

Examining “2-week Minecraft Phase”: The Cyclical Engagement Patterns in Sandbox Gaming

Abstract

The 2011 video game, *Minecraft*, has sparked a craze across the globe. Due to its nature as a sandbox game, *Minecraft* offers players extensive creative liberties to build their dream world. However, a peculiar yet common phenomenon is observed among many *Minecraft* players: A cyclical pattern of fatigue with the worlds they are currently playing, usually within a range of 2 weeks. This phenomenon, colloquially referred to as the “2-week Minecraft phase”, remains largely unstudied in academic literature. To investigate this occurrence, we conducted a pilot survey among *Minecraft* players to assess its prevalence. Subsequent in-depth interviews were conducted with representative samples to gather more nuanced insights. The final analysis reveals the distribution and underlying causes of this phenomenon. Our study examines the “2-week Minecraft phase” from psychological and social aspects, providing valuable insights for game developers seeking to enhance long-term player engagement and satisfaction.

Keywords: Minecraft, Game psychology, Cyclical engagement pattern

1. Introduction

Minecraft, the video game released by the Swedish game company *Mojang Studios* in 2011, has achieved a great success in the global game market. Being a sandbox game, its internal freedom grants the players unlimited possibilities to build their dream world virtually. Starting from the most basic element of the game, blocks, countless styles of game play have been adopted by players of all kind. Because the game mechanic itself doesn't limit players' actions, players could have full control of what they would do in a game world.

Although a highly free mechanic would theoretically allow unlimited playing with in a single game world, many *Minecraft* players would usually experience a boredom towards the world they're currently playing, then either stop playing the game or turn to a new world, leading to a cyclical engagement pattern. This experience is shared by players from worldwide, but hasn't been discussed widely in the public.

In March 2024, user “Legitimate-Bath-9651” made a post on *Reddit* [Leg24], stating the experience publicly and giving five possible reasons behind this cyclical fatigue:

- Novelty: Players like the freshness of participating in new worlds, so the motivation is lost when a world gets old.
- Direction: The unsatisfied requirements (like mining, building a shelter) push players to play; when the game comes to the ending stage, all requirements are either fulfilled or automated, so players become aimless.
- Attrition (multiplayer): When a player stops playing, more players would tend to follow.
- Activity difference (multiplayer): Players at different engagement level would have different developing pace. Slower players may feel detached with the rest of the world.
- Differences in goals/directions (multiplayer): Players having different ideas for progression may drift away from each other, eventually losing motivation to play as a part of the world.

The post has lit up a mild but not strong discussion among other *Reddit* users, sharing their views and solutions on/to the experience.

In the title of the post, the phrase “2-week *Minecraft Phase*” is used. It is necessary to mention that this is not the first time the phrase “*Minecraft Phase*” has appeared on the Internet. Earlier in February 2023, user “gawkgawkcumsock” has created the entry “*minecraft*

phase” on *Urban Dictionary* [gaw23], but its meaning was defined as “the annual 2 week phase of the minecraft grind that most people find themselves stuck in”, a bit off from the definition in the later *Reddit* post. Back to an even earlier stage of years ago, the exact same phenomenon has been brought up occasionally on the *Minecraft subreddit*, but without the now-coined term.

Later in July 2024, *YouTube* content creator “niko” made video with title “The 2 Week Minecraft Phase Explained” [nik24]. The title is somehow ambiguous, as the video only explained *what* is the 2-week *Minecraft Phase*, but not *why it occurs*. The video became a hit, furtherly pushing the concept to a wider range of the *Minecraft* community. By the end of September 2024, the video has gained over 1.3M clicks.

Data from *Google Trends* (Figure 1) shows that starting from September 2024, the phenomenon has gone into the public’s eyesight.

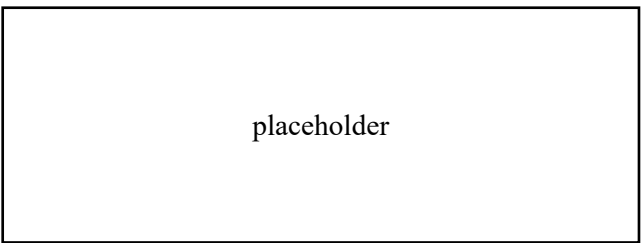


Figure 1: Search count of “*Minecraft Phase*” over a month in the United States according to *Google Trends*.

Up to October 2024, no research studies has been conducted on this phenomenon yet, nor is there any academical literature. So to introduce “2-week *Minecraft Phase*” to the academic community, our team conducted a formal research to find out the causes of it.

2. Method

The method used for this research is intended to be qualitative, but before diving directly into finding the causes, the research team wanted to validate the existence of the phenomenon and the size of the popularity affected by it. To do that, it is the best to a quantitative method.

2.1. Pilot Survey

The validation is realised via an online survey towards a collection of *Minecraft* players. The survey questions consist of non-private information related to players’

experience with *Minecraft*, including how long they have been playing the game, how frequently they create new worlds, what modes they play the most, what negative feelings have the game caused on them, etc. There are two purposes for this pilot survey:

- To find the distribution of players’ engagement duration towards worlds to validate if the 2-week phase really exists.
- To collect a sample base that could be filtered and used for the later interview stage.

A table of survey questions could be found in the appendix section (Table 1).

2.2. Interview

[The criteria for choosing the interviewees needs to be justified and clarified.]

After the survey data is collected, it is possible to analyze it and filter out a subset of players who have strong resonance with the phenomenon. The research team then conduct one-to-one interviews with these selected players. The interviews could either be online or in-person.

The main purpose of the interview stage is to find out the causes of the phenomenon by gathering subjective experiences from individual samples. The gathered data is then be transcribed, coded, grouped into categories, analyzed and discussed.

A table of interview questions could be found in the appendix section (Table 2).

3. Distribution analysis

[To be finished.]

4. Interview Results

[To be finished.]

5. Conclusion

[To be finished.]

6. Discussion

[To be finished.]

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Appendix

A. Survey Questions

No.	Question	Expected Answer
1	How many years have you played Minecraft?	0-11
2	How often do you play Minecraft?	Occasionally, once a month, multiple times a month, etc.
3	Do you play singleplayer or multiplayer more often?	Singleplayer, multiplayer
4	What Minecraft mode do you play the most?	Survival, creative, online servers
5	On average, how many hours do you play in a single Minecraft world?	0-5, 5-10, 10-15, 15+
6	Have you defeated the Enderdragon in a survival world?	yes, no
7	What aspects of your previous world caused you to stop playing?	Boredom, frustration, etc.

Table 1: The survey questions used to pilot the research.

B. Interview Questions

No.	Question
1	Can you describe the last time you decided to start a new world? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What was the main reason you wanted to start over?• How did the new world compare to the one you left behind?
2	When you create a new world, do you have specific goals in mind, or do you play more spontaneously? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you have goals, what are they? (e.g., building a specific structure, exploring, defeating bosses)
3	Do you feel a sense of attachment to the worlds you leave behind, or is it easy to move on? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you feel attached, what makes it hard to move on?
4	How do new updates or changes in Minecraft influence your decision to start a new world? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have there been updates that made you want to restart?

No.	Question
5	What role do mods play in your decision to start a new world? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you start new worlds specifically to try out mods?
6	Have you ever regretted abandoning a world? If so, why?
7	How does playing in multiplayer or singleplayer affect your decision to start fresh? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you more likely to start over in one mode versus the other?
8	What's your process when deciding where to settle in a new world? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you explore a lot before choosing, or do you settle down quickly?
9	Are there any moments of progression during which you feel like you want to start a new world instead of continuing? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you fight the Ender Dragon, Wither, make Netherite equipment? • Why do these progression points make you feel this way?
10	Have you noticed any patterns in your behavior when it comes to restarting worlds? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For example, do you tend to restart after reaching certain milestones or facing specific challenges?

Table 2: A brief outline of the questions to be asked in the interview.