Assessing the First Time Player Experience for The Walking Dead: Road to Survival (WDRTS)

Study plan by Andrea Chin

Study Objectives

- To discover initial player impressions of WDRTS during the initial tutorial
- To discover any challenges or frustrations that hinder enjoyment of WDRTS
- To discover what factors influence a player's likelihood of continuing to play WDRTS

Research Procedure

Recruiting and Logistics

The user researcher will recruit 12-15 players of mobile, free to play games over the course of 3 days for a 1.5 hour playtest. Prior to the playtest, the researcher will set up a video camera to capture the player's emotions and expressions as they play for the first time, as well as to assist with transcription for notetaking and reporting.

Half of the playtesters will play WDRTS on a tablet, and the other on a standard mobile phone; both the tablet and phone will run on the same operating system (iOS or Android). The researcher will also ensure that relevant telemetry can be captured from the playtest tablet, and the same tablet, smartphone and build will be used in each playtest.

Tentative Playtest Schedule

The end-to-end research study is estimated to take 7 days, but more realistically may take 2 calendar weeks due to the amount of time needed to recruit and schedule participants.

January 4: Recruit 12-15 participants from WDRTS Facebook page, subscriber newsletter, and previous Scopely playtest participants.

January 6: Begin playtests, scheduling 3-4 playtests daily depending on participant availability. 12 participants is sufficient for minimum sample, 3 extra participants helpful to have as reserve in case of no shows. Send out a daily "study feedback snippets" email internally with a few relevant quotes and initial impressions from the day's participants.

January 8: Initial data analysis – compile relevant participant quotes at various points during the tutorial, start writing up player interview feedback in presentation deck.

January 10: Review telemetry and provide relevant metrics and graphs to include in report. Telemetry, depending on how data analytics pipeline is pulled and structured, may take an additional 1-3 days depending on assistance from the game analytics team.

January 11: Present initial findings with relevant stakeholders (designers, gameplay programmers, marketers, etc.). Typically, I would prepare a 30-45 slide Powerpoint presentation deck, with a more

comprehensive 5-8 page written report. Extensive metrics and telemetry graphs seem to work better when hosted on an internal wiki for reference in order not to bury the high level, actionable findings.

Playtest Procedure

During each playtest, the researcher will observe and ask structured interview questions as the player completes the tutorial and then has 15 minutes of "free play" (should time permit) to explore the WDRTS game on their own. The playtest is identical for both the tablet and smartphone players.

The researcher will use an Excel file for taking specific notes and gathering feedback on each tutorial event, something along the lines of:

Tutorial Event	Notes and Participant Comments	Timestamp
First combat	Participant thought combat controls felt natural. "It's easy to figure out how to target a specific walker."	10:12 AM

After the player has had enough time to become acquainted with the WDRTS gameplay, the researcher will ask a few more structured interview questions and have the player fill out a questionnaire assessing their overall impression of the initial gameplay.

Data Collection

The user researcher will ask the player to complete the WDRTS tutorial and ask the following interview questions at the appropriate times.

Interview Questions

In-game Questions (based on observation and playtester actions)

1. Why did you make that choice?

2. It seems like you're spending a lot of time on [specific screen/mechanic/UI element]. Can you tell me more about ?

3. What did you expect to find on this screen?

Post-Tutorial Questions

1. What was your initial impression of the game based on the tutorial?

2. How did that first impression change as you played?

3. Was there anything that you found surprising?

4. Did the game drag at any point? When? What caused it to drag for you?

5. Were there particular aspects that you found satisfying? What was most dissatisfying?

6. What was the most exciting moment of the game? What was the most boring?

7. Did the tutorial feel too long, short, or just right?

Post-Freeplay Questions
1. What parts of the gameplay seemed most interesting? Why?

2. How did it feel when interacting with the UI? What felt hard to select, tap or drag?

3. Were there any features that you expected to see during the tutorial that you discovered now? Which ones?

4. What features were most confusing to use?

5. Did anything feel awkward, clunky, or irrelevant?

6. Were there any features that you were expecting in the tutorial that you didn't see? Which ones and why?

End of Session Questions
 1. Overall, how would you compare this game to others that you play?

2. What elements of the game did you like the most?

3. What was missing from the game that would make it more fun?

4. If you could wave a magic wand and instantly change just one thing to make this a more engaging experience, what would it be?

5. What kind of player do you think would enjoy this game?

Questionnaire
Please see the attached ratings questionnaire featuring Likert scale ratings assessing the player's overall subjective experience playing WDRTS. These self-assessments allow for benchmarking future playtests with future updates.

Telemetry:

The researcher will aggregate the following metrics post-playtest to objectively assess player engagement with the following gameplay mechanics critical to the WDRTS experience. Graphs will aggregate findings separately for tablet and smartphone players.

Amount of analysis depends on how the telemetry pipeline is structured, and additional analysis and reporting may be more efficiently supported in collaboration with the Game Analytics team.

Missions
- How many stages of the story campaign completed
- Amount of time spent per campaign stage
- Number of Adrenaline Rushes used
- Number of missions completed
- Number of achievements earned
- Number of character deaths

Team Roster
- Number of times and amount of time spent on players rearrange (add/drop) new characters to teams
- Number of settlers trained and added to roster
- Number of times players tap the enemies/challenges previewer on the team edit screen before missions
- Number of times and amount of time spent on the level up and upgrade character screens

Town engagement
- Number of buildings constructed
- Number of items crafted in the workshop
- Number of building upgrades

Monetization
- Amount of time spent in the Recruits and Rewards store, and what packages and character info screens they've tapped on
- Number of Skip Waits used
- Amount of gold spent and on what upgrades

PVP campaign
- Number of raids on other players' settlements
- Number of tokens earned
- Amount of reputation earned

Data Analysis and Presentation

This is an outline of what the presentation/final report would look like.

I. Study Objectives

II. Participants and relevant player personas

III. Playtest Procedure

IV. Player Feedback Questionnaire Ratings

- Individual slides/sections for each questionnaire rating with a few relevant quotes
  - Ex. Under "Clarity" aggregated rating, include some of the players' interview comments and written notes like "I wasn't sure how to engage in PvP combat – it wasn't clear where to access that, if that feature existed."

V. Specific Tutorial Impressions

- Show screencaps of particular screens that players liked/disliked, with relevant interview comments
- Include tables and graphs of relevant telemetry tracking player interactions

VI. Freeplay Impressions

- Show screencaps of particular screens that players liked/disliked, with relevant interview comments

VII. Design Recommendations

- List the features and other gameplay drivers positively contributing to player impressions
- Prioritize design issues/features that players most frequently identified as detracting from their player experience
- TL:DR edition – 2-3 minute video playtest highlight reel featuring player comments on gameplay delighters and detractors