplayer online games attractive to the users and analyzes in which degree they are important according to different points of view; the researcher, expert, active players, and casual players. The study has employed questionnaires, interviews and observations that provide empirical data for the discussion.

The study shows that there are two main features included in online games that are important from the user's point of view: the communication and the challenge of playing against other people. On the other hand, the interface is not an issue that incites the user to continue playing. It has been found that there are other facts that are incentives for playing, such as the story schemed through the game or the urge to become better. The possibility of attaining new knowledge about the mechanics of the game as well as improving one's skills are important factors in the sense that the game should allow it in an intuitive way; neither too easy nor too difficult, as both extremes divert the attention of the players from the game.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Playing computer games has always been a way to have fun for a while in front of the monitor. These challenges could be sport oriented, strategic, or adventure oriented. Groups of friends usually met to play such games in order to make it more fun since they could interact directly (in a physical sense) and they could compete so that the machine was not anymore the one the user plays against. Nowadays the possibilities of communication that the Internet offers and the interactivity that it supports are of great importance in order to understand how the world of games has changed. Not many years ago desktop computers could only be connected to the Internet but in the recent years consoles such as PlayStation or XBOX offer this chance as well. Furthermore computers such as XBOX are succeeding due to the fact that it presents many alternatives to interact while playing (voice systems).

1.1.1 A short history for Online Games

Multiplayer online games have a short history compared to other kind of games that are played in a computer. The access to the Internet has extended during last decade and this fact has helped users to access such way of playing games. By the late 1980's all the elements necessary for playing online were there. The beginning of online gaming can be set with PLATO, the first online computer-aided instructional system. The first online games were designed for such platform during the 1970´s. In 1979 the first online games were MUD (Multi-User Dungeon) which were only text-based role games.

Years later, by the end of 1992, some game developer companies started experimenting with multiplayer games. These experiments made possible that 4 and even 8 players could play in the game. This fact meant a revolution in online games and in 1993 this resulted in *Doom*. This was the first online first person shooter game. A couple of years later an improved version of *Doom* appeared called *Quake*, and many people became interested in playing online by then.

The following years games such as *Ultima Online*, in 1997, or *Everquest* in 1998, continued attracting people in the Internet and a lot of money was invested on advertising and sponsorship. By 1999, *Everquest* accomplished what *Meridian 59* had started a few years ago being a three dimensional game and supporting a massive community. The fact of governments investing in Internet connections made the access to the net possible for users, increasing the number of online game users. Today around 500.000 are subscribed to *Everquest* and it has 300.000 people in its closest competition.

However not all online games are successful, for example *The Sims Online*. According to some experts the problem of this game is that it lacks the social aspect, that is, it does not include a social environment where players can interact with each other.

The most successful game since *Everquest* came in 2003, *Star Wars Galaxies* (Role Playing Game), which had around 275.000 subscribers. The success of this game was a result of the fact that players can carry out different activities but fighting. It is possible to go to dance in a "bar" or even spend some time in the hospital helping weak people to recover their characters. *PlanetSide* (First Person Shooter) was one of the other best games this year with around 50.000-60.000 number of subscriptions. In 2002 *Counter Strike* appeared and today it is one of the most widely played online games. Around 19,5 million people own this game and according to GameSpy (www.GameSpy.com) statistics almost 70% of the online first-person shooter gamers play this game. In the category of role-playing games *World of Warcraft* is the most successful in the recent days with more than 6 million active subscribers.

1.1.2 Different kind of games

Depending on what the game consists on it can be categorized it in several genres. Although there are many game categories three of them will be focused during the research: first-person shooters (FPS), real-time strategy (RTS) and role-playing game (RPG). These are the most played games online due to their ability to collect a huge amount of players interested in what such game can offer them.

The main characteristics of FPS games are that the user has total control over the character and can interact with the environment without almost any restriction. The user is totally involved in the character (first person) so that usually the only thing that the player can see is the weapon you have but often you also have the choice to see the character. Games such as *Quake*, *Doom*, *Unreal-Tournament* or *Duke Nukem* are considered to be FPS games.

As concluded by its name the strategy is the main feature of RTS games where the possibility to play by turns is not involved. The goal is usually to control individual units and resources so that different objectives can be reached. The main challenge is that there are people playing simultaneously with you and you must manage every resource you have to struggle them.

Finally RPG is, in some sense, the digital version of the role-table-games. In this case (the computer based one) you are able to manage your character all over the virtual environment and interact with other characters in order to fulfil certain missions; normally they are more collaborative and social than the previous ones. These games have well defined rules and guidelines that must be followed from which the player can improvise what to do.

1.1.3 Clans or Guilds

"*What sets MMOs apart from other games are their social structures and communities*" (Chick, 2003). People playing these games tend to form social structures as guilds, role-playing servers, political groups, etc. that you cannot find in single player games. A guild is a group of people with the same interests (in the sense of playing games) who have certain standards or norms that must be followed in order to be accepted. The guilds can be compared to groups that are formed around sports where group members have the same interests and enjoy meeting one another.

Some game are designed to force people to create societies. In *Everquest* for instance the help of another player is necessary in order to have regeneration points once your character is dead. In other games such as *Star Wars: Galaxies* there are long empty spaces, between virtual towns, that the player must walk through. This is an example of a game where people tend to create communities.

1.2 Research Area

The challenge in single player games is only related to the game itself as it is the computer which controls the enemy to be conquered while in multiplayer online games the challenges come from the abilities of the other players as well. This fact introduces a social feature in gaming that must be taken into account in order to study the motivation factors that many computer games users have when it comes to start and continue playing. The need to interact with others to overcome problems or to just be conscious of what is happening around us is of human nature.

Almost every game takes place in a virtual environment designed specifically for the purpose of giving the player the sensation of being in a parallel world. These virtual environments of the game can be described using three dimensions: game play, game-structure and game world. The game play involves actions that the users carry out and which strategies they follow according to their intentions. The rules that lead the game including the simulation rules are a part of the game-structure. Finally the game-world is composed by the graphics, textures, the fictional content, the design, etc. which gives the game a shape in order to make the player visualize it.

According to Aarshet (2003) "*almost any game, from football to chess, can be described by this tripartite model*" and "*these three levels can all be subdivided further*". Thus the game play can be described as the actions, strategies, social relations as well as the player's knowledge in character communication, out of character communication and so on. As part of the problem is playing online multiplayer games it will be focused in order to explain how those factors can lead online multiplayer games users to continue playing.

As mentioned above the communication is one of the main characteristics of online games as it is the main difference between such games and games not online. One of the

purposes of this thesis is to find out if this feature leads people to play this kind of games or if there are other factors that motivate them.

According to Konzack (2002) every game analysis should consist of the following points: hardware, program code, functionality, game play, meaning, referent ability and socio-culture. For our research purpose the game play mentioned above along with the socio-culture points are our points of interest. The way Konzack describes the game play is different in comparison to Aarshet's (2003) explanation since the first one includes the game structure in this point. On the other hand the socio-culture feature of a game includes "*the interaction not just between computer game and player but the interrelationship between all participants of the game*" as Konzack states.

Playing computer games can be compared to reading books or watching a film. When one starts to read a book and it is an interesting history or topic, one will begin to be deeply involved in it sometimes even forgetting about what is happening around oneself. Once engaged in the activity of reading or watching a film one continues doing it until the history is finished. In computer games the same thing can happen. Once in the game, there can be a moment when the player does not realize anything else but what is going on inside it.

1.3 Purpose

This research study aims to find out which factors in Online Multiplayer Games enhance people to continue playing such kind of games and which of those factors are related to the interaction or communication among players. The features of these games are specific for them and might not exist in other computer games as the ones that do not require an Internet connection so the focus will be on those characteristics that can be found only in online multiplayer games. This distinctiveness will be the challenge of playing against another human player instead of playing against a character that is controlled by the game, the chance to communicate among the users within the same game that allows the users to have fluid conversations about what is going on in the game and in relation with these two points what the attitude of the players is, this is, what motivation they find when they are playing. Besides the fact of the users being far away from each other will also be focused on in this research.

The realization of this research can be of interest for the people who play computer games, in order to read a scientific research of what makes them to continue playing online games, as well as researchers, who could see the factors that make their customers to continue playing.

Everyone who plays this kind of games is in the target group of this research, and every person will be considered as a player without making age differences. It is however important to underline the fact that the average person playing online games according to J. Kirriemuir (2005) is around the age of 30. One of the limitations of this study is that

there have been no females included, which means that this study will only be applicable for the male gender. Furthermore a generalization of this kind is in any case quite difficult since the sample size is limited in this of this study has been limited.

The intention of this research is to take into account different people that are directly related to Online Multiplayer Games. First of all habitual users outline the most important target group since they experience the games on a daily basis making their point of view is a main issue for this study. Some members of this group are considered as experts since they play on a competitive level; their point of view will be important for the study as well. Although there has not been an extensive research in this area, deep knowledge from a researcher in the field has been obtained. Finally people who do not have experience in online multiplayer games will also be questioned since their point of view can complement the others in the sense that people used to do something as a habit tend not to realize some factors of their behaviour.

1.4 Research questions

The research problem of this paper is related to how online games enhance people to continue playing and which factors are involved. The research questions that this research study wishes to answer, of which some are closely related but whose single points still should be stated clearly are as follow:

How do people get hooked on playing online games in the Internet?

Once people start playing online games they usually continue doing it. The research questions aim to investigate why this behaviour occurs and which factors are involved in it.

What are the elements creating social interactions which enhance players' motivations to play the game?

The main aspect of multiplayer online games is that they offer the chance to interact with other users and thus making it a social activity. Therefore the aim of the research is to find out which aspects of such interaction that players, researchers and professionals in the area think are of importance.

What is the role of interaction and team interaction within current multimedia games?

Even if there is no physical contact while playing online multimedia games the communication is important in order to make people achieve a realistic sensation that they are playing against other players. Alongside with this the aim is to investigate the sense of the possibility to communicate.

What do online games have that conventional games do not have?

The Internet offers many possibilities related to online gaming, making them quite different from the ones played without connection. This has resulted in the fact that the likeliness is higher for playing online than for playing offline games.

Is it more addictive to play against a character that is controlled by a person than playing against one that is controlled by a computer?

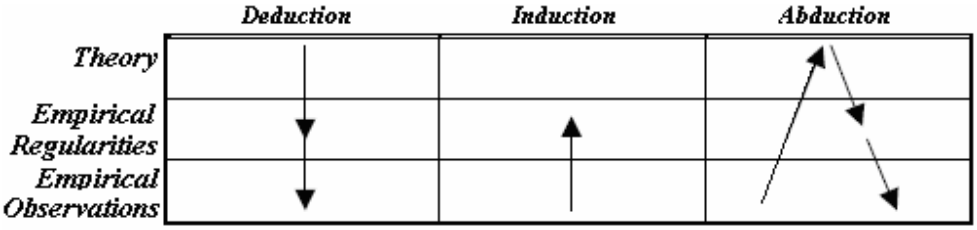
The challenge of playing against a character controlled by another player might be bigger than doing it against the computer since such a player can be experienced in playing the game and it his actions can be unpredictable.

1.5 Research approach

The research of this thesis is related to the abilities and features that multiplayer online games have that make people continue playing. The number of previous papers on the topic is small, mainly because it is a new area that has expanded with the Internet, which is during the last decade, and although there are many online gamers they cannot be compared to other leisure activities such as reading books, listening to the music or watching films.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994) there are two approaches of research; the qualitative and the quantitative. The qualitative approach is useful in order to increase the understanding about the reasons and motivations that lead to a certain behaviour. For this purpose a small number of cases is needed, but opposed to the quantitative approach such cases must be non-representative. A quantitative research on the other hand is based on a large number of representative cases with the intention of quantifying the collected data, in order to generalize a vast number of samples when it comes to how a population behaves.

This research is going to be carried out qualitatively due to time and sample limitations.



Deductive, inductive and abductive approaches

A deductive approach is often used when there are well established theories that the researcher wishes to use as a basis for his research questions. In this case the conclusions will be drawn from empirical data and knowledge.

On the other hand, when there are only a limited number of theories about a subject the inductive approach is used. The goal using this method is to create a new theory based on the empirical research although in many cases already existing theories are used in order to carry out a new research.

Abduction is a qualitative method which involves an iterative process of relating existing ideas, findings and observations. New observations must be taken into account and therefore new ideas will arise (Coffery and Atkinson, 1996). The abductive approach is a suitable research approach for a qualitative analysis where every new fact that is realized must be kept in mind in order to understand the whole phenomenon.

Both the inductive and deductive approaches take place in every research, making it difficult to separate them. According to Miles and Huberman (1994) both approaches are related to one another. Peirce (1955) defines abduction as "any proposition added to observed facts, tending to make them applicable in any way to other circumstances than those under which they were observed, may be called a hypothesis". The link between hypothesis and observations indicates that a hypothesis is the verification of repeated facts in the way that those facts are useful as the foundation of an empirical study.

Grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) states that at an initial level, information can be gathered from any source; scientific literature as well as notes taken from informal conversation are considered to be valid information sources. The collection of data is an iterative process that consists on the continuous sampling, coding and comparison of such data to each other (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Grounded Theory will not be employed in this thesis as a theory but rather as a background to explain the settings of the abductive approach.

This thesis will employ an abductive approach, hence start from the empirical observations where the collection of data will take place using questionnaires, interviews and participatory observation. The data will then be analyzed in order to find out some patterns that occur among the practitioners and in order to explain those attitudes the theoretical framework will provide a scientific base. In order to discuss the theoretical framework, several hypotheses arising from the theoretical framework will be examined that might or might not occur through the empirical data. Finally, the conclusion will attempt to answer the research questions and give the authors' point of view on the topic.

1.5.1 Questionnaires

In order to receive information from experienced and regular players the researchers constructed an online questionnaire which was e-mail based. One of the advantages of

making this kind of questionnaire is that they give the possibility to reach people easier and faster than common questionnaires (Preece, 2002).

Due to the nature of this study, the type of questions expected could not be responded to in a simple "Yes" or "No" way, so some techniques as check boxes or Likert scales were of no use for this study. This made the analysis of the answers more difficult to go through, but on the other hand, the answers were much richer in the spectrum of shades, giving this study a plenty of rich and useful information.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), questionnaires are good to make a first approach to the subject being researched, as there should be a "*beginning with exploratory fieldwork, leading to the development of quantitative instrumentation, such as a questionnaire. The questionnaires findings can be further deepened and tested systematically with the next round of qualitative work*". This research has proceeded in this way, making first the questionnaires to approach the field, and complementing it afterwards with qualitative interviews with experts on the field of online games.

Initially, a beta version of the questionnaire was sent to the respondents to get some feedback about his thoughts of it. In accordance with his reply, some changes were made in the questionnaire, for example erasing some questions and changing some others in order to obtain a more direct and comprehensive battery of questions. This final version of the questionnaires was sent to around twenty persons known to be involved in the online gaming community. Out of those, the answers of thirteen persons were obtained. 20 examples of the questionnaires were left in a gaming centre in Lund so that players that passed by the place could answer the questions, but from this only three answers were received.

The profiles of the participants in the questionnaire were all males, who were between the ages of 22 and 31, most of them being students. The fact of not having women does not imply a gender motive, but is rather due to the fact that among the people acquainted to the researchers, there were no women who played online games. This does not mean that women do not play; it rather implies that the researchers do not know women who play online games.

The questionnaire consisted of seven section were the first one was a short introduction to the purpose of the study (who the research performers are and what the answers are to be used for), what was expected from the respondents along with instructions about how to answer the questions and where to send the replies afterwards. In the second section personal information questions were asked in order to have an idea of what kind of people the respondents were (age, gender, occupation, available Internet connection). In the third section the questions about gaming habits took place: consumption of time, the importance of the interface, preferences playing, etc. The fourth section consisted of interaction or communication related questions that could give us an idea of how important it is to be able to communicate with other players during an online session. Questions about the game itself were posted on the fifth section and motivation related in the seventh one as *why the respondents play online games* or *what are they looking for*.

Finally the researchers were especially interested in the notion of time the players had while playing so the questionnaire ends with five questions about this issue. In the end of the questionnaire some space was left for additional comments.

1.5.2 Interviews

In order to get a deeper comprehension of the research problem area two interviews were made with two experts on the field, Ola Johansson and Hans Christian Stoltz.

Ola Johansson is 28 years old. He has been a competitive player in the game *Unreal Tournament*, presenting himself to several cups during 2004. Currently he competes in a racing game called *TrackMania Nations ESWC*. He works part-time in a game centre in Lund and is the manager of a clan called *Soul-rippers*. Ola also organizes a large world-level cup on www.clanbase.com twice a year, in which there are usually between eighty and ninety clans competing.

Hans-Christian Stoltz is a 38 years old teacher, a researcher in the area of multiplayer online games (related to the emotional immersiveness in such games) and an online games player. In his opinion it is important to be a player if you are researching about games in order to understand what is happening. The base for his doctoral thesis is how subjectiveness is used within the games. The interview with Hans-Christian was structured so that there were some theory oriented questions related to the Flow Experience, one of the theories employed in this thesis, and Emotional Immersiveness, the theory he has used to research about games.

Through the interviews, a qualitative approach has been followed. There is a tendency which considers that the qualitative interview is not a scientific research because of what they consider as a lack of objectivity in the qualitative interview (Kerlinger, 1979, Mandler & Kessen, 1959). This current is known as *positivism* and their main reasoning is that the human interaction during the interviews makes the result of the interview non objective.

There is however another tendency that does consider qualitative research as a method that is valid for scientific research. According to Steinar Kvale (1996), the qualitative interview is an objective type of research due to three reasons. He states that objectivity can be understood as:

- Freedom of bias
- Intersubjective knowledge
- The reflection of the nature of the object studied

The first interpretation of objectivity made, the freedom of bias, is the concept of the research as a study that "*implies doing good, solid, craftmanslike research, producing knowledge that has been systematically cross-checked and verified*" (Kvale, 2002). Secondly, objectivity can also be seen as intersubjective knowledge. The explanation of the meaning of this concept is that data that is collected during the interview must be testable and reproducible, or in other words, the output of a phenomenon being studied should have the same results in a repetition of the study. This is precisely the concept of reliability, that consists in the fact that the operations made through a research can be repeated having the same output, can be applied to the qualitative research, as the case is investigated with the same data and the same time, not in another point of time, will give the same results. The last point is objectivity being treated as the reflection of the nature of things. And also in this point, the qualitative interview can be seen as an objective tool as "*...with the object of an interview understood as existing in a linguistically constituted and interpersonally negotiated social world, the qualitative research interview as a linguistic, interpersonal, and interpreting method becomes a more objective method in the social sciences than the methods of the natural sciences, which were developed for a nonhuman object domain.*" (Kvale, 1996).

As a conclusion, if objectivity is taken as the study of something free of bias, that presents intersubjectivity and that reflects a reality, then the qualitative research is objective.

Focusing on the interviews made concretely, they were twenty questions that were subdivided into different groups, which were time consumption, motivation, interaction and research questions for the interview to Ola Johansson; and playing online, interaction with the game, theoretical questions and research questions for the interview to Hans-Christian Stoltz. In both interviews the interviewees were informed on which field each of the questions made belonged to in order to let the interviewees know what the focus of interest in making each of the questions had been and also to have an easier way to analyze the data further in the analytical part of the research. Both of the interviews were semi-structured interviews. These types of interviews combine properties of both the structured and non-structured interviews; the interviewer starts with pre-planned questions and he tries to get additional information through questions that are not pre-planned until the interviewee has no more information to give to the interviewer (Preece, 2002).

During the interviews, both research performers were present, being Ander who posed the questions, but any of the research performers made the non pre-planned questions. Two MP3 players were used to record the interviews as a risk precaution in case that one of them did not work, and at the same time interesting points that the interviewees said were noted down. Afterwards, the interviews recorded were transcribed, following the ethical principles described below in the chapter *Ethical Issues*.

1.5.3 Observations

This thesis is not based on any concrete online game, but a point of reference that could reflect in some way how the reality is was searched. One of the most famous games of today is the *World of Warcraft* where six millions of people, all active subscribers, take part. The observation reflections made upon this game have a basis on all the data collected, as questionnaires, interviews and articles. Internet forums related to this game were visited casually in order to have the chance to find out some valuable data and feedback. The Game Center in Lund was the place chosen to observe players, and these observations took a couple of sessions of half an hour each one.

As a complement to these observations the workshop (playing *Battlefield 2*) was useful to have a point of view of a participant in a game besides the observer. The research performers are aware of the fact that during the participation on the workshop some feedback might have been lacking from the users since the game was new for the research performers who were focused on playing the game, in a participatory observation way, instead of observing them out of the computer, but as mentioned above it was complemented with the observations in the *World of Warcraft*.

These observations will be hidden during the thesis as they have been complemented with some information obtained through the interviews, and from other players who had played for a few months, hence the explanations will be generalized without focusing on a concrete experience.

1.5.4 Workshop: Battlefield 2

As mentioned above the main idea of this thesis is the collection of different points of view about playing multiplayer online games. Common players answered the questionnaires, two interviews were performed with an expert player and a researcher in the same area, and people with no background of playing online games formed the last target group. In order to get the users' opinion a workshop was organized in the Game Center in Lund where *Battlefield 2* was played.

Game Center where the workshop took place (Lund)

This workshop was organized based on the workshop session made at Lund University by Petter Alexanderson called "Evaluating usability and user experience" which was used to evaluate a new kind of software not used before. The procedure was changed slightly in order to fit our purpose but basically the six steps below were followed:

1. **Introduction to the testing**. The participants were told what they were supposed to do during the session (enjoy while playing) and what they were supposed to do afterwards (discuss the experience).
2. **Pre-test interview**. Each participant was asked about his background playing multiplayer online games in order to have an idea about how to take into account their experience during the workshop.
3. **Exploring the interface**. None of the researcher knew how the interface worked since a game that no-one had played before was demanded, so the manager in the game centre (Ola Johansson) was asked to introduce us to the game followed by a brief explanation.
4. **Executing core tasks**. Playing *Battlefield 2* demanded two hours that were divided in two sessions of one hour each one. This way a gap could be made between both which would be useful afterwards in order to analyse the difference between them.
5. **Post-test interview/Discussion**. In this step the interviewees were simply informed how they were expected to discuss about the workshop. The discussion was an informal conversation between all the players and the players were asked to answer four questions about the experience. The questions were as follows:

    5.1 What did you like from the game?
    5.2 What differences do you notice from the first hour and the second one?

5.3 Do you think the communication was necessary? Why?
5.4 What do you think about the interface? Was it important?

Eleven persons between the ages of 22 and 24 participated in this workshop; all of them were males and international *Erasmus* students at Lund University. Some of them had played computer games before but they were casual players in online games, which, in this case, indicates playing once a year or even less. They had never played *Battlefield 2* before and neither had the researchers, who both participated in the session.

The session was based on two groups formed by six and five people belonging to the army of either the United States or China. The game consisted in each team trying to catch the flag of the other team and the idea of it was to play a session of an hour and afterwards discuss the experience using four questions previously written down, but the session was so successful and amusing that everyone wanted to play for another hour.

1.5.4 Ethical issues

As a first approach to the question, there is no correct ethical way of achieving the research due to the complexity of the ethical issues and their cultural nature. Different parts of our research will analyzed, and the different ethical issues that have been taken into consideration in each stage, some of them being difficult to combine.

As research projects include several stages, ethics have been, applied in all of the stages (Kvale, 1996). This implies the stages of thematizing, designing, the interview situation, transcription, analysis, verification and reporting.

In the first stage, thematizing, the main goal is that the research theme should be about an issue that helps humanity to evolve. In this research, it has a goal that is of help in a concrete social aspect of the human being while protecting the persons that are used in the investigation from psychological or physical harm.

When it comes to the analytical part, there are two main issues that have been taken into account, the confidentiality of data and the analysis made with it. This is the part of the investigation where the development of the idea is made, and the presence of objectivity and confirmability (Miles & Huberman, 1994) in the study are a central pillar.

The confidentiality is as well present in the interview situation, transcription and through the reporting. The definition of confidentiality is the non reporting of data identifying subjects (Kvale, 1996). Through the research, the persons used as source of data to accomplish the investigation should be able of staying anonymous if it is their desire, but in this case the interviewees have not had any problems with appearing in the research.

The consequences of the interviews (Kvale, 1996) are other factors that have been handled through the research. As a first point, the interviewed have not been

psychologically pressured in any way to give answers that if not pressured they would not say. These cases can appear when, during the interview, the relation climate between the interviewee and the interviewed gets closer, in some sense a bit intimate; because of this situation, the interviewed might give some certain explanation that in other cases he would not give. This practice is not acceptable because of the lack of objectivity and/or confirmability due to the affective state of the interviewed (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Throughout this research there has been a special care in not interfere with the interviewees when they were talking and not making goal leaded questions.

As a last point to the ethical issues, the role of the researchers through the investigation has been based on the principles of honesty, fairness, knowledge and experience (Kvale, 1996). These principles are directly related to the concepts of objectivity / confirmability, reliability / dependability / auditability and validity / credibility / authenticity that Miles and Huberman (1994) defend as a standard for the quality of conclusions, and that can be applied to the whole research process. These features in a certain research are the quality that makes it credible and that gives a rigorous testimony of how it was made. They imply the importance of the study with regard to its objectives and the logical coherence among the components that shape it.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Online Games

Online gaming has become a very common way of spending leisure time among people all round the world in the technology era. It is a new way of interacting with people from geographically distant places without moving from the player's house, and additionally being seen as something fun to do.

These games can be treated as Networked Virtual Environments (Net-VE), as they completely fit the characteristics of this model (Manninen, 2001). The definition of Net-VE is the Networked Virtual Environment "is a software system in which multiple users interact with each other in real-time, even though those users may be located around the world. These environments aim to provide users with a sense of realism by incorporating realistic-looking 3D graphics and even stereo sound, to create an immersive experience" (Singhal and Zyda, 1999). The Net-VE is formed by five main characteristics (Singhal and Zyda, 1999): a shared sense of space, a shared space of presence, a shared space of time, a way to communicate and a way to share. Specifically focusing the theory to our study field, the online games and the customization is the following.

The shared sense of space occurs in the games through the virtual space were the game is happening, and were players act with their characters. The shared sense of presence exists as well in these kinds of games as players meet other people's characters in the virtual world of the game, being able to even differentiate between participants, either by the physical appearance or by a name that in many games appears over the head of the characters. The shared sense of time is also a characteristic of the online games as the happenings that occur in the games that have been studied are only real time games, being even a case in which the character had to sleep in the game in order to have better physical attributes as in normal life. Anyway, there are internet online games that are not real time based, but the small amount of these have made us not considering them in our research. The fourth point of the model is the necessity of a certain way of communication; this fact happens as players are able of interacting with each other, as for example having conversations, either default or by writing or even saying what they want to communicate, or simply fighting against each other. The final point of the Net-VE model, the way to share, has its own customization to the online games through the interactive and dynamic environments that are offered in the virtual worlds of these games.

There are several motives that motivate people to play in the internet, such as the *Flow Experience*, a concept developed by Csikszentmihalyi that has been adapted through different theories to the online gaming. Through this paper the *Flow Experience Theory*, *Communicative Action Theory* and *Motivation Factors* will be used in order to explain the next points.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Playing multiplayer online games means interacting with other people who can be both active and passive. This interaction involves a communication action among several people so the Communicative Action Theory will be used to describe a group level.

In this kind of games playing against other users is a challenge since there can always be someone with more experience and better abilities than you. Thus, besides the communication mentioned before, interacting with other players makes the game challenging and depending on the player's own skills or abilities; a single session could become amusing or boring depending on the state of immersiveness of the player in the game. The Flow Experience Theory will be used in this aspect describing an individual level.

Finally most of the research studies made until today in the area of online playing conclude that the social factor is a main issue. Still, the interaction with other people is not always the main reason to play a session; there can be several motivation factors. Sometimes after a hard day a person needs to forget about daily life and playing this kind of games can be a good solution, but other times someone might be bored alone and they need to interact with people and playing online is a good solution as well. These different situations will be described using the Motivation Factors explained earlier.

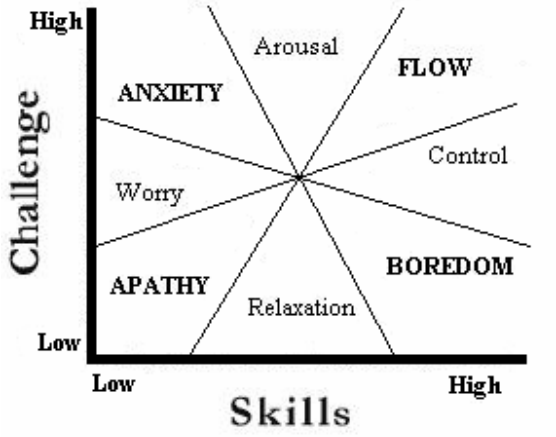
2.2.1 Flow Experience

Games have always been a medium for enjoyment. When designing a game, some factors such as the difficulty or the graphics must be taken into consideration in order to make the players experience the game as something that is actually happening. Designing a game implies the engagement of the player so that he continues playing. This behaviour can be explained using the *Flow Experience Theory*. The Flow Experience is characterized by the following eight elements:

(1) A task that can be completed.
(2) The ability to concentrate on the task.
(3) That concentration is possible because the task has clear goals.
(4) That concentration is possible because the task provides immediate feedback.
(5) The ability to exercise a sense of control over actions.
(6) A deep but effortless involvement that removes awareness of the frustrations of everyday life.
(7) Concern for self disappears, but sense of self emerges stronger afterwards.
(8) The sense of the duration of time is altered.

Flow is defined as focusing complete attention on the execution of an action excluding everything else. After the psychologist Csikszentmihalyi (1975) proposed the Theory of Flow to explain how some activities are performed, such as working, shopping or gaming, the theory was used to explain how people interact and behave online. His study

was based on a survey involving 250.000 people over several years about how those people carried out activities such as the ones mentioned before. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990) flow is *"the state in which people are so intensely involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it"*.



Result of the empirical study by Csikszentmihalyi based on the combination of skills and challenges

STUDY	FLOW ANTECEDENTS	FLOW EXPERIENCE	FLOW CONSEQUENCES
Ghani (1995)	Balance of challenges and skills in the activity Perceived control Cognitive Spontaneity	Enjoyment Concentration	Focus on process Learning Creativity
Hoffman and Novak (1996)	Skill/Challenge Congruence Speed of interaction	Skill Control Time distortion	Increased learning Perceived control Exploratory mindset Positive experience
Chen (2000)	Clear goals Immediate feedback Potential control Merger of action and awareness	Concentration Time distortion Loss of self-consciousness Telepresence	Autotelic experience Positive Affect
Skadberg and Kimmel (2005)	Telepresence Attractiveness Experience web sites Interactivity	Enjoyment Time distortion	Increased learning Changes of attitude and behavior (indirect, through learning)

	Speed Ease of use		

Comparisons between main studies related to flow

By studying the Flow Experience, one can concluded that the concept of flow is directly connected to the skills an individual has when carrying out a certain challenges. Thus, combining them, there are four main ways of behaving while performing a task: anxiety (high challenge/low skill), flow (high challenge/high skill), boredom (low challenge/high skill) and apathy (low challenge/low skill). According to Yong-Young Kim et al. (2005) "*if an online game player feels the game is challengeable (high challenge), he has the congruent skills for the challenge (high skill) and he is mesmerized by the game (high focused attention), then he will experience flow.*" The study made by Yong-Young Kim et al. shows that the flow was directly connected to the level of interactivity inside the game. In online games this is provided by the characteristics the Internet offers, such as communication. Even if the human communication is more sophisticated than the technological, technology is of main importance in the games that are being studied.

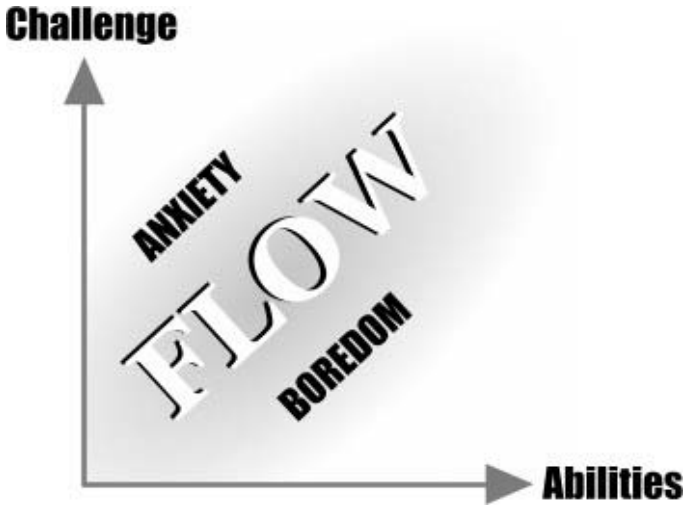
Webster et al. (1993) refines the concept of flow. Through an empirical study they concluded that there are four elements involved in the flow as an optimal experience: intrinsic interest, curiosity, control and attention focus. According to their theory, when a computer user is using a computer mediated communication the flow appears when control is perceived; his attention is completely focused on the interaction, his curiosity increases and the interest is completely focused on the interaction itself.

Balance of challenges and skills in the activity has been used by Ghani (1995) to explain how an individual can reach flow. As the user of the computer mediated environment perceives control, the flow experience can occur as a concentration on the task and enjoyment of such a task. According to Ghani, an excess of skills makes the user feel more in control which will lead to flow.

Hoffman and Novak (1996) have developed a theoretical model based on Csikszentmihalyi's work where two new features where added: telepresence and interactivity. Steuer (1991) defines *telepresence* as "*the extent to which one feels present in the mediated environment, rather than in the immediate physical environment*"). Hoffman and Novak analyse the flow in consumer navigation on the Internet to extend Csikszentmihalyi's model and afterwards Yung (2000) has joined the group to conclude that the speed of interaction in web navigation, including web loading and feedback, was a fundamental feature to reach flow.

Some articles written about sport psychology compare the flow to Zen-like meditation which implies absence of mood, distraction and stress in your consciousness. Chen´s (2000) work shows how it should be possible for that user to select the right amount of challenges according to his personal skills in order to make a player experience flow. This could be done implementing a system that constantly balances the challenge level with the current skills the player is showing. A system of this kind should be able to

analyze the methods of playing during a period of time and then adjust the difficulty, so that is does not become boring or too difficult for him. Nevertheless, this *passive flow adjustment* system is fairly difficult to implement since many systems are not able to analyze what the player thinks.



Chen's balance between abilities and challenge

Skadberg and Kimmel (2004) have studied the flow experience using a tourism website site and they concluded that the telepresence (as an antecedent of flow) was influenced by the site attractiveness and the interactivity which at the same time was influenced by the speed and ease of use. In this case they measured the flow using time distortion and the level of enjoyment.

Alexander E. Voiskounsky et al. (2004) define the major characteristics of flow as:

(1) Temporary loss of self consciousness and sense of time
(2) High concentration on the task
(3) High level of control over the task
(4) Objectives become clear and distinct
(5) Actions emerge awareness
(6) Experience brings full satisfaction
(7) Immediate feedback
(8) The flow rests upon the precise matching between the available skills and the task challenges (according to their study this was the most important one)
(9) Motivation is intrinsic (whatever produces "flow" becomes its own incentive)

A study made by Alexander E. Voiskounsky et al. is based on MUD ((Multi-User Dungeon, or Multi-User Dimension) which are text-only based online games on virtual environments. The researchers reached the conclusion that MUD players did experience flow and that the flow was the most important factor during a session.

Sweeter and Wyeth (2005), working at the University of Queensland, Australia, formulated a new model called Game Flow for evaluating how people enjoyed playing games. They have employed this model to evaluate the *World of Warcraft* game which is a RTS (Real Time Strategy) game. This model consists of eight elements: concentration, challenge, skills, control, clear goals, feedback, immersion, and social. The study concluded that not all elements are suitable for all kinds of games and that the elements must be adapted accordingly.

2.2.2 Communicative Action Theory

The Communicative Action Theory (CAT) has had a significant impact on Information System (IS) research. This theory was proposed by Habermas (1981) and differentiates three worlds: objective, social and subjective worlds. According to Habermas, the happenings on the objective world are primarily goal oriented so that the actors involved in those actions want to achieve a concrete goal. In order to do so, socializing acts happen, forming social groups with common goals and communicating among the actors involved in such social groups. Each individual has his own perspectives and ideas, so that the desire of personal success occurs as well.

Playing online computer games means interacting with the players involved in the same session. This interaction can be represented in many ways as direct communication via chatting, the fact of playing against another player, or just being a part of a community were there are some norms that must be followed in order to be accepted. The main characteristic of the Internet is that it is a communication media, sharing information and in this case to play online games with people that can be geographically distant. This feature of the internet is a central part of online games.

Habermas states four social actions that can occur in everyday social interactions: instrumental, strategic, normatively regulated and communicative. Tony Manninen (2000), professor and research scientist in Oulu University, has employed the CAT formulated by Habermas and adapted it to multiplayer online games. Manninen's interpretation consists of six possible social actions, all dependent on the circumstances and the participant's behaviour: instrumental, strategic, normatively regulated, dramaturgical, communicative and discursive. As an aid to explain the CAT, Cecez-Kecmanovic, D. and Janson, M. A. (1999) state that *"the objective world to which the actor refers includes other social actors who are perceived not as objects but as rational opponents and players in the 'game'"*. Consequently, this theory can be understood using the social events within a game and each of those social actions can be applied during different situations in online games.

The *instrumental action* is a success oriented action which means that the individual is trying to achieve a concrete goal using a certain alternative according to a certain situation. These alternatives are the rules, derived from the player's empirical knowledge or theoretical models, through which the situation is regulated and each individual has to follow. When a person trying to achieve a goal in an instrumental action takes another

human's action into account, it turns into a *strategic action***,** which is goal oriented. This involves two or more individuals that expect a certain result. Usually people tend to form social groups with common rules or values that must be followed in order to be accepted. When members of such groups behave in a particular way, following particular circumstances the *normatively regulated* action occurs. If the player is part of a group, he will try to show his strengths and hide his weaknesses, without considering whether they are true or false, depending on what people are expecting from the player in a *dramaturgical action*. The *discursive action* occurs when discussions take place leading to agreement. When a common point is reached after having a discussion or negotiation, a *communicative action* is taking place, making people coordinate their actions.

These social actions can occur during a session of online games depending on the goals the players have and the situations taking place. T. Manninen (2000) concludes that even if the possibility of communicating is as simple as just exchanging some single pre-established words, they follow the actions mentioned above.

2.2.3 Motivation Factors

Numerous researches have been carried out about the factors that lead to people playing a certain game. There are several theories attempting to classify the different types of players in the online gaming community depending on the motivations that they have to both start or continue playing.

Types of motivations / Models	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
Bartle	Achiever	Socialiser	Explorer	Killer		
Fullerton et al.	Achiever		Explorer	Competitor		
Yee	Achievement	Relationship		Grief	Immersion	Leadership
Lazzaro	Hard fun	People factor			Easy fun	

Comparions between main studies related to gamers motivation factors.

According to Bartle (1996), there are four types of players according to the motivations they have to play. There are two variables that exist to play an online game: the acting on or acting with, and the preference on interacting with players or with the environment. From these characteristics, the four kinds of players that Bartle finds are: *achievers* who are focused on acting on the environment of the world of the game, *socialisers* who prefer to interact with other players, *explorers* who are interested on acting with the environment of the game and *killers* which main aim is to act on other players.

Fullerton et al. (2004) have developed their own model, finding ten types of players. The description names of these players are competitor, explorer, collector, achiever, joker, artist, director, storyteller, performer and craftsman. There is an extensive explanation for

each one of these types, each one of them with a different motivation to play. This model has been developed from the works of Bartle.

Precisely because of the differentiation of four kinds of players that Bartle state with his theory, Yee (2002) points out the lack of flexibility in his model, where *"...one problem with such a just-so model is that the 4 types may overlap… a respondent has to choose between being an Achiever or an Explorer, then the end result will be a dichotomy where none may exist to begin with"*. The model that Yee defends is formed by five different motivations or factors linked to the online playing: relationship, immersion, grief, achievement and leadership. In this model, the author insists repeatedly on the fact that these factors are not representations of players but are rather to be seen as characteristics that the players possess. This enables one player matching with various of the factors stated above.

Lazzaro (2004) explains the motivation in four factors that are related to the ones mentioned above but with some differentiation, giving a new point of view to the existing phenomena of online gaming. The four motivations that Lazzaro states are hard fun, easy fun, altered states and the people factor. *Hard fun* is the "*opportunities for challenge, strategy, and problem solving*". *Easy fun* is the motivations that are based on the intrigue and curiosity of the players, giving them an immersion in the game world. The *altered states* are the more primal feelings that get players to play, such as experiences in "*reaction to the visceral, behaviour, cognitive and social properties*". Finally, the *people factor*, which is the motivation that makes people want to people because of the social rewards they get from it, as for example, the social recognition of their abilities or the simple interaction with other humans in order to achieve a united goal.

Making an analysis through all the models that have been presented, many common points can be found in all of them, as the existence of socializing or challenge as motivations for online gamers to play. The differences between each of the models are more customizations of Bartle's models to the foundings that every researching group has made; the other models are upgrades of the postulates that Bartle first stated. The kind of motivation that players feel could be explained by Yee's and Lazzaro's models, and the kind of character that are used while playing are synthesized in Bartle's and, more extensively in Fullerton et al.'s model.

2.3 Research Factors

2.3.1 Interaction

One of the main characteristics of the online games studied in this thesis is the multiplayer feature. This kind of games allows the possibility to interact among players within the game. Besides the interaction between players there is an interaction with the

environment; how the character is controlled by the user and how the environment can be modified.

2.3.2 The Interface

The virtual environment of the game is build up so that the interactive part from the visual part can be distinguished. The interactive part consists of how the players can modify the environment by opening doors or climbing stairs. On the other hand, the visual part involves how the scenarios are designed and how they look like, if they fit the story or the époque when the game takes place.

2.3.3 Consumption and Notion of Time/Space

According to the Flow theory, the consumption of time is longer when the player is so involved in the world of the game that he gets immersed in it. At the same time, the player might lose the notion of time he is consuming he might also lose the physical perspective of the location he is in for the virtual location, the one that is inside the game, and it might change and become the real one for a moment.

2.3.4 Knowledge Acquisition

As it often happens with new technologies, when the player starts playing a new game he must learn its mechanics. Once he has started to achieve knowledge about the game, it will be easier to control for him and perhaps more enjoyable. It is just a matter of time before the player becomes familiar with new tools and once the player has the experience of using them changes.

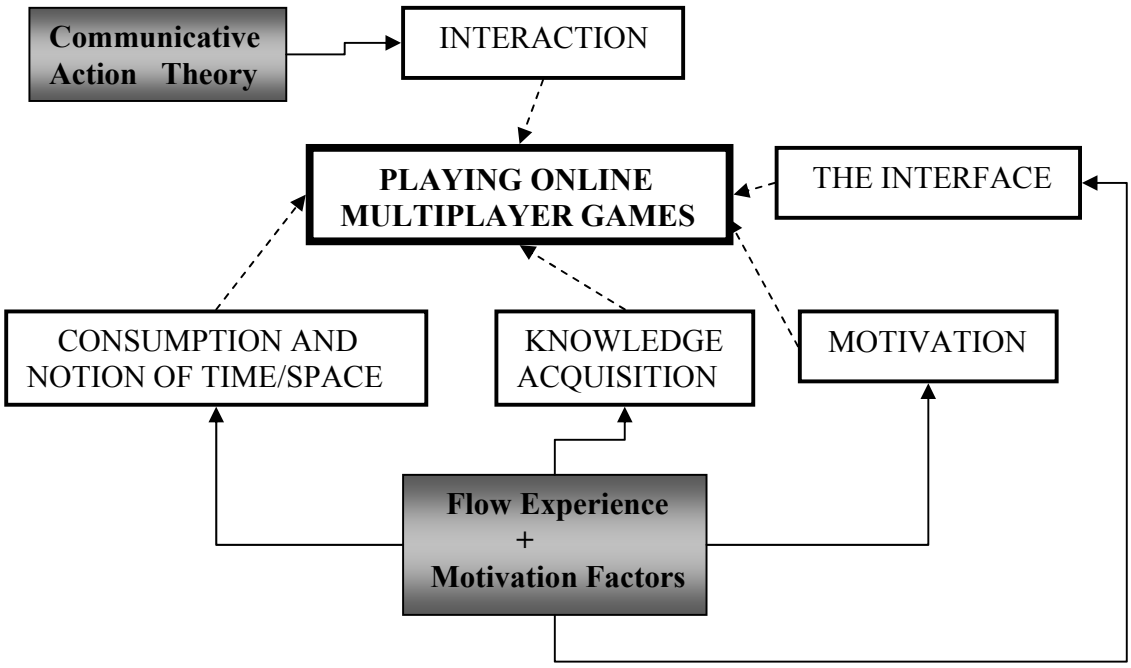
2.3.5 Motivation

Everyday has different characteristics depending on the mood of the player, the weather or other variables. The experience of playing a game is also different since the player might look for something different in the game each time. Attaining the goal that motivates the player can help him enjoy an online session.

2.4 Research Model

Each of the theories explained above can be used to understand why participants in online multiplayer games do continue playing once they have started. There can be many reasons for this behaviour but the focus will be made on some aspects that can only be found in online games. The non online games usually offer the possibility to enjoy one's free time and to play against virtual characters which are controlled by the game engine. In contrast, online games offer the option to interact with other players, which at the same time means a challenge for new players who must improve their abilities in order to have a higher status. The fact of interacting with real players, even if the interaction is not

physical, makes such players feel as if they were in a real world, forgetting their daily lives.



Research Model for playing online multiplayer games

In order to understand how some players get engaged onto playing some games, their progression during several sessions within the game must be observed. In the beginning they might be lost and confused about how to control it but once they start to get experienced they will probably enjoy it more, thus continuing playing until they get bored because it is not a challenge anymore, or because they have known another game which is more exciting than the previous one. This behaviour will be explained using the Flow Experience Theory, which relates the abilities or skills of an individual with the challenges a certain task offers.

When contacting other players, online games users have different conducts depending on their goals in the game. Such conducts are called motivation factors which make each user act in a certain way depending on what he expects from the game: killing people if you just want to relax scrupulous if you want to be strategic… There are many authors who have written about player's motivation factors and their classifications will be used in this paper to understand the research problem. The motivation factors will complement the Flow Experience Theory, since the flow can be different depending on the mood of the player and what is he looking for in the game.

The communication is a fundamental aspect of the human behaviour and even if there is no face-to-face interaction, the fact of being able to be in touch with someone is an incentive to get involved in an activity. This interaction as the Communicative Action Theory shows can take place in several different situations even if it is not a direct communication, as for example being part of a community where some rules are followed. This kind of interactions might be an explanation for people playing online multiplayer games, and will be studied. Besides, the communication among the practitioners can be "in character", when the conversation topic would be about the game, or "out character", when players talk about something not related to the game.

The discussion will be divided into two main sections that will be based on the Communicative Action Theory and the Flow Experience Theory, complemented with the Motivation Factors (see the *Research Model* picture above). The reason for this is that the Flow Experience Theory lacks the communication among players, which is important due to the fact that the actions of communicating makes possible to share the flow.

There are four factors which effect in playing multiplayer online games. They can be explained using the Flow Experience theory and the Motivation Factors: *consumption and notion of time/space*, *knowledge acquisition*, *motivation* and *the interface*.

On the other hand, the *interaction* element in multiplayer online games has a direct effect in playing online as well, and in this case the Communicative Action Theory is used to explain it and add the conceptual lack that exists in the Flow Experience Theory.

3 EMPIRICAL STUDY

3.1 Online vs. Offline

Before explaining what has been found in the empirical study, there will be a short introduction comparing online and offline games. Apparently, just a few words should be necessary to distinguish them but depending on the interests of the user, there are different choices in each one. Offline games cannot offer the interaction possibilities that online games actually do and, according to a participant in an Internet forum who is used to play console games, "*online games lack a lot of what people find fun in console games*". In order words, there are also disadvantages, and some games implemented for multiplayer purposes have a different way of interaction. So, depending on what the user is looking for, the most appropriate game can be either online or offline.

The fact of being able to connect a computer (desktop, laptop, XBox, PlayStation, Nintendo) to the Internet makes a game quite different. The possibilities that the Internet offers for gaming are few at the moment since it has not been used for this purpose until now. Offline games can be used to have fun but many of them present limited possibilities in the sense that the game is lineal, although there are exceptions as role-based playing games and most games have alternative objectives or missions that can be played beside the main storyline. This means that you can do only what the game offers you. The story inside the game is clear as it is programmed to achieve concrete goals but once these goals are attained; there is nothing to do but to wait for the next generation of that game which will provide new challenges.

On the other hand, playing online games means playing against other real players that are not Artificial Intelligence (AI) based. This fact makes the game more challenging as you get more experience and knowledge about how to play it. In single player games, once the player performs better than the computer characters, the attraction of playing decreases, unless you like being god forever, as the movements that the computer characters make are predictable due to the fact that the computer does not learn or analyze the human character's movements. In general, this makes people give up playing. The reason for this is that the complexity of an average action, strategy or role game is very high when it comes to analyzing the possible movements that the players can do, and there is no AI good enough to adapt to the movements or strategies of the player. In the category the chess games are the only games that have succeeded. In the chess games, the number of possible movements each time is low; it is a world of 64 squares, where the movements are few and can be pre-analyzed by the computer. This is the reason why it can be a new challenge for the players each time in multiplayer games, even if the same scenario is always played, as the kind of strategy the people playing are going to follow is unpredictable.

It is worth to mention that the empirical study was done taking into account multiplayer online games. Multiplayer offline games can also be played by more than one player but

usually the number of users is limited. If using a PlayStation, the number of offline players can vary from 2 to 6, but if the game takes place on a desktop or laptop the number of participants is more limited. In those cases, everything that is going to be written has the Internet as the medium to interact.

ONLINE GAMES	OFFLINE GAMES
Interaction with other players	A history must be followed
Cannot expect player's behaviours (immature, professional…)	Usually the game is played seriously
Higher competitiveness and challenges	AI based characters (predictable)
Evolution through the game (limited)	Evolution around the players (unlimited)
Internet connection is needed	Usually better graphical design

Differences that the interviewees think are important

In general, the choice of playing multiplayer or single player games is mood dependent. If the user is looking for a shared diversion then online games would be the best choice whereas single player games can be a good alternative if the player is looking for a pastime. One respondent compared the playing to playing sports; sometimes you feel like playing basketball with more people but another day you might feel like running alone, it depends on the day.

3.2 Knowledge Acquisition

In the era of the information, knowledge has a main role in every technology system. However, data warehouses or information systems that store knowledge are not in focus for this study. What is going to be treated is the role the knowledge has in computer games. This knowledge comes from starting to use the system, the game in this case, and as you learn how to use it getting new knowledge. This process is different, depending on the difficulty of the game.

> "*A game easy to use but difficult to master would be my ideal game. It should be easy to start playing as a beginner but difficult to become an expert. A game that in a five minutes you can control it but that it will take you 5 days to be an expert*" (Respondent)

3.2.1 The human person

The knowledge acquisition can occur in several ways if the human person playing or the character that is representing the human player in the game's virtual world is taken into account. The latter happens during a role game and the character gets experience as he

succeeds with certain goals. If the human user is taken into account, he can learn how to play the game and improve his skills while doing it where the complexity of the game can be easy, hard or something in between. Such complexity can be determined by how easy it is to control the movements or the game on itself, or by how difficult it is to proceed in the game.

If the game is of such complexity that it is too difficult to accustom to its rule in the beginning, the user can feel too insecure playing online together with other gamers that he might give up playing. *Unreal Tournament* is a good example of this kind of games where learning how to use all the movements is a difficult task for a beginner. Usually, games include some "keys", as it happens with software used to type text for instance, that are standardized and once you have played a similar game it becomes intuitive to get involved in yet another one. But in the case of Unreal Tournament there are many features that have not been included in any game before. This is the reason why it will be almost impossible for the casual player to follow other experienced gamers player when starting to play this game in an online session, which can make him quit playing. On the other hand, games like *Quake* are quite intuitive so that the difference between a beginner and a skilled user will not be that big and will still be fun to play.

Nevertheless, in multiplayer online games, and as the data that has been collected shows, the attainment of the goal is not as important as how you reach it. There are usually several players involved in the game and according to one of the respondents "*the matter is that there is almost always a better player than you and then it means a challenge"*.

For the human player, the acquisition of knowledge can take place in two circumstances: training and observing. The more you play a game, the better you know how to manage it and therefore the more people you can beat. Anyway, depends on the kind of game that is played, killing people is not always the main goal. As Ola Johansson stated in the interview; "*It is always the attraction of setting a goal and if you don't reach it trying to use another tactic, but the killing on itself doesn't attract*" when talking about the *World of Warcraft*, one of today's most famous multiplayer online games. It is however also possible to observe "*other players to see how they solve a situation using some kind of moves that I can learn from them*" (Ola Johansson).

3.2.2 The character

One of our respondents believed that "*what makes a game engaging in a role game is the fact of continuing playing to reach more levels*", talking about the character. According to some role players it is hard to leave your character when having played for a long time and having reached certain level of experience with it. Each character can improve its abilities in different ways, either getting a certain number of weapons if playing a first person shooter or having a huge army in a strategy game. Role-based games are considered the most addictive due to the fact of the experience acquisition.

In any case, the main point of the character improving and acquiring new abilities is that the human that is controlling it knows how to do it. If the character is a wizard and the player does not know how to use the magic spells or the abilities this wizard disposes, it is mandatory for the player to learn how to incorporate those abilities in order to make a real upgrade for the character. Besides, it must also be simple to use those abilities since "*a long time of learning can make many people do not want to continue playing*" (respondent).

3.3 Motivation

"*All games are designed to be addictive, it is good for the business*", believes Ola Johansson, online game expert, in the interview granted for this study. To make the games addictive, they should contain some motivational features for the players to start playing and staying faithful to the game. But the complexity of these characteristics is very high as every person looks for personal amusement features in a game, not to mention the possibility that each person looks for different features depending on which the mood they are in at the moment of playing, a fact that Ola Johansson clarified. These motivational features will be enumerated and analyzed throughout this chapter.

3.3.1 What are you looking for in online games?

3.3.1.1 Among beginners and casuals

This research has found the following reasons, in order of importance, as to why beginner and casual players play online games:

- Having fun
- Immersion in the game world
- Accomplishing challenges
- Interaction with other players

When the interviewees were asked about the issues they look for when they are going to play online games, there are several answers that are repeated in the different questionnaires, but there is one particular answer being repeated in the majority of them: the search of fun as a main reason or motivation to play. These two feelings, having fun and the immersion into the world of the game are very noticeable when visiting a gaming centre. What has to be taken into account is also the expression of the feelings of players that depends on the type of game they are playing. Ola Johansson affirms that "*some games usually make people louder than other games. Strategy games are often silent games, you have to think and they do not have the adrenalin that you can find in action games"*.

The differences appear in the moment the interviewees are asked about the way they got to know that it was fun. From this, two main ways to approach this field can be distinguished:

- Someone who started when little with computer games, and with the evolution of these, started with the online games
- Someone in the environment of the player, such as brothers or friends, played

There is a common thought among the people who were categorized to the first group; that they do not differentiate the fact of playing computer and non computer games when they were younger. From their point of view, both are games and they should be looked upon alike. This fact points out the internalization that the computer games, and by extension the computers, have in the everyday life of western life style.

When it comes to the differences among the motivation that players felt when they started playing online games and the ones that they feel now, there are only two types of questions. Either the players do not feel any difference at all when they have to make the comparison, or the players conclude that in the beginning they were more focused on the skilled part of the game, as their own scores or simply the fact of winning, but now the only focus is to spend a good time playing.

The next more answered question is the fact of getting immersed into the world of the game. In this part, there are two possible players; the ones who wish to experience another world for the sake of exploring this new place, and the ones that desire this immersion in order to forget their everyday problems in the real world, or in other words, as a way to escape from reality. This experience of immersion still remains in the players after they have had a session playing. Ola Johansson has noticed that the fact of people commenting the happenings after a session with other people that have been playing with them in the same virtual world is “pretty standard”. The comments that people usually make about the recent experience are exclusively on the good skills that they have developed, in the cases that the player has been lucky, or the bad luck or cheating of other players after sessions of dissatisfactory.

Other less frequent answers given are the challenge of setting a goal in the game and reaching it, and the interaction with other players. This competition focus has also been observed by Ola Johansson, “*Some people really get into the competition part and get very loud when they are winning or losing. When they are winning they want to humiliate the person they are winning over. And they do it as loud as possible. And when they are losing they want to have an excuse*”. This fact is of great importance for the players in certain action games, as they win reputation among the community of players of the game from this. This is yet another reason for online players to spend further time playing, therefore a motivation for them. The fact of being skilled enough to be known inside the community of players of a certain game, or even feared when it comes to an action game, functions as a spur for online players to continue playing. This motivation is even more important in games played by a large number of people. An example of this is *Half Life*: *Counterstrike*, a first person team-based shooter game. According to *GameSpy*,

Counterstrike this has been the most widespread online game during the short history of this area. Being launched in 2000, it still creates a halo of prestige, and the fact of having killed a great amount of other players can give the winners a sensation of pride.

3.3.1.2 Among expert players

Inside of the expert players' community, there are a lot of differences to be found between the motives of the beginners and the casual players. There are even distinctions in the kind of games played and the fact of playing one type of game or another depends on the motives that people have to play. These special characteristics will be enumerated in the next paragraphs.

- Hard to master
- Reputation
- Priority to group goal achievement than personal

One of the main motives that expert people expect from a game is the fact of having the ability of commanding correctly the characters through the game. This makes the playing a challenge each time a session starts, as the control of the character is not under control. As Hans-Christian Stoltz states, "*You build things that makes it hard to learn, because the game is dead when the user understands the mechanics of the game. To present new things, new obstacles are the most important part of the game*". This characteristic has special importance in the first person shooters, where the interactions with other players have more importance in the strategic point of view than in the social one, and were the ability of shooting and aiming the enemy is a basic characteristic; in the moment the player masters too much the game, it becomes boring due to the fact that there is no challenge in playing it.

Reputation is usually related with players which are experts especially in role games, as they present this feature as one of the most important ones; the fact of being known or even remembered in the world of the game. This can only happen in role games as they are the only ones that do not have a starting or finishing point; it is a continuous game. For example, on the first person shooter games the sessions have a start and a final point, and only players that connect to certain amount of servers with some continuity will know about a certain player that is really good. But still, the reputation is outside the games, it is on the knowledge of certain players about other players. But on some role games people have or can show their reputation inside the world of the game. For instance, in *World of Warcraft*, the experience level of the player appears on the heads of the characters, and weapons are graphically different so that they can be distinguished by people, knowing what quest had to be done to have the possession of the weapon. In other games, as in *Asheron's Call*, the player could even have a house were players can show the items they have gathered in the quests they have participated in. There are even examples of games in which, as the reputation could not be shown, expert players quitted playing.

When it comes to achieving the goals, especially in the first person shooter games, that are more oriented to the goal achievement, the expert players show to have more interest on wining the session globally, not being the person with more points in the team. This is the opposite if it is compared to what casual or beginner usually do, as H-C Stoltz states, *"...there is a certain flag in the map Hotel Flag that is too obvious; you don't win the game by taking this flag. But you win scores if you capture the flag. ... you can see the whole American team (*the beginners*) rushing to that flag without a strategy, just trying to kill as much as they can. The experience players want to win the map, win the whole game, instead of wining individually".*

3.3.2 Why do you like playing online?

From the beginning of the research, one of the main goals is to know what players like from the games they usually play online and therefore it is one of the questions in the questionnaire: *What do you like from the games you play* (see appendix A). Even though the number of respondents was not too large, it was enough to realize that the answer was almost unanimous and there was no doubt about what makes online games different from offline games. Here there are some of the answers that have been received.

"The people, the challenges between the people"
"The competitiveness"
"The fact of not playing against programs, but against people"
"The fact of confronting real people and not machines"
"The interaction with other people"

As observed, the interaction with other human players and the competitive challenge that this means is by far the main reason for playing multiplayer online games, according to the respondents. This feature just exists in online games and it is the biggest lack of offline games, although some devices can be used in some games which allow the multiplayer mode in some games, but quite limited.

> *"the chance of being able to interact with other players (humans) to achieve goals, specially playing and sharing the experience in the game with friends"* (Respondent)

> *"besides if those people are known, the emotion and interest increase"* (Respondent)

Commonly, the interaction is among known players. In many occasions, people playing know each other because they were friends before; if they have the chance to play at home because they have a fast Internet connection they try to meet their friends just online. But it is usual that people who go to play online games to the game centre make it in groups of friends, thus having online and face to face interaction. According to Ola Johansson they *"have a new student discount for the university students to encourage the students to come"* and *"they take their friends"*. It happens that players in the game centre that go together sit next to each other and after a while playing, they try to avoid

each other due to competitive motives, trying to make it hard for the mate to see the screen, so that their position in the game is not known by the friend.

3.3.3 Forming social groups of players: GUILDS

If the player starts playing alone, there exist certain games such as *World of Warcraft*, where the interaction with other players is very high; this makes people join groups of players, or guilds. These groups have certain rules that must be followed, and players must act consequently. The most important feature of online games, according to Ola Johansson, is "*to make people able to choose what kind of people they want to play with or against*". This is possible in guilds; it is very common that if you meet a player from the same guild that is behaving against the internal rules, he can be thrown out of the guild. In the *World of Warcrfact* website forum, the research performers entered a section called *World of Warcraft Guild Recruitment* and to have an idea about how it works to be part of a guild and what it means the welcome message states it clearly:

> *"This forum is here to provide you with a friendly environment where you can recruit members for your World of Warcraft guild. Community forums work best when participants treat their fellow posters with respect and courtesy. Therefore, we ask that you take the time to read through the forum Code of Conduct before posting."*
> (http://forums.worldofwarcraft.com)

This statement shows to what extent the fact of playing online is a social phenomenon.

In modern games there is a new feature that is useful in order to meet the people the player want to play with and it consists on a browser mechanism. This mechanism allows keeping the track of the players friends, in order to find them easily. *Xfire* is an example of this kind of tools, which online players can use in order to have the possibility to contact their game mates. This interaction is important for most of the players, and in some sense it is why guilds are created.

3.4 The Interface

The concept *interface of a game* can lead the reader to misunderstand what the real meaning of the concept is. A game consists of a virtual environment that is shaped in a different way depending on in each case. This environment consists of different forms and structures, places that can be explored and characters that can be interacted with. But not only what is seen within a game is called interface; it is also the way the player interacts with it. It is common in a game that some actions which must be achieved in a simple or fast way, as to pick up a weapon or to climb a wall using a ladder, take too long. This is context and game dependent. If it is a first person shooter game, as for example *Quake*, easy and repeated actions should be made by simple combinations, such as looking or shooting. In contrast, if the player is involved in a sport game, as a football

game for example, and he wants to shoot the ball in a certain way or make a trick, then it should not be easy to do it, and the combination of several keys would be the best solution, otherwise it would be so easy to do it and there will not be any challenge.

The interface can be defined taking into account the following approaches:

- The interaction design
- The visual design

In relation to the first definition "*A good interface attracts you more in the beginning*" and an important aspect is that "*it must be rich in resources*" (respondent). Games like *Warcraft* or *Imperium III* are strategic games that do not need a great interface but that are much more entertaining than other games due to the fact that each session does not necessarily has to be like the previous one.

The intuition is one of the main features that the interface must allow. The core movements and actions should be easily accomplished without distracting the player from the game. A respondent said that "*a good interface must be able of you not paying attention to it, you should not realize that it is there, you should not have to abstract yourself from the game in order to control it*" and a common issue is that it must be easy to learn because many people will give up playing if it takes too long. But it should include things that, as referred in the section about the *Interaction* (*3.3.1 What are you looking for in online games-Among expert players*), provide new obstacles so that the game continues after the user has understood the mechanics of the game.

When people were asked about how important the interface is, they understood it as the visual design, and if it is one of the main reasons that makes people continue playing (see Appendix A). According to their answers the interface is just the medium that can make the player start playing the game, but at the same time it can be like a wall which hides the real argument of the game. If the argument of the game is repetitive and monotonous it can make the player feel bored after a while, and then the interface is not important anymore, even if it is the best interface ever.

On top of it a great interface can make the game so slow that playing can become a nightmare. There must be a balance between speed and quality, but not only in the sense of graphical quality but in the sense of game quality in general. According to the questionnaires gathered the speed within the game is more important but it is not far from the importance of graphical quality. There can be several reasons for this, as having a fast Internet connection at home solves the speed problems in any game so that the player's attention is just payed to the graphical design. A student of "fine arts" answered that he "*plays because of the designs, tourism*" so in this case it is a specific reason that is related to what he is studying. Others said that old games where the quality was not that good are more likely to engage them than the new games where the quality is usually fantastic. Anyway as a general feature "*speed is the main factor of the quality*" but "*if there is just one of those the game does nothing to do*".

3.5 Consumption and Notion of Time/Place

Computer games consist of virtual environments designed to make the player get involved into another reality and, as it has been mentioned before, one of the main reasons why people play is to get immersed in the game world. This fact can sometimes lead the player to lose the notion of time, or the notion of the happenings that occur around him, as it happened to our expert Hans-Christian. He affirmed that "I *can get drawn into stuff, yes, very focused and forgetting where I am, yes I could get to that kind of flow state*". As an example for this, he stated that he could forget about eating, or not realizing the amount of time he was spending on a specifically game. The respondents were asked about this fact, and their answers were completely different from Hans-Christian's experience since they ensured they were aware of the time spent online and surprisingly one of the contestants stated that *"losing the notion of time involves a level of concentration and lost in thought that cannot take place when you are interacting with real people"*.

According to the information gathered on the questionnaires practitioners spend around 3 hours every day playing online games. Those 3 hours can vary from 1 to 8 hours depending on the mood and the day of the week, since the weekend is the part of the week that is more used to play more. In relation to the length in time of the sessions, analyzing the answers of the respondents it can vary from 30 minutes to 3; exceptionally 12 hours. In any case, it depends on the kind of game being played, since each game is designed to have longer or shorter missions, although 3 hours is the common extent.

In relation to the people visiting the Game Centre in Lund, the opening hours are quite generous, on Friday and Saturday it closes at 3 a.m., and it is common to find people still playing when they are closing (more during the weekend than in work days). When it comes to the amount of time spent in front of the computer, people who go to this place often pay to play for an hour, but afterwards it becomes too short for them and they pay for another one. This behaviour was observed during the workshop when everyone, after the first hour wanted to continue playing.

When asked about the awareness of time that players that frequent the gaming centre, Ola Johansson commented that *"sometimes they want to know how much money they have spent, they ask the question because they realize that it's more time than what they actually intended"*. The reason for this happening is that common visitors have an account that they must refill in order to have time to play, so they cannot know for how long they have been playing during a session, and therefore how much money they have spent.

The amount of time is another important aspect when talking about online games, as the virtual environment can make the player feel as if being inside the game. Some games, like *car driving games*, can make the player move his body as if he was driving a real car or, with the intention of driving faster, pushing the keys harder. In the games that are being studied here this behaviour rarely occurs but, as Ola Johansson stated, "*I see people*

when rockets are coming to them moving trying to avoid them ... It is not common but it happens".

3.6 Interaction

Playing games has always been based on interacting with the other players involved in the same game either if it is a computer game, a table game or another kind of game. Through this study it is wanted to get knowledge about the interaction among players but with the virtual environments and the different characters that can be found within a game.

It is worth mentioning that the interaction in the game depends on the game being played. Sometimes it is just casual chat, as talking about the weather, and other times trying to help each other to solve the quest. Then it is the game in itself that attracts the communication (Hans-Christian Stoltz).

3.6.1 Among players

The interaction among players is one of the essential characteristics that is intrinsic and differentiates precisely the online games from the normal computer games. This interaction between players is new due to its own characteristics; people who are geographically very distant among them can now play together as if they were in the same room. But is it the reason that people play online games this interaction, or is it only a collateral feature of this new type of communication? These topics will be analyzed in this chapter.

Through the analysis of the data that has been gathered through the research, the following facts have appeared to be core facts:

- The communication between players in online games is basic
- If the game does not present enough tools to communicate inside the program, players use other programs to communicate with each other
- The amount and type of interaction among players is game dependent

In all the cases of players interacting with or against someone that was not physically in the same location, the player communicated with the other partners in the session. The type of communication was different depending on the kind of game, but the need for communication was a common thread among all of the different groups of games.

In the cases in which the game did not present enough facilities so that the communication among players could happen, secondary programs were used to substitute the lack of that feature. Some programs that Ola Johansson, the expert in online games, commented that are used commonly among players are Skype and XFire.

While observing players in the act of playing in front of a computer, the importance of communication and the kind of interaction between them depending on the type of game they were playing has been observed. In first person shooter games, more concretely in Counter Strike, the interaction was used for basically simple interaction while they were alive in the game, as asking other players what moves they were going to do, asking for cover in some movement that they were doing, or just making comments about what has happened if they had died during the session. In this kind of games the social factor is almost non existence since players try kill each other constantly, although there can be group mission (where the communication is notable), but player do not meet in the game to talk. Besides the interaction must be voice based due to the fact that the hands must be free in order to use the keyboard properly to manage the character; first-person shooter games are fast and action games where there is not usually time for distraction. When it comes to other strategy or more specially, role-based games, the amount and richness of the conversations was notably superior than in the first person shooter games and players are more likely to interact via chatting.

It was interesting to find out that the communication among players can lead to the destruction of the myth. With this it is meant that people have certain stereotypes of players depending on which games they play. Imagine playing Star Wars online, in order to be realistic and to be immersed you would like to listen to the "*players spelling in a certain way*" like "*feel the force with you*", but they do not always do it (Hans-Christian Stoltz). Players were talking about matters that had to do with the game, but also many other matters that had nothing to do with the game; the conservations showed a clear friendship among the characters, and what is more important among the players. As two examples of these facts, the first one is an affirmation of Ola Johansson in which he stated that "*…makes the interaction between players very close, so you get to know the other players. They become friends, they can even have affairs with other people in the game, yeah, people fall in love in the World of Warcraft and stuff like that. It becomes very social…*", or as a player, as happened during our observations had his character killed while he was talking with a friend in *World of Warcraft*.

3.6.2 Within the game

When it comes to the interaction with the game, it has been found that there are several features in the games that are important for the players:

- The level of complexity of the game is important
- Exploring new types of characters is interesting
- Exploring the maps is interesting

As a first approach to the level of complexity, it is ought to say that each game has different levels of complexity. Their complexity can appear in how the movements are done using different key combinations. In this part of the analysis, the interaction complexity with the environment will only be considered, or in other words, the

movement complexity. This complexity is connected to the variety of movements that are different or alike to other games for players who have experienced with other games, or the intuition for players who have never played before. There are games that are really hard for beginners due to the complexity of their movements, such as Unreal Tournament. As Ola Johansson states, "*Unreal tournament has so many features that other games don't have at all; unique features that no other game in the world has. There are more weapons that in any other game, each weapon has two different fire modes, every other game just has one, and then you can combine those fire modes to become a third fire mode which makes it even more complicated. And then there is the movement in Unreal Tournament that is very very complex. You have dodge moves, you have double jump, you have dodge jump and wall jumps; moves that don't exist in any other game and that takes a lot of practice to get it right…In another game the difference is not that big between a good player and a mediocre player…And that will scare off the fresh guys because they will not have a chance, they will not see the guy before they get killed".*

The fact of getting to know the personal features of the different kinds of characters that exist in the game's world is something valued by the online players. Especially in the MMORPGS, the amount of available races and the amount of different genuine specializations that exist for each of the races makes it interesting for the player as trying all the possibilities that the game offers the player achieves many goals. First, the player can know the particularities of each clan and consequently choose which clan he likes more. Secondly, even if the player knows the history of each race, he can know the pros and cons of the rival races in order to know which strategies to use in case of a fight against them. And third and finally, the fact of knowing the special features of all the races just for the sake of knowing them, as many times the history of the game is very followed by the players. As Ola Johansson stated, "*...there is always a new type of character you can play to have new experiences or new abilities*".

Exploring the map is also seen as something interesting for the players. The parts of the map that are unknown for the players is felt as an attraction as they represent possible quests that are unknown, were new rewards can be obtained and new people can be met.

3.6.3 Human players vs. AI

As a first approach, two distinctions must be made with the reality of the characters within a game. First, it is not the same playing against a character controlled by a real person or controlled by Artificial Intelligence. This difference characterizes online games and it is well-known that this fact makes it more exciting. According to the questionnaires, once a single player game is finished there is no emotion anymore. On the other hand with online games, it can always be a different experience as the human behaviour is unpredictable and this makes the game surprising; the game depends on the players taking part in each session. The evolution of game goes together with the characters instead of being just related to the story of the game that once it is finished the game is *dead*.

There are games like chess where the AI can contain a good intelligence engine which makes it challenging every time, but this is because of the limitation of movements that can are permitted; they can be previously analyzed by the engine and act consequently as a human. But when it comes to other games as *Battlefield 2* or *World of Warcraft* it is much more complicated to build up such engine, so it is very limited.

"If you play Battlefield 2, you see the ambition between players when they act, or I think you can see it. (...) There is a certain flag in the map Hotel Flag that is too obvious; you don't win the game my taking this flag. But you win scores if you capture the flag. And you can see the whole American team rushing to that flag without a strategy, just trying to kill as much as they can. The experience players want to win the map, win the whole game, instead of wining individually. (...) Computer controlled players don't act like that. (...) The AI is not very developed, so it is easy to find the patron, so you play against patterns instead of playing against someone." (Hans-Christian Stoltz)

And secondly, the player can either adopt the personality of the character he is controlling or not. This is important in the sense that it makes the game more realistic and credible, but in the end every player is known because of the way of playing due to his own personality, although there are exceptions as well.

3.7 World of Warcraft

During the research, some observations were made around *World of Warcraft* in a gaming centre in Lund. It was made in order to have an overview of how people behave during a session of a massive multiplayer online role playing game. Such observations are based on the interviews, questionnaires and informal conversations with some players and will be explained in the following chapters.

3.7.1 Creation of the character

In order to start playing, the first thing to do is to create a new character that will be guided through the different scenarios in the game. Depending on the player's intentions the game allows him to create a personality that fits him. For instance, a warrior is convenient for close combats; a hunter is a good choice as a companion as he can have a pet that at the same time will defend and help in combats. On the other hand, if the idea is to join a group, a magician can be the best choice, even though he is a weak character for combat, it is useful in group playing since he can heal the other characters in the group. After making the decision, the faction must be chosen, the alliance or the horde, the race, as elf, human, orc or gnome, and the class, as for example warrior, hunter, magician or druid. Once the player has started playing and got some experience secondary abilities or talents can be chosen, such

as mining, clothing or cooking, that will be useful in order to construct items like armours, food or clothes. During the character creation, it is also possible to choose its appearance: male/female, skin colour, facial hair or hair colour. (Picture from the *WoW* website: www.worldofwarcraft.com)

3.7.2 Playing observations

A *World of Warcraft* session starts awaking the character, which is sleeping while the player is not playing. To improve the character getting new abilities and experience, the best way is to go alone fulfilling certain missions so that the experience is not divided among a group. This attitude is good in the beginning when the character does not have any high abilities, so in order to achieve more important missions to go further in the game, it is useful to achieve missions alone so that the experience obtained from making them is not divided among a group. Anyway, the types of missions that can be done in the beginning of the game are very simple; it makes no sense trying to achieve big missions due to the weakness of the character.

WoW is a game developed to attract casual users. With this aim the game allows reaching goals and high level of experience with the avatar quite fast. This fact can scare experienced players who are used to spend a lot of time playing in order to be something in the game, to reach a level.

Forming groups

When the character has enough experience make larger quests but still lacks sufficient abilities to achieve big missions on its own, it is common to join other people in the game forming groups that travel together through the game world. These groups are usually formed by characters with different attributes, helping each other in order to achieve the goals in the missions, as for example sharing objects. A quite normal behaviour is to look for characters with complementary attributes to the player's. It is normal to look for characters with a different class and with different secondary abilities. For example, if the player is a Warrior, it is useful to have a magician in the group that can restore the character's life points and *mana* when they are decreasing. For a magician it is also helpful to have somebody in the group that is strong enough to fight in short distances, as magicians are usually weak and have long range magical attacks. It is the same when it comes to the jobs or secondary abilities. Again, if the player is a warrior but he cannot make armours, it is good to have someone in the group that has this ability. This attitude is quite social and rational, making strong groups of individuals that help each other covering their weaknesses and using the strengths of the others in their own benefit. Some people create characters to join a balanced group with their friends. For instance, if several friends want to play together and act as a group they can create a warrior, a magician and a hunter and build in this way a balanced group. Since every race is starting in a different part of the map, in order to play with friends, the characters should be created of the same race or at least in the same faction, alliance or horde. It is common that someone within the group takes the leader attitude, but the group can also be

democratic. If any of the players in the group is more experienced than the others it is normal that he acts like a leader, this behaviour depends on the individual personality of the players.

Communication among known players

Chatting is a common activity among players that know each. Sometimes it is more important, not the fact of playing, but having someone to talk to, with an artificial personality; it makes the player login the game and have fun for a while. This makes clear that the purpose is not always to play the game to get experience with the character reaching some mission through the killing of some creature, but to meet the people behind the character and *have a walk* while meeting some enemies. Besides players use to meet the people of their group at a certain time in a certain place of the map to play together and get experience together. In this way they are able to get a similar level and access to the same areas in the game

The interaction with people that is not in the player's group is also important. While playing with the group, he can find someone that needs help to get a certain mission but as he is alone and he is not powerful enough to make it in its own. The game permits him to share the "not done missions" with anybody else that has not made this mission before. The player just needs to use the *share* option in the mission menu in the game interface to perform this action and get help from other characters. The sense of friendship that appears in the game make characters help each other.

3.8 Workshop: Battlefield 2

The data collection from the Workshop that took place in the game centre in Lund is based on the answers the participants gave us to the following questions:

3.8.1 What did you like from the game?

When it comes to talk about the game in general there are four main features that the participants in the workshop liked most. The most entertaining and exciting fact was that the players knew each other before playing, which made the session very amusing. Playing with friends, as opposed to sitting alone on a computer at home, was the general idea that they concluded as the best characteristic of playing in the game centre. Besides, as it was a team play it was very amusing, added to the fact that each team had a mission which consisted in catching the flags of the other team.

Image from Battlefield 2 (http://dx.ampednews.com/)

The virtual environment was the second feature that people liked from the game. In their opinion the interface was really good making them feel immersed into the game. The visual effects, as one of the respondent said, "*were awesome*". Another mentioned the fact of the game "*being so realistic*" was another advantage. On top of it the high speed or tempo of the game and the synchronization made the game easy playing.

The less interesting point of the game according to the answers, but not less important since everyone thought they were interesting as well, was the fact of being able to change the way of playing using different weapons or vehicles; exploring the game features. All the players tried almost every vehicle within the game, which were cars, trucks, and tanks. There was even the chance to fly using a helicopter but it was available for experienced players in the sense that it was very difficult to manage it; everyone died trying to use it.

3.8.2 What differences do you notice from the first hour and the second one?

Playing two different session, of an hour each one, even if it was not previously planned, gave the chance to formulate this question in order to make people realize the difference of starting to play an unknown game and continuing playing it. All the participants agreed that during the second session they were used to the controls and they manage much better within the game. This means that they improved their abilities due to the knowledge they gathered while playing the first hour. Besides they started discovering new options exploring the game. The strategic fact was also realized by most of them since they started to play better creating groups in the game during the second hour.

3.8.3 Do you think the communication was necessary? Why?

This thesis is closely related to the communication factor within online games, and during the workshop it was tested. The participants did not think that it was important within the game, but they were screaming during both sessions when someone killed another, one or just to join a strategic action. The latter was the main goal of communicating and since all the players involved in the game were in the same room the computer based communication was not necessary. But communication does not only involve chatting but also the actions carried out within the game. For instance, all the vehicles had the

possibility to carry more than one player which provoked social interaction within the game.

3.8.4 What do you think about the interface? Was it important?

There were several opinions about the interface in the game. According to some of the participants, the interface was important since it suited the game and created an enjoyable game atmosphere. Others agreed, saying that it looked nice but that it was not important, although it must be intuitive in order not to get disoriented, a comment used for online games in general.

The participants explained that the interface was quite slow when it came to the soldiers walking through the scenario, but at the same time the interface was realistic thanks to vehicles that could be used to go faster in the game. The intuitive part could be realized when driving a vehicle since the controls where different from the ones used to walk with the character, but it was still easy to find out how to do it. On the other hand, there must always be a difficult challenge, in this case consisting of trying to fly using the helicopter.

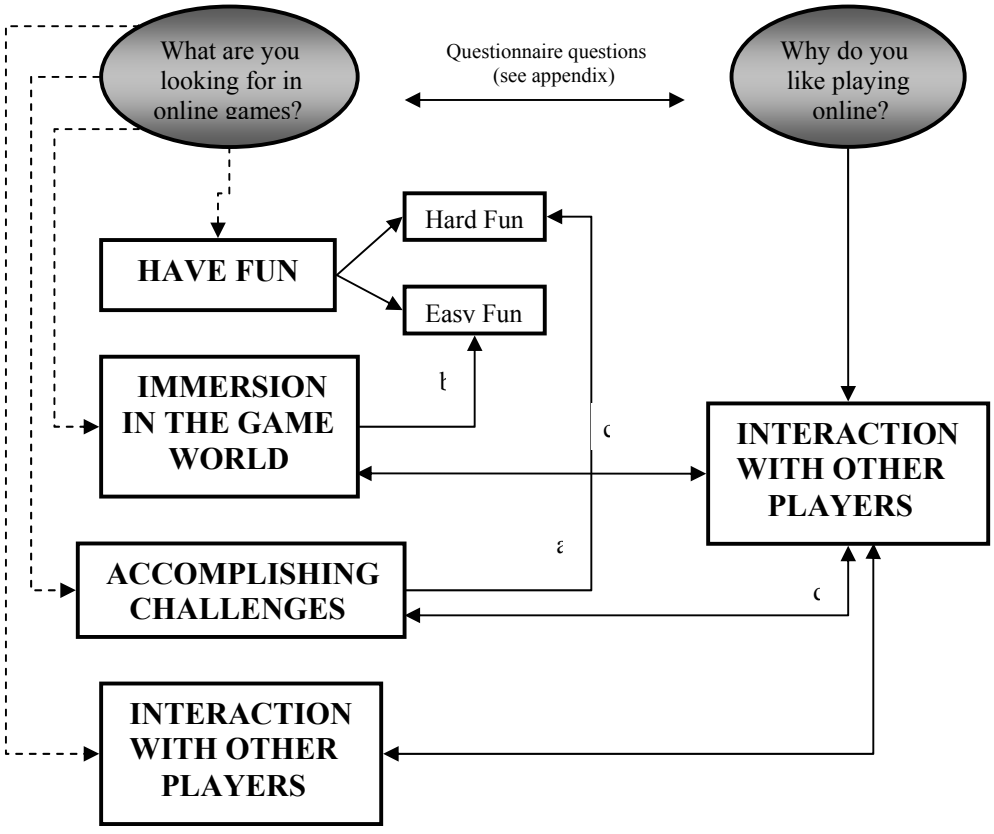
3.8.5 Other observations

The statistics in the end each showed which players were the best, something that gave a higher status to the best players for the next session. Another big challenge was killing.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Motivation: Contradictories or relatives?

In the section *3.3 Motivation*, two questions that were asked through the questionnaires were analyzed: "*What are you looking for in online games?*" and "*Why do you like playing online?*". Apparently the answers for the first question and the answer (in general there was a main answer) for the second question could seem contradictory. "*The interaction with other players*" achieved the least attention when talking about what the respondents were looking for in online games, but on the other hand the reason why they liked playing online games it was almost collectively the same. This section aims to explain such contradiction and conclude that all the different motives involved in the following figure are related to one another. For this purpose, Lazzaro's motivation factors model will be used, making a pattern matching of the collection of empirical data treated in the literature review.



a- opportunities for challenge, strategy, problem sovling
b- intrigue, curisoty
c- characters controlled by human player
d- human players vs. AI based characters

Lazzaro (2004) introduces a new point of view to the phenomena of online gaming and explains the motivation factors as follows: hard fun, easy fun, altered states and the people factor. The altered states will not be in focus for this discussion. With this the fact of having fun (as our respondents said) can be divided into hard fun and easy fun. Hard fun consists on the opportunities the game offers you for challenge, for being strategic and to be able to solve the suggested problems. There is also a direct relation between *Accomplishing Challenges* and *Having Hard Fun*. Nevertheless, both respondents and Ola Johansson believed that Interacting with other Players means having a new challenge every time as there can always be a better player than you, which supports a relation between *Accomplishing Challenges* and the *Interaction with other Players*.

Moreover, easy fun consists on the intrigue and curiosity that are involved in exploring a new world so that, as explained in the figure above, *Immersion in the Game World* and *Having Easy Fun* are directly connected as well. Besides, the game world consists of the personalities that characterize the game due to their abilities, how they are shaped and how they act. The fact of these personalities acting is nonetheless dependent on the human player who is controlling them; or as Hans-Christian Stoltz states, "*when they were in-game and in character, they tried to act according to these personality features, even if they weren't like that in real life*". This gives a relation between the *Game World* and the *Interaction with other Players*.

Finally it should be mentioned that, even though it can not be understood from the figure above, *Having Fun* and *Interacting with other Players* could be connected, since most of the people asked usually play with their friends to have fun. It is the fact of playing against friends that makes them feel amused. Conclusively, there is no contradiction in what the respondents told us; rather all factors are interconnected.

4.2 Reaching the Flow

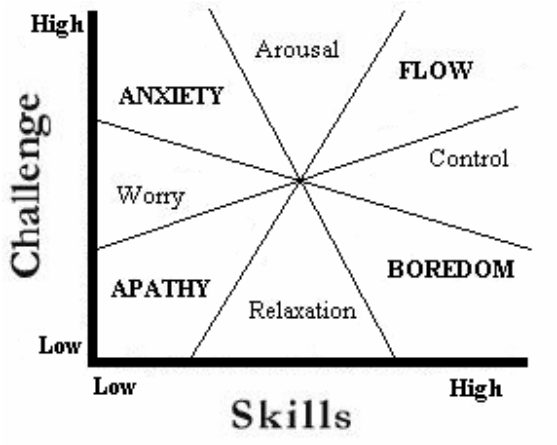
A game that is able of making you experience the flow, as Alexander E. Voiskounsky et al. (2004) define it, will make you continue playing in order to look for that flow where you will be immersed in another reality, namely in the virtual reality that the game offers you. Not all factors involved in the Flow Experience are common among online players, but most of them appeared in the questionnaires collected and the interviews that have been made. Those factors were mostly related to the knowledge acquisition and the motivation that lead people to play multiplayer online games.

This chapter attempts to explain why the Flow Experience Theory is not a complete theory. The reason for this is that the lack of communication with other players is complemented with another theory, the communicative action theory.

> *"…there is no discussion about how flow is communicated between different players. Flow is a state that you reach as an individual player, connected to the goal, connected to the difficulty of the game, connected to how you interpret the game. But if we three play the game, it can affect each other."*
> (Hans-Christian Stoltz, interview)

4.2.1 Knowledge Acquisition

When talking about the different ways in which a human player can acquire knowledge in a game and how the enjoyment after playing is greater when the player has a more profound understanding of the game. According to the major characteristics as defined by Alexander E. Voiskounsky et al. (2004), aiming to explain the significance of the flow experience, ***(6)*** *Experience brings full satisfaction* is related to the knowledge acquisition during one or consecutive sessions. This figure clarifies that it is more amusing and easier to get immersed in the game if the player knows how to interact with it, despite the risk of boredom if there is nothing else to discover and the player has had a comprehensive experience of the game. In the next table this point can be seen where the player's high skills, due to the fact of high knowledge acquisition, meets the low challenges that the game offers to the experienced player.



When it comes to the challenge of attaining the goals that the game implies, both boredom and anxiety can occur (see *Table 2*). If there is a level of difficulty that means that the user does not have enough skills and that there is an overwhelming challenge as to win the enemy in the game in order to go to the next level, both the player and the opponent can feel anxiety, when the challenges (goals) are so weak that it is too easy for the player. By this follows that ***(8)*** *"the flow rests upon the precise matching between the available skills and the task challenges"* (Alexander E. Voiskounsky et al., 2004) matches what the players asked think about online gaming. Some of the participants in the workshop had played first-person shooter computer games before and this was notable when it came to control the game. Their previous skills made them faster and more capable at executing the challenges that this particular game provided them.

Another situation in which a flow can occur is when the character that the human player is controlling gets experience, as it occurs in role-based games, in strategy and in first-person shooter games in the sense of having a big army or several weapons, and such a person knows how to control it ***(3)*** *High level of control* is one of the elements of flow (Webster et al., 1993; Alexander E. Voiskounsky et al., 2004) that takes place when the player knows exactly how to interact with the character's abilities, making it beneficial for the enjoyment of the player. During the second session in the workshop, most of the players had positive results in taking the control and the goals of the game which made that session more enjoyable for them than the first. This observation fits the element of flow mentioned earlier ***(3).*** Additionally, if interested in the character's abilities, then the ***(9)*** *Motivation is intrinsic* (Webster et al., 1993; Alexander E. Voiskounsky et al., 2004) which can also lead to flow.

If however the previously mentioned ***(3)*** point of the flow experience is located in another context, the discussion can lead to confusion. Online playing implies the interaction and challenges among real human players behind the characters. This fact means that the actions carried out within the game are unexpected since they are not performed by a computer based character, bearing in mind that sometimes humans are predictable as well. In those playing situations, the player does not have a high level of control over the actions coming from other players. This reality makes most of the players enjoy multiplayer online games; a characteristic that does not follow what the flow experience theory states.

Finally, learning how to solve a situation by observing other players in action is related to Webster et al. (1993) and their definition of the concept of flow. As they stated, some of the elements involved in the flow as an optimal experience are curiosity, learning how to solve new situations observing other players, as well as control and attention focus, in this case on trying to learn new tactics. This last feature can be compared to a student who is interested in a certain subject and how his concentration is focused on reading a book to learn more about the subject; in some cases the student will get deeply involved in such an activity and the flow occurs. "*As the user of the computer mediated environment perceives control the flow experience can occur as a big concentration on the task and enjoyment of such task*" (Ghani, 1995).

4.2.2 Motivation

The competitive act is commonly found among multiplayer online gamers when it comes to challenge a friend or a powerful character within the game. Different classification systems (Fullerton et al. (2004), Bartle (1996), Yee (2002), Lazzaro (2004)) present different competitors that exist in the gaming. There are several motives that make people play a certain game. The analysis of the workshop with the game *Battlefield 2*, resulted in some interesting output. The theories listed above state that there is a type of player called *killer*, and in this specific game, the type of gamers had the motivation explained as players whose main aim is to act on other players (Bartle, 1996). It stated that the players who had killed more people from the opponent group were the ones that

motivated the ones who were always killed in order to be better. At the same time a reputation of those who were more skilled within the game becomes bigger. This motivation is again referred in the Flow Experience Model, as the *"**(5)** ability to exercise a sense of control over actions*" which leads the player to gain a reputation within the game so that his virtual character is known by other players. On the other hand this element ***(5)*** involved in the Flow Experience can lead to confusion as playing against another human person makes the action in the game unpredictable, which leads the players *not to exercise a sense of control over those actions* but rather the opposite, it makes the game more entertaining and not boring. So in this case, both aspects must be considered.

There are also players whose main goal is related to getting new experiences in another world in order to explore the virtual environment (Bartle, 1996; Fullerton, 2004) or, in order to flea from their everyday problems in the actual world, they allow themselves to get immersed in a virtual reality (Yee, 2002). These features are referenced to in the Flow Experience Model as one of the characteristics of the model and as a "**(6)** *deep but effortless involvement that removes awareness of the frustrations of everyday life"* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Worth mentioning is that this immersion does not only take place during a session but continues when the session has finished. The players, if they have been playing with some friends, usually continue talking about the artificial experience while leaving the game centre, as Ola Johansson commented, or as it was observed by the researchers after the workshop had finished.

The observations made of *World of Warcraft*, the player, at least during the session that was observed, played mainly to communicate with other gamers that he had met before. This player personality is referred to as a socialiser as he prefers to interact with other players (Bartle, 1996). The socialiser's main goal while playing is the relationships (Yee, 2002) or the people factor (Lazzaro, 2004). All these terms verify the theories stated above.

When compared with the interview with Hans-Christian Stoltz, there are new matchings with the theories. In an analysis of the assertions he stated, he was a socialiser, explorer and achiever, as, in his own words, "*When you play you should reach your goal ... it's the exploring phase that is quite fun as well…I could be 2 whole weeks to look at the environments, just to the graphics ... you build alliances, where people belonged to different groups with different features. There were meetings among the players that were governed with strategies*".

4.2.3 The Interface

In this section, the elements that form Alexander E. Voiskounsky's theory of Flow Experience will be discussed. Furthermore, some of the motivational factors explained in the theory are focused on the interface.

In the questionnaires there were some questions that could lead the respondents to take into account the interface in their answers. One of them explicitly mentioned the interface in order to welcome the interviewees to give their point of view on the topic. These kind of questions can be found in the section called GAMING:

> *6. Do you think the interface of a game is one of the main reasons that make you continue playing? Explain it.*

Once the answers gathered, and as explained in the data analysis, the conclusion was the interface is important only in the beginning of the game, to attract the player, but when it comes to continue playing. Besides, the preference between quality and speed does not show priority supporting the visual quality, that is, the interface.

Apart from the question above there could have been some others where the answers could have been related to this section as in the GAMING section *4. What do you like from the games you play*; but they were not.

There are some elements in the Alexander E. Voiskounsky's Flow Theory that could have been related to this point, but this study will not include such an analysis due to the fact of the limited sample and possibly of the questions in the questionnaires not being properly planned. The following elements of such theory are not explicitly supported by the data collected during this research study:

> **(2)** *High concentration on the task*. An appropriate interface with scenarios fitting the real date when the game takes place, might enable an immersing of the player into the story.
> **(3)** *High level of control over the task*. This point could be implicitly related to the opinion of the respondents since they wanted the interface to be intuitive, clear and easy to use, and that will lead them to reach faster a high level of control over the task. Nowadays most games' controls are similar, commonly the same actions are achieved with the same buttons in the games that are of the same type, and this fact makes it easier to learn how to play and therefore to control it.
> **(4)** *Objectives become clear and distinct.* Every game should make this point clear, at least with the interface.
> **(7)** *Immediate feedback*. Visual feedback in a game is important in order to know what is happening, but perhaps the game design of today is quite advanced, making this point a less prioritized matter.

Having a look at the motivation factors explained by Bartle (1996) the *acting with* part is going to take into account. Some players are motivated to play because they like acting with the environment, or as one of the respondents said; making tourism*;* they are called *explorers* in this model. This kind of users play primarily to discover and interact with the game world. In Lazzaro's model, *easy fun* can be related to how the interface is designed since it is based on the intrigue and curiosity of the players which could be related to how the virtual environment makes them immerse in the game world.

4.2.4 Consumption and Notion of Time/Place

Comparing the information that has been obtained from the analysis of the data and the theories that have been stated above, the similarities and differences will be discussed through the following paragraphs.

According to the version of Voiskounsky et al. (2004) of the Flow Experience theory customized to computer games, the first major characteristic is the defined the major characteristics of flow as a "***(1)*** *Temporary loss of self consciousness and sense of time*". There are different scenarios in which this loss of time and consciousness of place has been investigated, and the theory has been both verified and not supported by the data gathered.

In the workshop, the participants had a very good level of abstraction of reality when they were asked about the notion of place, being highly immersed in the game, for example not noticing some of them when the person in charge of the game centre went around after a while to check if someone had some kind of technical problem. It should be said that this happened only to the players that were more skilled in playing a first person shooter game. When it comes to the loss of time, all the respondents answered that they thought that the time passed extremely fast, fact that does verify one of the statements of the Flow Experience Theory explained in the paragraph above.

In the answers received from the questionnaire contestants, there was a complete unanimity in the opinion that they did not experience any loss of notion of time or space, just in some cases respondents answered very non specific answers as "*maybe time passed faster*". When asked about the notion of space, all the answers said that there was no loss of the place they were in the objective reality. This might have been provoked by a misunderstanding or an error from our part in the approach of the questions.

Hans-Christian Stoltz expressed in his interview, as stated in the paragraph 3.5, that he really suffered losses of notion of place and time, so for him the theory does verify completely.

Ola Johansson, from his position as a person in charge in a gaming centre, observed that he did only experience that there were many players that after having paid for a certain amount of time, they asked for some extra time. This fact could be interpreted as a loss of time; the player expected to play some certain time, but as the time passed faster for him, he needs some extra time to make him satiate his desire of playing. But this is an unproved theory that is left for further studies.

4.3 Communication - Interaction

As it has been repeatedly said through this paper, the biggest difference between online and offline games is the fact of being able to interact with other human players; the communication. In this section the Communicative Action Theory is used in order to explain in which circumstances this communication occurs and what type of communicative actions happen in each case.

As mentioned earlier, the Flow Experience Theory, which has been used in relation to the knowledge acquisition, the motivation, the interface, and the consumption and notion of Time/Space is not enough since it lacks the communication aspect that is involved in playing multiplayer online games. In such context the fact of interacting with other people and sharing the flow, if it occurs, is an important issue that must be taken into account.

The Communicative Action Theory, after Habermas (1981) had formulated it, was adapted to multiplayer online games by T. Manninen (2000). It consists of the following social actions that can take place explicitly or implicitly in the game: instrumental, strategic, normatively regulated, dramaturgical, discursive and communicative.

It is worth to say, as the empirical data shows, that the amount and type of interaction among players depends on the type of game that is being played. Thus you will not find the same need for communication in a first-person shooter game or in a role-based game. The first one is more likely to interact within the group, if it is *group-mission* oriented, and such interaction being as fast as possible, while the second one tends to make it necessary to have a deep and slow communication.

The most basic actions that are carried out within a game are goal oriented. The rules that govern the game are the boundary for this kind of action, but they are usually far from the player's knowledge. While the player does not have the whole knowledge about the game, he will be able to find out different *instrumental actions* that can be carried out, as for instance observing another player killing the enemy in a certain way. The difficulty of finding out the best instrumental action for each situation will be game dependent. The difference between experienced players and beginners is big due to the fact that the instrumental actions that can be accomplished are difficult to learn, as in the example of *Unreal Tournament*.

On the other hand the fact that many games offer a selection of several characters increases the possible number of instrumental actions. The abilities of the characters vary, making the experience of playing as a wizard different from that of playing as a warrior. The way those abilities are used are very different and therefore the points of view of the game will be different with each character.

Even though the social factor in first person shooter games is almost non existent, the main goal is to continuously try to kill each other. When it comes to group missions in first-person shooter games, *strategic actions* are common to happen. The cooperation in

such action games makes the players communicate as if they were in a war covering one another and asking for help. During the workshop, the *Battlefield 2* session was based on a group mission. It was common to try to catch the other group's flag by joining another player, as it this made it easier to beat the other team. Besides, each team used different outfits to avoid killing a team mate.

In the *World of Warcraft*, a very social game, this kind of behaviour can also be observed in order to achieve certain missions. Players tend to help one another and share missions with the intention of making it easier.

The act of forming social groups with the same values is represented by guilds in multiplayer online games. These groups have common values and they are supposed to behave in a certain way depending on the situation. According to the *Communicative Action Theory* this is a *normatively regulated action* when usually "*people tend to form social groups with common rules or values*" and "*behave in a particular way according to some circumstances*". The fact that players belonging to the same guild criticize other players for certain wrong behaviour could be seen as a *discursive action*, for instance throwing them out of the servers.

"*...depending on what you want people to expect from you in a dramaturgical action"* you can make the players believe in something that is not true, as experienced during the workshop. Each vehicle had symbols so that it could be detected by the team mates, whereas the members of the opponent team were tricked.

In general the *communicative action* was carried out using chat or face-to-face communication when the workshop took place. The *World of Warcraft* has an internal chat system that can be used for this purpose, and as mentioned in the data analysis, chatting programs like *Skype* are used inside the game as well.

The examples mentioned above are just a few examples of under which circumstances the communicative actions can occur. In reality there are more examples, not reflected in the study, as it is limited to the respondent's and interviewees' experience.

5 CONCLUSION

Throughout the research, different factors that make multiplayer online computer games being played have been analyzed and discussed. For the generalization of this study to the phenomenon of online gaming, the collection of data should consist of a large sample that is not fulfilled in this study. Thus these conclusions are only valid for this concrete research. Anyhow, the gathered empirical data made the discussion possible due to its homogeneity in relation to the main ideas.

The findings have showed that there are differences between online and offline games in the way they are socially played and perceived. The characteristics inherent to online games that have been observed as being very interesting for players are the communication among players and the challenge of playing against other human players instead of playing against non human characters.

The interaction with other players has been a core element in the results of the research. It has been proved to be the element that makes people come back to the game, and this is due to several reasons. As a first characteristic, being part of a game that has an own society permits the player to get immersed in a subjective reality. In this reality, the boundaries of a daily life disappear; new feelings are stimulated so that the player has a virtual character that represents him in the game world with some specific physical attributes and a net of social relations. It is worth to mention that this fact depends on the game.

It has been found that the challenges that appear while playing against human players are much more exciting and addictive than playing against artificial intelligence controlled characters. There is a component of surprise in the human players that the non human lack, and this fact makes the game different each time in the way the goals are achieved. Besides, the fact of acquiring knowledge is important since it gives the player different levels of entertainment as he is learning to understand the mechanics of the game. The game must however have enough challenges so that the whole knowledge is not reached in a short period of time.

Nevertheless the main reason for playing is to be amused. This goal can be achieved in several ways; by achieving goals, being immersed in another reality or interacting and challenging other players.

The interface has appeared to be important in the moment the player starts with a certain game, but when the mechanics of the game have been understood and internalized it loses its importance. Then the way in which the story of the game is schemed is the reason that leads the player to continue playing to find out the end.

For further research, the discussion section about the interface should need a deeper analysis in order to realize its real effects on playing multiplayer online games. With this

aim the questionnaires and the interviews should be structured focusing more on this aspect.

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APPENDIX A: Questionnaire (Spanish version)

ESTUDIO DE INVESTIGACIÓN SOBRE JUEGOS ONLINE

Somos dos estudiantes de la Universidad de Lund que estamos tratando de investigar (como parte de un master) de que manera los juegos online multijugador enganchan a la gente y que motiva a estas personas a seguir jugando día tras día. Si te gusta jugar online y tienes un rato libre para contestar unas cuantas preguntas te estaremos muy agradecidos y será un placer saber a cerca de tu experiencia.

Algunas preguntas son bastante precisas y no necesitan una respuesta larga pero nos gustaría que respondieses de la forma más extensa posible. Si te lleva mucho tiempo contestar todas las preguntas de una vez, y no te apetece seguir, por favor déjalas reposar y continua mas tarde. Para nosotros es muy importante recibir tus respuestas de forma que la investigación sea lo mas realista posible. Si estas interesado en el resultado final, por favor háznoslo saber y te lo mandaremos. No dudes en contactar con nosotros si tienes información que crees pueda sernos útil y si conoces a personas que puedan contestar estas preguntas POR FAVOR mándaselas. Incluso si hoy en día no juegas pero en su día jugabas nos interesa tu experiencia.

Envía las respuestas a: playingonlinegames@gmail.com

Gracias de antemano por tu ayuda!

INFORMACIÓN PERSONAL

1. Edad:
2. Sexo:
3. *Ocupación:
4. Juegos a los que sueles jugar (especifica a cuales juegas online):
5. *¿Qué estás estudiando? ¿Qué has estudiado?
6. ¿Tienes conexión a Internet en casa? ¿Usas esa conexión para jugar o prefieres ir a un cyber?
7. ¿Qué tipo de conexión tienes? ¿Estás satisfecho con esa conexión?

JUGANDO

1. ¿Cuántas horas juegas a la semana/día a juegos online?
2. ¿Cuánto suele durar una sesión?
3. ¿En qué época sueles jugar más? Durante el día, la semana, el mes, el año.
4. ¿Qué te gusta de los juegos a los que juegas?
5. ¿Te has encontrado alguna vez en una situación en la que prefieres quedarte en casa jugando online a encontrarte con gente?
6. ¿Prefieres jugar en el ordenador o jugar cara a cara? ¿Qué diferencias aprecias?
7. ¿Crees que la interfaz de un juego es una de las principales razones que te hace continuar jugando? Explícate.

INTERACCIÓN

1. ¿Utilizas algún tipo de comunicación mientras juegas? Si la respuesta es afirmativa, ¿qué tipo de comunicaron utilizas cuando estas jugando online? (voz, texto, otro…)
2. ¿Has echado de menos la posibilidad de comunicación durante alguna partida? ¿Qué diferencias encuentras?

3. ¿Controlas en todo momento el intercambio de mensajes? Es decir, ¿sueles mantener conversaciones fluidas o comunicación fluida?
4. ¿Conoces personalmente a alguno de los personajes que suelen frecuentar el juego? ¿Os habéis comunicado más allá de la pantalla?

A CERCA DEL JUEGO

1. ¿Qué tipo de juegos prefieres?
2. ¿Qué diferencia encuentras entre ellos?
3. ¿Qué prefieres, juegos de ordenador online o de tipo monojugador?
4. ¿Qué diferencias encuentras entre ellos?
5. ¿Prefieres que los personajes se adecuen a la realidad en cuanto a su comportamiento y/o apariencia?
6. ¿Si tuvieses que elegir entre calidad y velocidad con cuál te quedarías?
7. Si sólo con describir un juego (con tus palabras) podrías crearlo, ¿cómo lo describirías?

MOTIVACIÓN

1. ¿Por qué empezaste a jugar?
2. ¿Qué diferencias encuentras entre cuando empezaste a jugar por primera vez y ahora cuando te sientas en frente del ordenador a jugar?
3. ¿Qué buscas cuando juegas? Explícate.

NOCIÓN DEL TIEMPO Y DEL LUGAR

1. Mientras juegas, ¿eres consciente del tiempo que estas consumiendo en frente del ordenador?
2. Si alguien que se encuentra en la misma habitación que tu se dirige a ti, ¿te das cuenta?
3. ¿Pierdes la noción del tiempo mientras intercambias texto con algún jugador?
4. ¿Te exaltas con facilidad mientras estás jugando y ocurre un imprevisto en el juego?
5. ¿Sueles mirar mas allá de la pantalla como si te encontrases en un escenario real? Por ejemplo, intentar mirar lo que hay mas allá de una esquina moviendo tu cabeza en vez controlar el personaje. Explícate.

Si tienes algún comentario adicional, por favor no dudes en añadirlo aquí:

(English version)

RESEARCH STUDY ABOUT PLAYING ONLINE GAMES

We are two students (Aritz and Ander) from Lund University that are trying to investigate as a master thesis the way in which multiplayer online games engage people playing and why do these players continue playing afterwards day by day. If you like playing online games and have a little time during the day to answer a few questions we will be so pleased to read your answers.

Some questions are quite precise so that a long answer is not necessary but we would like most of the questions to be answered as broad as possible. If it takes a long time to answer them and you do not feel like continuing, please wait for a day and finish it afterwards. It is very important for us to receive them back in order to be realistic in our research study. If you are interested in the final report, please let us know and we will send it to you. Feel free to mail us if you have some information you think could be useful for us and if you know some people who could answer this questions PLEASE send it to them. Even if nowadays you do not play but you used to we are interested in your experience.

Send the answer to: playingonlinegames@gmail.com

Thanks in advance for helping us!

PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. Age:
2. Gender:
3. *Occupation:
4. Games you play (specify which games are online games):
5. *What are you studying? (or What have u studied?)
6. Do you have an Internet connection at home? Do you use that connection to play or you prefer to go to a cyber?
7. What connection do you have? Are you satisfied with your connection?

GAMING

1. How many hours do you spend weekly/daily playing online games?
2. How long does it take a session?
3. When is the period when you play most? Specify it during the day, the week, the month, the year time.
4. What do you like from the games you play?
5. Do you prefer playing in the computer or face-to-face on the table? What differences do you appreciate?
6. Do you think the interface of a game is one of the main reasons that make you continue playing? Explain it.

INTERACTION

1. Do you use any kind of communication while you play? If the answer is positive, what kind of communication do you use when you are on an online game? (Voice, text, others…)
2. Have you ever missed the possibility of communicating during any gaming session?
3. Do you usually maintain fluid conversations or communication in general?
4. Do you know personally any of the people that usually play with you? If the answer is positive, have you ever communicated outside the game?

ABOUT THE GAME

1. What kind of games do you prefer?
2. What differences do you find among them?

3. What do you prefer: online computer games or single player games?
4. What differences do you find among them?
5. Do you prefer that the players are adapted to reality in their behaviour or in their appearance?
6. If you had to choose between quality or speed, which one would you consider more?
7. If giving your own description you could create a game, how would you describe it?

MOTIVATION

1. Why did you start playing?
2. What is the difference between when you started playing for the first time and now when you sit in front of the computer to continue playing?
3. What do you look for when you are playing? Explain it.

IDEA OF TIME AND SPACE

1. While playing, are you conscious of the time that you are spending in front of the computer?
2. If someone who is in the same room a you are talks to you, do you realize it?
3. Are you easily excited while playing if there is something unexpected?
4. Do you completely forget about the time while interchanging text with a player?
5. Do you usually make physical movements while playing? (e.g. trying to look round a corner moving your own physical head) Explain it.

If you have any additional comments, please feel free to add them:

APPENDIX C: Interview to Ola Johansson

TIME

How much time do people dedicate to play online games according to the information you have?
There are many different. We have the regulars… 8 hours a week, and that come all the year, and we have people that just come in once a month or something like that, 2 hours a month, so it is very different.

When is there more people playing?
The fall and the winter is the highest season, and during the summer is the lowest season, you don't want to seat indoors when it's warm outside. (pregunta mia) Friday and Saturday are the biggest days definitely, by far. Three times as big as Monday to Thursday, and then Sunday is somewhere in between (pregunta mia) The afternoon between 2 and 5, it could be crowded, and then there is a slope between 5 and 6, and when the evening starts again there is again like a peak.. if it's on a weekend it could last until 2 at night, but between the week until 10 maybe

So there are more students?
Maybe half a year ago we checked our account and we saw that the 10% of our customers were 19 or above so it's 90% that's 18 or younger. It has probably changed, because we have a new student discount for the universtarians to encourage the students to come and take their friends and feel that they get more time for their money than everyone else

Do they usually come with their friends?
Yeah, sure. There are alone players too that come alone and play WoW.

How does the paying system work: paying before or after playing? If the answer is the first option, are there many people that stay more time and want an extension of the time?
Always before, that way the customer can never owe us money.Often people that don't play often, they come in and say ah!! I will only play an hour, and after that hour they say, ah!! I'll play for another hour.

Is it only casual people who do that?
Hard to say…ehhh….It's difficult to draw the line sometimes, because there is a big spectrum, there are not only regulars and non regulars, there is this big grey spectrum in between. The time is in their account, so it's often that they already have time in their account so we have this discount system that is kind of rare, so we have a system that makes discounts if you buy many hours at the same time. So, 35 SEK an hour, 4 hours 100 kr, and 10 hours 200 kr, so it's kind of a big discount. And that's possible only because we have this system were the time is saved so you don't have to spend the time in the same day.

With your experience, is there many people that do not realize the amount of time that they have spent playing? When you close, is there usually still people playing?
Yes, sometimes they want to know how much money they have spent, they ask the question because they realize that it's more time than what they actually intended but, we can't show them the statistics because they could really realize how much money they have spent and it would be bad for the business.

Is there usually people still playing when you are closing?
It depends much on the day of the week, form Monday to Thursday it's 1 or 2 maybe, Fridays and Saturdays we close at 3 am, and there's usually 5 to 10 people who stay longer.

MOTIVATION

Has there anyone who has asked you to play without having money? (asking maybe to pay back another day?
Yes, it happens. A little too often, … there are people that for some reason they don't have the cash and they want to play anyway. We can't let them do that, it would just become worse for them, they would expect to get the same treatment for the next time and in the end they would owe us so much money that it would be bad for them. It could become a habit for them borrowing money from us. We want to avoid getting people in that kind of position.Well it's specially the kind of person that tries to negotiate the price, must people don't do it, specially in

Sweden, we're not used to negotiate as in other countries (tjena!! El jambo hablando a un niño mutante q entra en el establecimiento).

When people leave the gaming centre, do they continue talking about the game?
Yeah, it's very common!! After a session with their friends it's pretty standard to talk about what has happened on their way out, very very common. They are so focused when they are actually playing so they often they are quite wild at playing, so when the game is done they often talk about it."*Yeah!! I was better than you, you suck",* and the other guys say "ah!!! The mouse was weird…" there is always an excuse for not wining.

Have there been some cases of usual players that have suddenly stopped coming to play? Do you the motive of any of these cases?
Well, I know some regulars that have just disappeared more or less, most often I have learnt later that it's just that they have bought a very expensive computer. There have been I think three people whose parents have come up to us and have said that this guy shouldn't be allowed to play because he skips school and he stole money from us and stuff like that, but that's 3 persons in more than a year and a half so I would say very few. But mostly it's for half a year and afterwards the parents come back and say, yes, he can play again. Well, we have more than 3000 accounts created in our game centers and then it is hard to keep track of everyone, but I try to talk to most of the people to get some kind of communication but some people want to mind their own business and we have to respect them.

Do you usually see over-excited people?
It happens. Some people really get into the competition part and get very loud when they are winning or losing. When they are winning they want to humiliate the person they are winning over. And they do it as loud as possible. And when they are losing they want to have an excuse as "you only beat me because you played unfair".

Why do know think the game is exciting?
Different people play loud, others don't, and it is also because of the game. Some games usually make people louder than other games. Strategy games are often silent games, you have to think and there is not adrenalin that you can find in action games. The game that makes people shout and scream most is probably counter strike. For some reason there is a kind of prestige when it comes about counter strike because it is the most played game in the world. Everyone that plays it thinks that it is somehow important to win. I don't really get it but those are usually the cases. As soon as it is counter strike there is much prestige, which is kind of sad. And then they become loud because of the prestige.

Have you ever appreciated real behaviours when playing online games?
I see it sometimes. I myself when I want to run faster I push the forward key much harder, but other than that I don't think I do any more movements. But I see people when rockets are coming to them moving (Ola makes some funny movements) trying to avoid them and something like that. It is not that common but it happens.

INTERACTION

Are there games that due to their complexity level people do not play to? (Both in interaction or achieving goals complexity)
It happens. Specially in a place that this. 99% casual gamers, our customer they are not competitive gamers, like myself two years ago when I competeted. Then if you are in a competitive level you want there to be a lot of difficult things. Things that take you long to learn, it is a good thing when you are competing in a very high level. But for casual gamers it is just frustrating to start a game when everyone is jumping around and shooting stuff, and becoming invisible and you don´t know what is going on. You feel really insecure, that is really frustrating for a beginner. But some games are more complicated than others. Unreal tournament it takes years to master. Unreal tournament is very very complicated, there are many many features. Quake is very easy, if you have played any kind of similar game it is easy to get into it very quickly.

What things does it have the game that makes it complicated?
Unreal tournament has so many features that other games don´t have at all; unique features that non other games in the world has. There are more weapons that in any other game, each weapon has two different fire modes, every other game just has one, and then you can combine those fire modes to become a third fire mode which makes it even more complicated. And then there is the movement in Unreal

Tournament that is very very complex. You have dodge moves, you have double jump, you have dodge jump and wall jumps; moves that don't exist in any other game and that takes a lot of practice to get it right. And when you get it right it becomes an incredible advantage compare to people who don't use those features. So the difference between a good unreal tournament player and a media unreal tournament player is incredible. There would not be any competition. In another game the difference is not that big between a good player and a medium player. The medium player can still get some… but not in unreal tournament, the difference is too big. And that will scare off the fresh guys because they will not have a chance, they will not see the guy before they get killed.

What is your opinion about the communication in the games? What types of communications do you know?
Well, we have a certain demand for communication programs that gamers use. There is voice chat, like skype. They use those while playing. Most of the modern games have that kind of communication in the game. But some use those in game features, some use in separate programs to communicate.

Apart from those games, do you have any experience with console games like PlayStation, Xbos, Nintendo?
Very little, not online. I think it is only the Xbox that permits you to play online. Well, a console is very limited when it comes to programs, cause you are not allowed to use computer programs, just the game, so you are limited to what the game can do but on a computer you can have other chat programs, you can install whatever you want on a computer but you cannot do that on a console. So the console is much more limited and that is pretty much why the consoles don't have that kind of competitive tournament that pc games have. There are not very big tournaments with consoles.

Do people usually communicate talking inside the "cyber" even though they are able of communicating inside the game? And the other way round?
It is different. If there is enough room to sit next to each other then they will just turn their head and talk to their friend instead of using any kind of program or the microphone. But if there are just a few seats available and they have to be in separate rooms then pretty much they have to use the microphones to communicate. Some people try to shout from one room to the other one but we tell them not to do it. It is very different, cause if two guys come here and they want to play against each other they know they are going to play against each other from the start, but they choose to sit next to each other so they can see each other's screens, but then they realize "well, this is not good" and try to turn their monitors afterwards which is very bad solution. The best would be just to sit in separate places so that they cannot see each others screens. Even thought they know from the first step in the game center they are going to play against each other they decide it, it is kind of weird. And I try to tell them when they start to move the computers and the screen "why did you sit next to each other, it is stupid" (laughs).

Which kinds of games are played here? Has it always been like this?
There is always been struggle between action games (first person shooting games) and strategy games. Those games have always been very very popular. First person shooters are in my opinion better multiplayer games. The multiplayer games are mostly played here cause you can use single player games to play one against other person, they are very personal compared to multiplayer games. The thing that we offer here is that people can sit in the same room and play together, that is the big attraction of this kind of places and that is why there are so little single players in this kind of places.

MMORPG, do you know them, are there any popular?
Yeah, there is one that is really popular, *World of Warcraft,* you have *Everquest* as well, not very popular here, but *World of Warcraft* is actually incredibly popular here (olaj checks the statistics of the game center and it is on the fifth position). Even if you have to pay for it. When it came out I thought well, no one will want to first buy the game, then pay a monthly fee and afterwards pay another fee at this place to play; it is three cost, no one will play it here. But people are playing, I think it is crazy.

Why?
I think it is on their lunch break people come here and play an hour just to kill time because it is very social game, but not necessarily social in the sense that there is people in the same room, but social in a group that they are playing together all over the world. It is a very addictive

game. So if you have school and there is just an hour until the next lecture it is very tentative to come here and play even if they have time to take a bus home.

What do you think it makes it so addictive?
There is always something new to explore, there is always new people to meet, they have guilds and stuff like that that makes the interaction between players very close, so you get to know the other players. They become friends, they can even have affairs with other people in the game, yeah, people fall in love in the *World of Warcraft* and stuff like that. It becomes very social and the guilds, they have big missions that they wanna do and for instance they say "ok, we are going to meet on Sunday at 8 o'clock and we are going to do this very big mission", they make groups of 30-35 people and play together. The thing that makes people play again and again is the interaction with other players. It is a very complex game, there is always a new type of character you can play to have new experiences new abilities. There is always new kind of stuff, kind of technical stuff to explore, not just meet new friends or new quests. So there are three things that make it addictive: interaction with other players, doing new quests, the technical thing of exploring different types of characters or classes.

Actually the killing is not that much?
No, it is not important. It is always the attraction of setting a goal and if you don't reach it trying to use another tactic, but the killing on itself doesn't attract.

So how is it the usability of this game, is it easy to play and to learn how to play?
I never played it, I have talked a lot to people that have, but it is difficult to say if it is easy or hard when you are just watching other players.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How do people get hooked on playing online games?
Well, all games are designed to be addictive. They try to make it always interesting, new stuff to discover, become better all the time so that the more you play the better you are and the funnier it is to win more I guess. It is kind of hard to stop playing when you have trained for years in a game, it is hard just to stop, it would be like taking two years of your life. That is why people continue playing in a competitive level.

What are the elements creating social interactions which enhance players' motivations to play the game?

The most important thing is probably to make players able to choose what kind of people they want to play with or against. So if they meet people in the game who are acting or behaving in a very negative way they can somehow choose not to play with them, they can ignore them, kick them from the server, just choose another server. They can avoid people they don't want to play with, and keep track of their friends so that you can find their friends easily like a buddy list in the server browser. It is more and more common in the new games to type in the name of you buddy and check if that person is online or not and if he is online they can show you where. That kind of interaction is probably very important and that is also why people create clans, guilds and stuff like that to form small groups of people to become friends. They set their own rules and play a certain game in a certain way and we have certain moral.

You are in a clan, aren't you? Do you have special rules?
I try to have a very strict attitude when it comes to sportsmanship and behavior. If I see a clan member who is behaving very immature and if he is saying bad things to other people, in some sense behaving badly, people in my clan do not behave like that, then if you want to talk like that you have leave the clan. So we have our standards and we try to only recruit people who wants to live with our standards, who wants to have people around them that also wants to have those standards. That is one way to kind of choose who we want to interact with and who we don't want to.

How many people are in your clan?
It is hard to define. There are some people that are inactive or are retired, but they are still in the clan in a fame salon, and just counting the active players who are in our chat rooms regularly I would say 12-15 people.

What is the role of interaction and team interaction within current multimedia games?
It is very depending on the game and how you want to play the game. If you want to play the game without interacting there are plenty of games that can give you that. If you want to play a game with a lot of interaction, a lot of groups

there are lot of games that can give you that as well. So I think a lot of players choose their game because of how they want to interact with others. If you are a very social person you will want to interact very much with other people then you join a clan, you play world of warcraft or that kind of games. If you want to play on your own you can play a campaign.

What do online games have that conventional games do not have?
There is still a problem with the artificial intelligences when it comes to computer control of characters. Because the artificial intelligence is so limited, it can't adapt. If I play against the computer I know exactly how the computer will play, I know his moves before he makes them. It is very predictable, very easy to beat because the computer never adapts to my moves. But if I play against a player in a certain way like in a strategy game, I send a lot of tanks against him then he will think "Oh, shit, he's coming with tanks" then I have to build rocket launchers that are better against tanks. So he will make a counter move against my moves but the computer won't. If I play first person shooter game may be I will camp certain part of the map that is very easy to defend and the computer won't adapt. It will go into the same crap again. A person will adapt if he thinks his strategy is crappy or "this guy is killing me every time in the same way" so he will use a different weapon to defend but a computer could never think like that. I think that is the biggest difference. There is also the communication of course when it comes to online games. You can't talk about your own life to the computer so this social thing is a big part of online games.

Is it more addictive to play against a character that is controlled by a person than playing against one controlled by a computer?
Yes, there is a very big difference on how the opponent reacts. You can play against the computer in chess and it is still a challenge but not in games (referring to multiplayer online games), there is so much difference. I think it is harder to make a computer think ahead because in chess the computer can think the movements ahead but not in games. You cannot expect the artificial intelligence to take into account all the different elements in computer games. There are so many unexpected things that can happen during the game that the computer can't adapt to.

What do you look for when you are playing?
It is different, sometimes times I am in a mood for finishing a campaign that I have started because I want to get the story, I want to know what happens. It is curiosity as watching a movie; you want to see how the end is. Of course you know playing a Second World War game that the Germans will lose, but you still want to find out what happens. You want to play the big final to see how the Russians shake the flag (he refers to the game "Call of Duty" feeling excited). Sometimes if I feel like getting that kind of story without interacting, sometimes I feel like playing online comparing myself with other players to see how they solve a situation using some kind of moves that I can learn from them or just compare myself to them and see if I am good enough to beat them.

20th question
What kind of character do you like there to be in the games?
You don't want to play the same character all the time. Sometimes you want to be the bad guy and other times a really good guy. Sometime you want to be sneaky, it depends on my mood very much.

Can I ask how your clan is called?
We call soul rippers.

APPENDIX D: Interview to Hans-Christian Stoltz

PLAYING ONLINE

1. Besides the research, have you played multiplayer online games just for fun or kill time? Which games?

I wouldn't say to kill time because I became engaged to them, so not to kill time. And, I am interested in the area as well from a researcher's perspective. On the other hand I tend to forget sometimes that I am researching sometimes when I'm playing because I am more focused on taking part of the actions in the game as well. I am an observer player as well as a casual player. I have played a lot of games, *Asheron's Call*, one of the big ones I started with, and *PlanetSide*, a massive battle type of game (…explanation of how it is…). I usually tend, when I play online games, to form a team as soon as possible because that is the part that is giving me most enjoyment in the games so I tend to play with people that I have known in the game. We team up and organize things. I have played the *Dark Ages Of Camelot* as well, and Anarchy Online, although I found it was quite boring.

Boring why?

In my opinion it was boring because they tried to impose the ordinary gaming system that you use with adventure type of games (the fantasy type of game) on a science fiction type of game. And I found that to be not feasible; I just found it boring after a while.

World of Warcraft (that is a game that I am active in), *Battlefield 2*, I play different type of games. *Battlefield 2* is a bit more limited in the amount of players in the servers, it is not that large scale as the other games.

Have you played the World of Warcraft as a researcher or as a player? What is your opinion about it?

Yeah, I've done both. I think it's a quite a good game actually. The problem for me is, as I am the old school adventure player, is that they try to make it easier for people to get thrown into the game and that means that they have built in to my opinion some sort of instant gratification. When you play you should reach your goal and your reward as quick as possible, but as I am used to all the other older games where you had to put a lot of time in spending playing to reach somewhere, to be something in the game, to reach a certain level or to use certain ability. You had to play strategically. This element is in my opinion quite non existent in *WoW*. You can reach a pretty big level quite quickly. And that's good for a casual player, but if you are a scared veteran, things are too easy.(…)

2. Did you usually feel over-excited? Could you explain it?

You mean like hyper-ventilating, that I cannot breathe? (Laughs). Not over-excited, but I can get drawn into stuff, yes, very focused and forgetting where I am, yes I could get to that kind of flow state, if it's fun. But that depends not only in the game but the people I'm playing with as well, there are a part that make get into the game more than the game itself; if you have together with friends it's more fun than having it on your own in some sense, at least when it comes to online games, so I could actually find myself in a very… hey, where have these 5 hours gone?

3. Have you ever experienced real behaviors while playing online games?

No, not that kind of action but I actually jumped out of my chair a couple of times when I got scared; when I run around a corner in the street and there was a guy waiting there to get me. When I am driving a car (in the game) I tend to move but not when playing the online games or in front of a computer screen. But if do it I do not know if it is the game on itself or if it is the technology.

4. What is your opinion about the communication in the games? What types of communications do you know?

All of them that are existing today within a type of audience. When I played *Asheron´s Call* I started with Microsoft Thunder Voice; it was a package that you could buy, a team speak client that you could use to talk to your friends while in the game. That was a secondary application that you had to start in the background of the game,

so it was not game dependent. But now I have used the text chat as well for several occasions and I do not know but my personal opinion, my gamer opinion, when you play adventure type of games I tend to think that the speaking tends to, in some sense, destroy the illusion a little bit. Because in a fantasy domain you will have the notion or stereotype of people speaking in a certain way, a certain language, stuff like that, things that you have seen in movies or read in books.

Then we start talking to people in a fantasy domain that illusion is destroyed because the adventure games within the fantasy domain need that kind of interaction in order to be into the game. But when you play science fiction game that is based on battles you just fight, you don't do anything else, there are no quests or things like that, and you fight for power. Then voice chatting is more ok in my opinion, and text chat is not sufficient enough because you need to communicate things to people quickly, it is a faster game the ordinary adventure games, fantasy games. So you need to communicate more quickly and the voice is much better.

A lot of games that are played today have abilities built into the game. *PlanetSide* was the first game I played that actually had the voice chat into the game, but I didn't work very well so we used Team Speak while we played. *Battlefield 2* has a voice client as well that you can talk with your squad members and it is quite good; no problems, no errors, nothing like that, they made a quite good job. That makes you into the game, when you play you organize things, it is useful to tell each other "hej, there is an enemy over there", you have to be aware of it but if you don't see it someone can tell you. So that is what we use the communication for inside the game. In the adventure type of games I haven't communicated in that sense, it is more helping each other to solve the quest and this is more casual chat; we talk about the weather. So I think it is the game in itself that attracts the communication.

What difference do you notice between when you started playing and now as an advanced or expert player?
I don't know if I will call myself as a player, as an expert. The only difference I try to reflect upon is the fact that I probably learn games a little bit quicker than when I started. And on the other hand that is negative part as well by becoming what you call an expert player in some sense. When it comes to adventure games, it's the exploring phase that is quite fun as well, but that is a bit destroyed because you learn the mechanics. In the beginning, I could be 2 whole weeks to look at the environments, just to the graphics. Now I know what to expect, and I miss that naïf part.

INTERACTION WITH THE GAME

5. What do you think it is the role of the interface in a game? Can it be a reason why people continue playing?
The problem is that if I answer the question as a researcher is that the interface is important, but then it depends what you consider the interface. There are people that consider the whole world as the interface. An interface made for a computer should be easy to use. You build things that make it hard to learn, because the game is dead when the user understands the mechanics of the game. To present new things, new obstacles are the more important part of the game. In my opinion, the interface is the whole world of the game.

Ok. That was as a researcher, but as a player?
That is also my opinion as a player. (…)The players can be seen as apart of the interface.(…) It makes me return as a player.

6. We have read your article about emotionale immersiveness and apparantely you have played Asheron's Call as a researcher. What opinion do you have as a researcher about the features of that game? And as a player?
I started to play *AC* in 2000. Features within the game it's something new to the players, hard to master and when you do it you win reputation. In *AC* they've done a good work in introducing new things on a monthly basis. The developers insert a certain part of the story in the game. Connected to the happenings, there are various solutions, and the results of the players doing the quests in a certain way will affect the next monthly update. This was the most enthusiastic features of *AC*, what you did affected the game. You could leave your mark in the world of the game. When you made quests in the game you had monuments and stuff like that in the game. After a while people have been playing, the social structures itself become interesting. There were public spots where you build alliances, were people belonged to different groups with

different features. There were meetings among the players that were governed with strategies about older members, beginners, what to do with questions, code of honour. It was quite advanced. Those questions don't appear in first-shooter games. They have clans, but outside the game, in a website, not inside the game as in adventure games.

7. There are easy games, hard games, and games in between both. Which repercussion has the complexity of the game in players? Are there games that due to their complexity level people do not play to? (Both in interaction or achieving goals complexity)

If you talk about how to move around, I don't see it as a problem, I have solved it in several ways. I bought extra equipment, as many games are rather keyboard intensive, in the first person shooters specially. You have to do it rather quickly, and there are too many buttons to command your character. Sometimes you have to look at the keys. I bought a Strategic Commander, like a mouse attached. It has one key for each finger that you can configure with macros. That could be something that could throw out players, the fact of configuring the keyboard. (…) I find rather easy *WoW*. They are not deep when it comes to the plot and the content, and to the actual quests. The plot is rather unidimensional, they are not very intriguing and they are very mechanical, and it could throw me out in the long run.

What about the goal achievement in the game?

I think that is quite connected to my answer. If it is too easy to reach the goal, as a player I want it obstacles to be hard. But not too hard so that you can't reach it or too easy to reach level 60 in *WoW*. (…deeper explanation about *WoW*…). I play much more casual to *Battlefield 2*, and that is probably due to the goal achievement, and that you don't get a reputation due to the rank. You just get a reputation in a few servers. (…)

8. Do you think it is interesting the fact that a game offers the possibility of exploring new types of character?

From a researcher's perspective, yes. I think that's quite good. I read a lot of articles trying to discuss this matter, usually from a psychological point of view. If you are bullied in school, you become fast the quiet guy that is smacked physical or psychological. And during the evening, you can play a role of being a big role, to feel content with what you have done in the game. So I think it could be rather good.(…) A first person shooter doesn't make anyone a shooter, you are a killer before.(…) It is easier to be a killer, if you are wack in the head before, then it is bad to play a killer. (…) There are researches in Sweden who say that it can be an outlet to some psychological frustrations.

9. The game as a virtual environment can be explored. How does it attract the player?

Yes, I think I have already answered this question. I find it very attractive, and if the game is easily explored it is boring. I think actually there should be a reward in exploring. (…explanation of the difference between *WoW* and *AC*…)

10. How would you make the life cycle of an online game longer?

Introducing a new stories. A rich environment. Always include something new for the players: graphically, technologically; on the design level, but on the exploring level as well. Then you should be aware (this is the hard part) of which state is the game in as a designer of the game or provider of the game. You should be able to interpret the signs and how the community is going. The gaming industry has been a lot better doing this for the last couple of years. *Battlefield 2* for instance has an ear on the ground, on the community, they are actually surfing abroad looking for the discussion and they are introducing new ideas all the time for updates or changes in the game and they try to listen to the players and see how they react. That will affect your longetivity, for how long your game will live because there is a life cycle and it is getting shorter and if you don't do changes into the computer game the life cycle nowadays is around 6 months, then it is dead.

So this means that companies must have good programmers and good technology, which is one side of the development process. The other side is that they have to be good content providers, so besides knowing the technology they have to understand what people want, not from the technological perspective, but what type of story, environment and character do they need inside the game; that is a hard line to walk. If you got a new story the time will catch up it because if you can do it the other can as well. Every designer game looks at other games and they will borrow your idea and that will affect the life span as well; the competitor will quickly hit the market and your product will die if you don't do

anything else. You always have to put something new but that is the negative side as well. As a game designer you have to be aware how the community is affected by your new concept and you have to split them up on the market before they are introduced in the game. That also means that you are telling the competitors what you are doing before you have put it inside the game. It is a thin line because you cannot expose too much because someone else will pick it up. If you look at the *WoW* will probably live for a couple of years more because it was such a large scale project, they kept it for around five years a lot of million of dollars, they had a lot of resources and that made it possible to build a game fast. The life time will get short and the more games you have in the market the more competitors so you have to find out certain edge. If you have a look at Dice they introduced a new concept, they developed *Battlefield 1942* that means that it is played upon the World War 2 scenarios and then they did *Battlefield 2* Vietnam and now they are doing the futuristic part. In an interview they said that doing a futuristic version was quite fun cause there was not a bound or limitations of the scenarios of the world. If you do World War scenarios you bound by the technology, you can do a certain type of tank, a certain type of machine because you have to be true to the content. But if you do futuristic scenario you can do something that no one has seen before. They introduced a new concept
Yeah, a rich world, rich environment which always gives something new to the players, graphically, technological of course if you talk on the design level. But on the story level as well, this is actually the hard part, you should actually be aware of which state the game is in as a designer or a provider of the game, so you should be aware that there actually is a life line and you should be aware of interpreting the signs in which the community is in, and the gaming industry has been a lot better in doing this during the last couple of years. *Battlefield 2* or Dice, which is a Swedish company that is actually constructing *Battlefield 2* has very good ears on the ground of the communities. They're actually surfing boards looking at the discussions and they're introducing ideas all the time for upcoming updates or changes in the game concepts, and they're introducing them in the community and see how they react. And that will affect for how long the game will live because there is a life cycle in the game, and it's getting shorter because we're getting spoiled as players, we're expecting new stuff all the time so there are actually numbers going around, every eighteenth month you get double the capacity of your computer for the same price, or something like that.(…) The same thing is with computer games, there are numbers that say if you don't make changes within the computer games continuously, the life time for a game today being popular is 6 months, then it's dead if you do nothing. So this means that the companies producing the game have to be technological eventors(?), because the technology itself is driving the illusion, so you have to be a good programmer, understanding algorithms in order to build the illusion of a nice world, you have to know about rendering, gaming engines,… the other side is that the companies have to be constant providers, besides knowing the technology they have to know what people want, what type of story they need inside the game, what type of event do they want or characters, that is a hard line to walk, but I think that Blizzard is doing a good job and Dice is good as well trying to evolve the game, I'm talking about the games I'm playing right now. (…)Another thing I that you can introduce a new type of gaming technology, a new type of gaming concept and the community will go *WoW*!! This is new, but the time will catch up, and someone else will evolve your ideas. The quicker the competitors are hitting the market with the same thing, the quicker the game will die, if you don't do anything else. (…) And as a game designer, that is a problem as well; in order to know what to do, you have to ask it in the community, and that means you are telling the competitors of what you are doing before it is done.(…explication about *Battlefield 2*…)

THEORETICAL QUESTIONS

11. About the emotional immersiveness, which factors do you think make the people continue playing?

It depends. If you are a solo player it is goal oriented. The game mechanics are goal oriented, the things that the game provides you are the actual goals in the game, and you become, some games are connected to a lifestyle for a lot of people, as Quake. If the game gives you the possibility of changing things from the game reality into your own reality, I can say with pride that I have belonged to a clan because that give me some sense of belonging to the game, and that makes me emotionally attached to the game. I don't say I love my game and hug my computer

screen, but it makes me to want to come back and feel enthusiasm to meet my friends and to talk to them and to make jokes while playing while we are trying to get a flag or whatever we do. So, to be emotionally attached in a multiplayer environment is dependent on how other players act, and the actions of others players are dependent on the possibilities that the game mechanics provide, and all these levels have to be interconnected. If the game gives me three possibilities to interact with other players, then there will be some sort of emotional connection to the game, I will come return to the game and will be enthusiastic about it, but if I am as everyone else is, everyone runs around and has the same clothes and same weapons, I won't return because I am just another man, you want to win a reputation. I think that's one of the biggest forces, I want to be someone, I want to feel myself that I am someone and I want other people to recognize myself as someone. And if you look at *Asheron's Call*, you have swords that were very rare, and if you showed them in public areas, people would come and say "Oh, where did you get that?". It's like having a new mobile phone or something around you. You have it for practical use, but it is a lifestyle as well. So the games that provide you with that possibility, those will be the games that you will return to. (…explanation about planetsite, game where everyone looked the same…).

12. Have you heard about the flow theory? Do you think there are any similarities between the flow and the emotional immersiveness?

I think I discussed this rather briefly in my article as well. Flow is good, it is a good theory, and it has a lot of good foundations for it. The problem, as I see it, is that there is no discussion about how flow is communicated between different players. Flow is a state that you reach as an individual player, connected to the goal, connected to the difficulty of the game, connected to how you interpret the game. But if we three play the game, it can affect each other. You become enthusiastic about something, "Hey, let's do this, it's quite fun, let's do that", and there is no discussion about how this is communicated to the other players of the team, how you become enthusiastic together, and how that enthusiasm, what you call flow, is communicated between different people. Flow is something that is described as it is today as a communication between the world of the player, if you apply flow on a computer game and the actual game mechanics, the goal of the game and stuff like that. It doesn't take into consideration how this is transferred between different players, how you keep the illusion alive between different players. It's like playing a live role playing game. You borrow the ideas of a role playing game(…explanation of live role playing game…). There is an institute in Finland making research about this, and they have found that the players themselves help each other in keeping the illusion alive.(…) It is like a movie, where everyone plays a role, and your role will help my role and will help me to immerse myself into my role; we affect each other through some sort of negotiation between our roles, and we keep the illusion alive, and that is not covered by flow. Flow is more a negotiation between how you perceive the game, and how the game speaks back, that's my interpretation. Flow is a good starting point, yes, I'm not negative about flow but it needs some other elements. I have tried to investigate other ideas that have helped us to know how this happens. My research philosophical perspective is that there are different realities and we move in between them. What makes you stay in a certain reality or what does the game need in order to the players be immersed in the games, and well, it is what I wrote in my article.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

14. How do people get hooked on playing online games?

I don't know, I don't know actually, that's a more psychological issue. It's the same question as asking why people abuse drugs or alcohol, I don't know the answer. But I think that you need to have different realities. Maybe drugs and computer games are not that far away in a philosophical level, because they are mind altering things, both of them. You do alcohol because you want to change your perception of reality; you want to experience something new. New could be, ok, alcohol makes me funny and laugh all the time and see fun things, and I become like a hysterical donkey when I drink, so I want to see and be something else. I'm not say that computer games is comparable to drugs, but the basic ideas are the same. Why do you do computer games? Because you want to experience something new, you want to have a new experience. You want to go away from the objective reality. The objective reality is somewhere in the middle of our conversation,

somewhere here. It's what we discuss, you hear my words. But your subjective reality is different for reach one of you. I have one too. You don't if I am thinking about my wife and my kids, you don't know. And maybe we want something that changes our subjective reality as well as our objective reality, and online gaming could be a part of that. It's like, online gaming; playing like kids is very connected. You play games to know rules, like hide-and-seek. You play to interpret your world and to explore your world. And maybe computer games do the same. If you talk about getting hooked in a negative way, then it might be that you're missing something in the objective reality. Like I said before, if you're bullied in school or you have a very low selfstime(autoestima en ingles, buscar) in your objective reality, or maybe your wife or husband or parents tell you that you suck, well then you might escape away through the computer, because you can be something else. And when you try to exchange the ordinary reality, then is when you get hooked. If you find it more interesting to be in the computer game world than in the reality, then we have a problem, in my opinion. I'm not saying that playing a lot of hours is bad or necessarily negative but if you say "Hey, I find this reality quite boring; I don't feel like talking to you right now, I would prefer to play World of Warcraft instead, or if I don't feel correcting your exam, instead I'll play *WoW*". Then it is a problem. I think that every player has experienced this while playing, for example telling a friend that "yesterday we has a real fun time, we went a raid on a horde village", and you are actually high on that experience and you want to do it again, it's ok. But if you feel that for the 365 days of a year, then we have a problem.
(…explanation of why he thinks that computer are not bad…) If I start an association of pool, I have founds from my home town to play it. And this is a problem in Sweden, it is better to play sports 5 days a week than playing 2-3 hours per day, then it is not good. Why not? Because it is not real. It is real when I sit on my chair in front of my computer. I perceive it as real, I feel it as real, not moving myself but I feel the connection between people and the connection with the game as real, whatever that is. It doesn't mean that it replaces the objective reality; that would be a problem. I always put up an argument. When you read a lot of books, that's good. But it is bad if you read all the time and you don't talk to people. Why can't you compare an abuse on books and on computers, escaping from the reality world. (…talks about channel 4, a team of women who are sponsored, chess…)

15. What are the elements creating social interactions which enhance players' motivations to play the game?
Do you talk on a technological level? It's not easy to answer that question because, as I said before, everything is intertwined together. While doing my article, there was a fact that being able of showing your identity inside the game could be very important. *Asheron's Call* had the concepts for housing (…explanation…) I have never seen a computer game where the characters get old. There are games where you get experience. What happen if your character actually dies and you can't revoke it? Maybe you can get married or… I don't know. Maybe it starts to reflect the real world as well, and maybe people don't want to play something like the real world. (…thoughts about computer games and reality like matrix…)

16. What is the role of interaction and team interaction within current multimedia games?
I've answered that already. The team makes the illusion alive. The communication is important; we talk about military strategy when playing to *Battlefield 2*. The communication is ok in a social level, but the interesting is when it comes to be inside the games to make the tasks. That's why you get disturbed when your wife or your girlfriend enters the room. You are doing a hyper-jump into another reality. (…explanation of watching a movie, jumping reality…) The communication is basic.

17. What do online games have that conventional games do not have?
Hard question. A different level of abstraction. I answer this without having thought about it. If you play *Battlefield 2* 2, or another game, the experience is more direct, you have sound, visual impression and social interaction. If you play Monopoly you have to do a more abstract thinking around the game. It is just a board with squares, you have to translate more. I'm not saying this is good for computer games. The thing is that when you have an experience in a computer game, you share the same reality, because you are seeing the same.

18. Is it more addictive to play against a character that is controlled by a person than playing against one controlled by a computer?

Yeah, I would say that actually there is, the ability of social interaction. You can build it into the game if you talk about a design issue (…explanation about his experiences with the first offline games, single player games…). The interaction was in a friends house, now you do it online. That's the evolvement.

It's more addictive to play against a person, because they are not so predictive. If you play *Battlefield 2*, you see the ambition between players when they act, or I think you can see it. tead of playing against someone.

(…) There is a certain flag in the map Hotel Flag that is too obvious; you don't win the game my taking this flag. But you win scores if you capture the flag. And you can see the whole American team rushing to that flag without a strategy, just trying to kill as much as they can. The experience players want to win the map, win the whole game, instead of wining individually. (…) Computer controlled players don't act like that. (…) The AI is not very developed, so it is easy to find the patron, so you play against patterns ins