# Social behavior in Warhammer Online:
# How we behave while playing with others

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Online videogames have been around for roughly 30 years [61], and soon after, each one of them had his own online community. These communities were supported not by the game itself, but by technologies like forums or chat rooms. With the appearance of massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs) in the early 90's [62], these communities started being maintained and developed inside the game engine. The most popular example of MMOGs is massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs), like World of Warcraft (WoW) or Warhammer Online (WAR).

With the aid of MMORPGs, the videogame industry already has revenues bigger than the music and movie industries [64]. WoW alone has more players registered than Portugal has citizens – more than 11 million users [1], each one paying a monthly fee in order to play. Mythic Entertainment's Warhammer Online is the most recent addition to the MMORPGs library. The game was released worldwide in September 18, 2008 [2] and by October 30, 2008 it had already 800,000 registered players [3].

The success of these videogames, as perceived from the answer given in my questionnaire, comes from the fact that people can now role-play with players from around the world, in a more immersive and reactive environment that previous pen and paper or offline computer role-playing games (RPGs) [47]. But getting people engaged in a community of almost one million players in a 3D environment is not an easy task.

In this paper I analyze the design choices made by Mythic Entertainment in order to create an active community within WAR, where almost every action in the game needs to or can be achieved by interacting and playing with other players. I also try to understand if these social interactions occur in ways predicted by many of the social theories and experiments created until this date. To what degree is our social behavior in WAR different or similar to how we normally behave in a normal community or even a different kind of online community?

## 2. WARHAMMER ONLINE

Based on the fantasy setting created by Games Workshop's tabletop game Warhammer: The Game of Fantasy Battles; Warhammer Online is a MMORPG which features a culture similar in appearance to Renaissance Germany crossed with Tolkien's Middle-earth [4].



**Picture One.** Miniature Greenskins from the game Warhammer: The Game of Fantasy Battles.

Players start the game by choosing the server in which they wish to play in. As seen from my questionnaire, normally people join a server where they have friends already playing, since they can't play with players from other servers after they finish creating their character. Players can choose from four different types of servers [5], who condition in a number of ways how they interact with each other. After picking a server,

players now have to choose between the two Realms available, The Forces of Order and The Forces of Destruction. The game is designed in a way that characters from a Realm, be they human or computer, see the characters of the other Realm as mortal enemies. This is helped by the setting in which the game is based. If a player chooses to play as a member of the Order, he can start the game as a Dwarf, Empire, or High Elf. On the other hand, if he chooses to play as a member of Destruction, he can choose between a Greenskin, Chaos or Dark Elf. Players from each race start in different parts of the game world. After a player picks the race of his character he has to pick its Career. This influences how other people expect the player to behave in the game, since each Career has a purpose. They balance each other in an advanced type of rock-paper-scissors mechanic. There are Careers more inclined to taking damage, while others excel in dealing damage, either at close range or from long distances. There are also characters that are more suited for healing or enhancing other players' attributes. After a player chooses his characters' Career, he can mold it to be different from other characters in the game, by changing its facial attributes, hair style, color, scars, etc. The player has now created his alter-ego, and he's ready to start playing with it.



**Picture Two.** Miniature Greenskin from the game Warhammer: The Game of Fantasy Battles.

Players control their characters through the keyboard and mouse, moving it around a 3D world with different regions, cities, keeps, outposts, caves, mountains, lakes, forests, war zones, etc. Depending on the Race and Career of a player's character it has different abilities and attributes. This last can range from Strength, Toughness, Intelligence, Willpower, etc. Players can pick quests and objectives from the games' computer characters. As they do quests and kill monsters, or other players, they win experience points. They can do this with other players in a small group that we call a Party, or with a high number of players, a set of Parties called Warband. When a player gathers the required amount of experience points he gains a new Player Rank, ranging from 1 to 40. As this Player Rank increases, the player gains more attributes and new abilities. Players have also to manage and maintain their characters' savings, items and equipment. Players win money by selling items and equipment, which they gather by finishing quests, trading with other players, or from loot around the world, even from their enemies' corpses. The players' characters can also take on a craft - making potions or making talismans (which enhance their equipment). As players create items they get better at it, creating more powerful ones as time goes by. This allows for people who dedicate their time in crafting items to get high amounts of revenue from selling them, or to be a valued member of the community if they give them for free.

As people play the game and get their Player Rank higher, they find more elaborate and powerful equipment. Other players can get a clear idea of a player's commitment to the game, and his level of expertise just by looking at him, since the way a player equips himself is directly connected to his Player Rank. This influences how others treat and address a player in the game, as much as social status in the real world influences the relationships between people (see Picture Three). At Player Rank 20 players can buy an animal mount which allows them to travel faster. This gives them a certain amount of status and recognition amongst the community, mainly in areas for players below Rank 20, since it represents the countless hours a player spent reaching Player Rank 20.

Players can have their characters join a Guild but each character can only be in one Guild in a given moment. Guilds are a collection of players from the same Realm and they work as a sub community within the game. They can have a theme/purpose, for example a Guild for

Portuguese players, or can exist accepting all sorts of members.

Players can interact with each other by chatting or performing certain animations with their character. They communicate using: (1) the social window, which anyone can read if in the same region of the game; (2) private messages between players; (3) the in-game mail; (4) regular chat, where anyone can read it if they are close to a player's character (the conversation is represented in balloons over the characters' head); (5) the Guild's chat window; (6) the Party's chat window; and (7) the Warband's chat window.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

In order for me to write this paper I analyzed the WAR's community from inside and outside the game. I observed how people play the game both through both my characters and in the real world. I analyzed a number of logs from different types of chats and I issued a questionnaire (Appendix) to both players in-game and on forums. I also studied the game's huge online documentation, from forums like Warhammer Alliance[1], and Allakhazam's Forums[2]; and online databases like Hammer Wiki[3], Allakhazam[4], and Wardb[5].

I am playing the game since the beginning of October, sensibly two weeks after the game was launched, and my experiment will end in December. My first character was created in the server Eltharion, which is a Realm versus Realm (RvR) type of server (more in the subject in section 4.4). It is from the Realm of Destruction and it's a Greenskin with the Career of Black Orc. My role in the game is to keep the enemies attention on me, since my character is able to withstand large amounts of damage.

My second character was created in the beginning of the December on the same server as my Black Orc. This time I chose for a Career a Discipline of Kain, and my role in the game is to heal other players, as well as to bring them back

to life in case they die. I did this to see if the same people react differently to me, since now my role is directly connected to their success in the game.

## 4. PLAYING WITH OTHERS

As I saw in the course of my questionnaires, what attracts players of the MMOG genre to this game is the way it enables a cooperative and/or



**Picture Three.** From top to bottom: A Greenskin Black Orc with Player Rank 1, 11 and 21, respectively.

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[1] http://www.warhammeralliance.com/

[2] http://war.allakhazam.com/

[3] http://warhammeronline.wikia.com/wiki/HammerWiki

[4] http://war.allakhazam.com/

[5] http://www.wardb.com/

competitive experience with other human players, and the way it rewards players for engaging in these experiences.

## 4.1 Parties

Parties are the simplest connection players can have with each other. When a player finds someone doing the same activity as them, they can start a Party with him or her. This allows players to group up, making it easier and a lot quicker to finish common objectives.

A Party can hold up to six players and the loot and experience points gained while in a Party is shared amongst its members. The person who started the Party is regarded as the Party Leader and has access to some special options like kicking a player off the Party, making it an Open Party, or changing the way the loot is shared.

In order for players to enter a Party they simply go to the window of Open Parties and pick one that is close to them and doing an activity that meets their goals. Or players can simply wait for a Party Leader to invite them.

## 4.2 Warband

A Warband appears when two or more Parties unite. This asks for a bit more coordination since a Warband can be constituted by up to eight Parties (forty eight players), but allows the tackle of harder and bigger objectives.

As before, members in a Warband share their loot and experience points. To create a Warband, a Party Leader has to choose to merge his Party with another one. Players join a Warband in the same way they would join a Party.

## 4.3 Public Quests

Apart from regular Quests, used throughout the MMOG universe, Warhammer Online implemented a spinoff of the previous system, called Public Quests.

A Public Quest is made available to players as soon as they enter predetermined areas of the world map. For example, if a bridge is represented on the world map as a Public Quest, every player that is on that bridge has access to it. If the objective of that Public Quest is for players to kill one hundred goblins, every time a player kills a goblin they contribute to the Quest. If when a player arrives at the bridge already ninety goblins were destroyed, he only has to kill the remaining ten for the Public Quest to be concluded.

After a Public Quest has been finished, the players who most contributed to it receive a prize, mainly loot (for instance equipment or gold). Although players in a Public Quest are already doing the same activity together, it is normal to see the creation of Parties or even Warbands. From my experience in the game, this helps players by keeping them focused and organized.

## 4.4 Realm versus Realm

As referred before, right after picking the server in which a player wishes to play, he has to pick the Realm in which he will play for. Each Realm allows for the creation of characters from four different races. The game is designed so that players from the four races of a Realm perceive themselves as allies, and at the same time they perceive players from the other four races of the other Realm as enemies, mortal enemies.

To encourage this type of fighting the game rewards the player's character every time he kills a person from the opposing Realm. The world map is filled with Posts, Keeps and Cities who can be conquered by players of both Realms. This is normally done by Parties or Warbands of players, who will share the rewards of participating in the Realm versus Realm (RvR) part of the game. These rewards take the form of experience points and loot, and on a reward called Renown Points. This builds up a rank similar to the Player Rank called Renown Rank, which ranges from level 1 to 100. As players get more renown points they're able to customize their characters even more.

As mentioned before there are four different types of servers in which players can create their characters in. The major differences in the servers are related to how people can engage in RvR fighting. If players join an Open RvR server they can fight players of the opposing Realm anytime, anywhere. On regular servers there are some rules to where these fights can take place.

Many people pointed out this feature of the game as a main reason to: (1) have left another MMOG to start playing Warhammer Online; (2) start being interested in the game in the first place; or (3) still be playing it.

## 4.5 Scenarios

Scenarios are a special branch of the RvR component of the game. It allows for players to engage in quick brawls with players from the opposing Realm within a set of rules, from anywhere in the world map.

Instead of having to "physically" take a player's character to a place in the world map where some RvR fighting is taking place, for instance, the taking of a Keep, players interested in a quick piece of RvR action can enter a queue to a Scenario from just anywhere in the world map. For entering this queue players have to pick in which Scenario map they wish to play in. After it gets a set number of players enrolled, they are "teleported" to the Scenario, which is "physically" disconnected from the world map.

Players from each Realm are automatically distributed into Warbands as soon as they set foot in the Scenario. Each map can accommodate up to 18 players per Realm, and the side with more points after 15 minutes wins. These points are won by doing the Scenario map objective. This could be, for instance, taking a flag out of the opponent's base and bringing it back to the player's, or conquering some parts of the map. Scenarios work as a game inside the game. When the 15 minutes are over, or the player's Realm as reached the 500 points, everyone gets teleported back to where they were, right before they joined the Scenario.

Since players are pitted against each other in a relative small place, and with a clear goal, the amounts of experience and renown points they gain are huge in Scenarios, making it very popular amongst players who want to get to higher Player Ranks quickly. Although it's a very popular feature in the game, it's not seen with very good eyes by the community. As many players state it, Scenarios "steal" players from the world itself, making certain parts of the game feel like barren deserts. Many see the Scenarios as a distraction from the game itself. A fake RvR, so to speak.

Since many of the features that make this game different from other MMOS need the participation of lots of players, it's necessary to find a way to encourage people to participate in them. On the other hand, many players are into Warhammer Online because it's not as time consuming as other MMOs. Scenarios save a lot of time for players who just to have fun for a few hours a week.

## 5. SOCIAL THEORIES & STUDIES

After giving a brief description of some of the game mechanics I'll summarize in this section my findings from analyzing the community within the game, taking as a starting point many of the theories and findings regarding both regular and online communities.

### 5.1 Online communities

Warhammer Online supports its community by allowing its members to interact through avatars in a virtual 3D space. Although these avatars can perform some basic animations, such as waving or dancing, most interactions are done through text messages. Despite the game not providing any other means of communication, almost half the people who answered my questionnaire said that they used some sort of third-party application for voice communication. Most of these people use it when speaking to their Guild mates.

More than half of the people who answered my questionnaire also said that they play with their friends and/or family, be they friends they met in the real world or online. Some even got a bit distressed by the suggestion in my questionnaire that people you meet online are not real life friends (it was not my intention). This reinforces the idea that these games reinforce the existing ties between people from a regular community. Others referred that they have a small, tight group of friends to whom they have been playing for a quite a while, moving from MMOG to MMOG. Some of these groups are created by people who only interact online. This supports the work of Walther, who defends that online relationships, although slower to develop (because of the lack of some non-verbal information), can become as strong as a real life relationship [6]. I must admit I wasn't one hundred percent sure of this idea before

experiencing this game and meeting the people I've met. Now I believe that both relationships can be as strong. As defended by Schuler, the best way to create an online community is to involve their potential users in the software design process [6]. This was partially achieved in this game by an extensive beta process, which aided the developers immensely. Although the final game was only released in September 2008, some people said in my questionnaire that they started playing it (in a beta version) as early as January.

## Common ground

There's a linguistic theory that provides a starting point for understanding how a group of people develop a shared understanding in a conversation. It is called common ground [6]. Since Warhammer Online is very objective oriented, when a Party is formed between strangers most of the conversations are related to the task at hand. In spite of this, sometimes the game grants the Party with a small break. This is when this theory is very noticeable. I noticed that many of the casual conversations start by people trying to establish some common ground with the other members of the Party. The most common question written by people is something in the order of "Where are you guys from?" This fuels a casual conversation that usually lasts very little, simply because the nature of the game. Normally strangers who play in a Party remain as such.

I believe that common ground is more fruitful between strangers in Guild, since they will eventually interact on a regular basis.

## Social presence

One other theory the supports the idea that online relationships can be a strong as real life relationships is the theory of social presence [6]. By the interactions I've seen between Guild members, aided by the avatars in a 3D world, I believe that this game conveys a sense of participants being physically co-present. Social presence is strengthened when players see the same people every time they log in the game, which happens with their Guild members, who greet them when they notice they are in-game, or wish them farewell when they leave. It's interesting to see that players have a sense of

personal space around their characters, backing away if a player gets his characters too close.

## Media richness theory

The degree in which a network supports a range of communication activity is studied by what is called the media richness theory [6]. For example, a simple text-based network isn't able to support many different types of communication activity. This is because of the nature of the medium in which the communication is done.

If we take into account the third-party applications for audio communication, such as Ventrilo, Warhammer Online presents their users with a very rich medium for communication. Players can interact through text or sound with other players. These players can be close to each other, when playing together for example, or far, far away (in terms of the 3D environment), if they are chatting for instance through the general chats, Guild chats or through private messaging. Players can also use an in-game mail system, both for communication or trade.

The game also allows for communication through non-verbal actions, such as character animations or how players play the game. As I played the game as a Discipline of Kain (the healer Career), many times people thanked me for the way I was conducting myself in a Party or Warband. As times goes by, people start recognizing players for how they behave in such groups. This also strengthens the theory of social presence at play in this game.

Although nobody can see each other's physical reactions to different situations, this reactions can be enacted in a way by each other's characters, or heard by each other's voices.

## Critical mass

The number of people needed to make an online community viable and attractive to others is known as critical mass [6]. This is very important in a game like Warhammer Online, since most of its most distinct features pit large numbers of players against one another. Either the Public Quests or RvR require that a regular number of people to be online and evenly distributed around the world map. Since RvR is the feature that most attracts and holds players in this game,

Mythic Entertainment needs to find a way of keeping players interested in it for the years to come.

As said before, many people find themselves only playing the Scenarios part of RvR, "stealing" players from the world map. This must be addressed in order to meet the critical mass necessary to keep the game flowing and interesting. If Mythic Entertainment can't interest players out of the Scenarios, this game will be just one more MMOG with quests and Parties.

*Third places*
It's quite tempting to say that these sorts of games are like the places described by Addison [9]. Third places are described as a place where people unite for relaxing, innocent and cheerful conversation. They are neutral places, without the need for a host, and were anyone feels at home. They work as levelers, resulting in inclusive places. What attracts people to these places are the other members and not some higher management - they expect to see familiar faces.

Even if we analyze the game considering two distinct parts of it, the Guilds and the game's environment, neither of these two fit perfectly into Addison's description of a third place. Although most conversation in the Guild chat are relaxing and cheerful, and everyone starts as a blank sheet, we cannot consider Guilds a neutral place. Normally the Guild Leader, or an Officer, serve as a host, and people have ranks within the Guild. There are also Guilds who aren't open for everyone, for instance, Guild for members with Player Rank 40. What is true is that people expect to see familiar faces when they check on their Guild.

If we consider the game's environment we can see more resemblances with a third place. It is a neutral, inclusive and leveler place. Players are only appreciated or judged by the actions they take in game, and no player is above another one. Despite all this, players can hardly expect to see a familiar face, since the game has such a large number of people playing it. Even more, most of the conversations I witnessed in the game's environment were task and/or goal related – not so cheerful and fun. This is mostly derived from the nature of game itself, which

asks for a relative high amount of coordination between its players, and never gives them too much breathing time during a task.

*Scale-free networks*
Warhammer Online is a good candidate to show a model of a scale-free network [49] since players add others to their in-game friend-list without having any access or knowledge of the degree of the other players. Despite knowing which Guild they are affiliated to, the degree value of the nodes isn't publicly available. Players interact with others when they feel a chemistry or bondage between them. This also applies for Guilds, as some users prefer small Guilds, with fewer members coming in and out, as long as the ones who are there are friendly and fun to play with.

**5.2 Social web**

There are two evident reasons for people to join Warhammer Online - it is a game, and it has a large community. People can join these kinds of communities for many reasons. As I found out through my questionnaires, many join with a group of friends. Even when joining alone, and despite of many people coming and going, many players bond with one another. Some of the groups of friends who joined Warhammer Online met in other MMOGs and then created a solid friendship without ever meeting each other offline. People bond easily in these environments because they all have something in common at start – the taste for fantasy games. As a user said in his response of my questionnaire, "I play to socialize". This supports the idea that people might join these communities to seek friendship.

These games usually depend on their users helping each other. This is where the sense of belonging and bondage surfaces. When two players have the same task, it's natural for them, due to the design of the game, to pair up and finish it more easily. But why do some players aid other people in a task when they have already done it? One simple answer is that players often ask (or expect) money or items in return for aid. But from what I experienced in the Guilds I've played, many players help others in order to build up a reputation or because they expect to be

helped in the future. Sometimes they just want to support their community (the Guild).

*Communities of practice*
A group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis, is a community of practice [11]. If we imagine the members of a Guild, who share, for instance, the concern of keeping Keeps or Posts for their Realm, they build their expertise in this task by doing it repeatedly on daily basis. Over time, they develop a unique perspective on this activity as well as a body of common knowledge, practices and approaches. They may even develop a common sense of identity.

The community outside of the game usually serves as a living repository for this knowledge, be they forums or regular websites. There are also applications who feed these websites with data from the game automatically, like Curse[6].

## 5.3 Encouraging Newbies & Contribution
When a community responds to a player's needs he usually gets more committed [21]. To survive and thrive, online communities must provide the benefits and experiences that their members seek. In this game, the basic mechanism by which players derive benefit is from playing with others. It is true that people might not feel very committed to help when in a big Guild since anyone else can produce the same contribution, but the game makes available a mechanism which helps anyone feel that they are contributing to their Guild.

Each Guild has a tax rate that applies to their members. Every time players collect loot or kill a monster or player, their Guild collects a share of it. Each Guild has a different rank, derived from their user's contribution. Since players can't compare their contributions (in gold and renown points) they don't feel their work diminished by some experienced player who might be contributing a lot more than they, so players feel that they are actually helping their Guild build up its rank.

Although in many online communities it's hard to incorporate new members because of their lack of experience, in Warhammer Online, when a player enters a Guild he automatically makes automatic contributions due to the implemented mechanism I referred above. If the Guild has special standards such as fighting in RvR in harder areas of the game, most invitations for new members refer these standers, for example: "X Guild looking for players with Player Rank from 30 to 40, for RvR". By asking for these types of players the Guild Leaders are assured that they possess a high amount of experience, since they need countless hours to reach those ranks.

Since newcomers to a Guild interact directly with experienced players right from day one, it's easier to retain and socialize them, as suggested by both theories of small-group socialization and organizational-socialization [23].

As found for a number of OSS projects, from an individual standpoint, successful contributions to one's Guild is much less about gaming expertise than about the construction of identities [22]. People also find benefits in specializing in their contributions as I found in my questionnaire, for example as making potions for other Guild members. This is known as public goods; once they're produced anyone can use them, but no one can used them all for themselves.

*Matching people with tasks*
Warhammer Online uses two simply systems to match players with tasks or objectives. The first is the already talked before Public Quest system. People contribute to a certain objective while inside a determined area, without having to interact with others (if they wish). This way everyone finishes a task without having to ask for help or having to help someone just for the sake of it.

The second system is the Open Parties window, which displays all the Parties in an area who are accepting members. By joining a Party this way, players will be matched with people who probably are doing the same quests as theirs, since they are on the same area. Now each player's objectives will be more easily done, and the Party will also take benefit from the player's contribution since all of the Party members will

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[6] http://www.curse.com/

have to work less since they have a new player on board.

## 5.5 Regulating behavior

There are a number of ways of regulating behavior. It can be imposed by law, norms, the market and the "built environment" of social life - its architecture [31]. In Warhammer Online players actions are regulated by all of them, but what most regulates their behavior is the game's architecture, its code. Each players can only make his character perform a predetermine set of actions, be it jumping or casting a spell. Players can only interact with each other using the game's tools for communications, like the chat windows or the in-game mail. The types of groups players can create in the game also have predetermined characteristics, with a limited set of editing options. Funny how players overcome these limitations of the code by using tools like Ventrilo[7] to enhance communications between people in-game, allowing for voice conversations. The game also allows for the creation of modifications on the client-side of game, by changing the graphical user interface. This doesn't change the regulation imposed by the code, but allows for users to change how they see the information presented to them.

On my questionnaire some users complained about how their behavior was being regulated by the market. Some latency issues didn't allowed players to fully engage in the game. Some users also reported that the game is "heavy" on the hardware side their computers, running slowly or with poor graphics, minimizing the experience and how people play the game. What I can say is that constraints like the market and code are plastic. Mythic Entertainment has released a different number of patches since the game was shipped to the stores. These patches constantly change the code, allowing for different behaviors from the players. An example of this was adding in the social window some options to better distribute the conversations between players, changing the way people interact through this chat window. These patches also try to address some of the market restrictions.

Member-maintained communities can be more robust and valuable than owner-maintained communities [34]. This is because member-maintained communities can reduce their reliance on key individuals and scale as the community grows. I won't go as far as to say that Warhammer Online has a community maintained by its members, but they sure help. Every user can report on another one by using a tool available in the game. This allows for the game moderators to rapidly react to situations where the users break the game rules.

Guilds are more into the idea of member-maintained communities. Although they have a Guild Leader, they usually work as a democracy, as stated in many responses to the questionnaire, with everyone evaluating how others play.

Since anyone can report a bad behavior, and they are severely punished by the game's moderators, there's a sense of both certainty of sanctions – a player knows he can be easily reported – and severity of sanctions – players can have their accounts deleted – between players [35]. On some Warhammer Online communities' websites there's even a counter for accounts banished in the game. Most of the fraudulent behavior is done over the internet, outside of the game. A popular activity that is prohibited in Warhammer Online is buying in-game gold with real money. But as said before, websites like these are hard to publicize in-game since every message can be traced to a user that can be easily reported, and everyone is aware of this.

*Norms*

Norms are beliefs shared by members of groups about what constitutes acceptable behavior in the group. They reduce uncertainty about how others will behave, and they especially guide new members, who need to figure out what's expected by others. Norms are enforced by members of the community themselves through social pressure. [30]

I've played World of Warcraft (WoW) for about a year, some time ago. It is interesting to see how Mythic Entertainment studied these norms and tried to accommodate them in Warhammer Online. An example of this is the Open Party system. The norm in WoW was to type in the

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[7] http://www.ventrilo.com/

general chat "LFG Quest name" when someone was looking for a Party to a specific quest – with LFG standing for looking for group. In Warhammer players need to simply open the Open Parties window and check for Parties that are in their area. In Warhammer Online's manual it's stated that this was a specific measure to end the "LFG" spam in the chat windows. An example of a norm in WoW that turned out to be a rule in Warhammer Online was the attribution of special loot. In WoW it was the norm when some special item was found that everyone should say "need" or "greed" if they needed that item or if they would just sell it. If more than one player stated that they needed that item, they would roll a number ranging from 1 to 100, and the person with the higher number could pick up the item. In Warhammer Online every time a special item appears, a small window appears, forcing players to choose between "Need", "Greed" or "Cancel". After everyone as picked an option, the game automatically awards the item to one player.

As people answered my questionnaire, many still use some terminology that they started using in WoW. This is quite natural, since many stated that they started playing Warhammer Online after leaving another MMOG (mostly WoW), and that was that previous experience what most contribute to them to learn how to play the game. Even in Warhammer Online's manual and help pages there are references to many of WoW's terminologies. I believe this was done in order for the newcomers who left a similar game to feel at ease from day one. Many norms regarding the new community of Warhammer Online are starting to arise.

Norms help members feel comfortable and safe, help new members learn appropriate behavior and help old members teach newcomers. When someone doesn't show regard for the norms he or she is quickly cast aside, without the intervention of any moderator, since a norm isn't a rule. In a game where cooperation is everything few people can afford to play alone. As expected, Guild members have stronger norms, since the ties between their members are greater than the ties that form between strangers who interact in the game world. Norms emerge out of the interaction with others, and in Warhammer Online they are expressed more passively, through nonverbal behaviors or imitation.

## 5.6 Online games

Dramatic elements engage players emotionally with the game experience and invest them in its outcome [46]. Warhammer Online has a huge back-story to support its gaming experience. Some users said that the only reason for them to be playing the game was because they were already fans of the Warhammer universe, which comes with no surprise since the table top game first came out more than two decades ago.

For players who know nothing about Warhammer the game presents the user with a flashy introduction video, where characters from each Realm are pitted against one another. The game keeps the players interested in the outcome of this war by presenting a game world devastated by conflict. Many of the quests players are presented with in this game are directly connected to this feud and as they progress in the game they are meant to feel that they are aiding their Realm. This of course is only imaginary, because for a game like this to work, no side can actually win. If a player plays as a Greenskin and they are presented with a quest to kill a great Dwarf Knight from the opposing Realm, as soon as he's dead, another one just like him pops up for others users to kill. This is the greatest weakness in every MMOG. The actions of the players have very little impact on the game itself. Someone has already done whatever it is a player is doing.

Warhammer Online tries to counter this by the implementation of RvR system. Every area of the game as an indicator which indicates which Realm is controlling it. Players win points for their Realm by conquering Keeps, Posts or Cities from the opposing Realm, or by winning Scenarios. Players get invested in the outcome of this war because they can see that they can have an impact on it. If a player sees that the Keep of an area belongs to the opposing Realm, he can start a Warband and try to take it back, and defend it from players who want it back. As players do these tasks, which aren't imposed by anyone (as a quest for example), they can change which Realm controls the area in which they are playing at the moment.

*Flow theory*
Flow theory states that in order for a player to remain interested in a game, his level of ability must be appropriate for the challenge. If his ability isn't enough to face the challenge he'll feel frustrated, but if there's no challenge he'll get bored. As he becomes more agile in the game, the challenge must arise accordingly. [46]

Warhammer Online applies this theory very well in my opinion. The areas around the game are divided into four tiers. For Player Rank 1 to 11 they play in Tier 1, for Player Rank 12 to 21 Tier 2, and so on until players reach Tier 4. When a player finishes most of the quests in Tier 1 they usually find themselves at Player Rank 12, and then are presented with quests that guide them to Tier 2. The quests get harder and harder as the Player Rank rises and there's a need for coordination with other players in order to succeed. The RvR part of the game also gets more complex as players climb their way across Tiers. The objectives of the Scenarios get more complex and players go from conquering badly guarded Posts in Tier 1 to having to conquer Cities in Tier 4, most of the times using siege equipment.

*Playing with others*
Like other MMOGs, the success of this game comes from its "social factor". Users describe Warhammer Online in their responses to the questionnaire by saying "I can interact with players from around the world"; "Without other people it wouldn't be so immersive"; "It's a social game, about online interactions"; "The point of a MMOG is to interact with others". It seems it isn't about the game itself, but about the interactions that happen within the setting of the game.

Roughly 80% of the users who answered my questionnaire said that they were on a Guild. More than 50% play with friends and/or family and around 30% use VoIP to interact with other players. Almost 40% play in Open RvR servers.

**5.7 Social Impact of the Social Web**
The traditional human orientation to neighborhood and village based groups is moving towards communities that are oriented around geographically dispersed social networks [59]. As seen in my questionnaire, more than half of the people who answered it play it with their friends

and/or family. Even I found myself playing with a friend from childhood who doesn't live close to me anymore, and some old friends from Elementary school. The game didn't replace any interaction I'm used to having with them, it only reinforced the ties we already had. As for me and for many others, this game nourished existing relationships.

Even so, most of time players find themselves playing with strangers, to whom they rarely bond with. Despite this, it's safe to say that games like Warhammer Online remove barriers to interaction, reinforce ties in less time, resulting in the improvement of the social capital of their members.

**6. CONCLUSION**
It's safe to say that MMOGs are here to stay. World of Warcraft showed it by having more 11,5 million members at the time I've finished writing this report [63], and Warhammer Online with almost a million just after one month in the stores. After studying the community of Warhammer Online for almost three months I found that most of the existing theories and research about both regular and online communities can be applied to the community presented in this game. It would be nice to see if Mythic Entertainment can apply the existing findings on communities to their game. How can they ease the process of creating common ground between players without hurting the neutrality of game, as a third place? How can they keep their critical mass when so many players only "live" the game through the Scenarios? Why doesn't Mythic Entertainment include voice communication in the game? How can they include more dramatic elements in the game? Apart from the report system, could they implement a mechanism help to players maintain and feel responsible for the community? Can the communications in Warhammer Online support more non-verbal cues?

Mythic Entertainment just released a patch that changes some mechanics of the game, and also adds two new Careers, one for each Realm. The patch is supposed to fix some of the problems reported back from the community, such as people play too much in the Scenarios. Now if a player participates in the RvR on game world he

can win lots of cool items and more experience and renown points. With these rewards Mythic is trying to get the RvR fighting back into where anyone can see it, the game's environment. If they succeed the game will feel more immersive and alive.

It would be nice to see new studies taking into account the communities in games like Warhammer Online. Since most of the users are playing for the social aspect of it, why don't deepen it? Make it so it as more impact on people's lives. I hope that in a near future MMOGs are as popular as social websites. They have the potential, and honestly, they are more fun. Better yet, imagine a Facebook for MMOGs characters.

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## 9. APPENDIX

**Questionnaire**

1. When did you start playing Warhammer Online - Age of Reckoning? (Month and Year)

2. Why did you start playing it? (Name two reasons)

3. When you're not playing Warhammer Online - Age of Reckoning, what's the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about it?

4. How did you learned about the existence of this game?

5. What do you like about it? (Name two reasons)

6. What do you dislike about it? (Name two reasons)

7. What contributed the most for you to learn how to play the game?

8. How many characters you have?

9. Are they on the same server?

10. Do you play with (real life) friends and/or family?

11. How many people do you have in your in-game friendlist? (Approximately)

12. How do you normally communicate (in the game), through microphone or chat channels?

13. Are you in a guild?

14. Does your guild have a theme/purpose?

15. Do you have an explicit role in this guild? For example: You were assigned the role of recruiting new members to the guild.

16. Do you have an implicit role in this guild? For example: Guild members always come to you when they need a potion.

17. Would you rather play an offline, free version of Warhammer Online - Age of Reckoning?

18. Are you a male/female? How old are you?

19. What's your job in real life?

20. What type of server do you spend more time playing?