

Dauntless Playtest Report

Methods and the User Experience

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David Hendershot, Trent Cobb, & On Lam

Instructor Robert Kennedy

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This study was conducted on the action role playing game Dauntless. Dauntless is a free to play game developed by Phoenix Labs and distributed by Epic Games (Phoenix Labs, n.d.). In Dauntless the player assumes the role of a slayer, a human tasked with finding and slaying behemoths before they can reach Ramsgate, the last human settlement in the Shattered Isles. Players are given the choice of hunting the behemoths solo or in a group of up to four players. As behemoths are slain they drop parts from their bodies, which players may use to craft and upgrade their armor and weapons. There are seven unique weapons in the game that players may equip to aid them in slaying behemoths.

Since it is free to play, all types of players will have the opportunity to play it. Dauntless presents itself as a new player friendly game, which allows new players to easily start playing Dauntless and experience a low learning curve, which allows anyone to feel welcomed to Dauntless, no matter what their experience level is with this genre of games. This means that the tutorial has to be able to properly teach the players how to play the game no matter what their experience level is with similar games. We decided to focus our test on this aspect of Dauntless and only test new players to see how they responded to the current tutorial provided to them. In addition, we want to learn if there is enough of a diversity with the weapon types that new players can find one or two of them to fit their playstyle. The final focus of this study is how players perceive the behemoths behavior and difficulty.

For this study, we recruited 11 participants who have never played Dauntless before and had them play through the tutorial and the first two hunts. What we found was that after the tutorial, the participants felt that they were comfortable with the controls and the combat.

However, they stated that even after the tutorial, they were still confused on what some of the UI elements were for and didn't know where the game wanted them to go once they had finished the intro to the tutorial. Our data also showed that participants chose to use faster weapons over the other options and they all felt that the first two bosses were easy.

We have concluded that players would have liked to have some more information taught to them in the tutorial and from our observations of the play test, we concluded that some of the players were confused on where to go to next in the questline.

Usability and Play Testing

There are many different types of testing methods used in studies to find peoples opinions on products, two of them are usability and play testing. Usability is a study that is focused on finding how easily the user can operate the product or system. This study is looking to find if the user can complete the intended task and how long it takes them. After they have this information, they utilize it to find ways to improve on the design to make it easier for the users to operate, so that they won't become confused and discouraged when using the product.

Play testing is focused on how participants feel about design choices and mechanics. This test is used to find out what participants like and dislike about the product and find ways to improve on the current design. Play testing is utilized to improve on mechanics and design choices, so that players will enjoy playing the game and will want to continue playing or tell their friends to try out the game.

Both types of testing methods are looking for ways to improve the game but they are looking for different types of data and responses. Usability is looking for how the player interacts with the game and if the game properly displays everything that the player needs to know to play

the game. Play testing is mainly focused on how the players feel about the mechanics in the game and if they are enjoying the experience.

Test Method Used

For our test, we invited 11 people who have never played Dauntless before. The playtest sessions averaged around 35-40 minutes, including the playtest and survey. We had the participants play the tutorial and the first two hunts in the game. The participants were only allowed to play Dauntless on the PC and were required to have the game installed prior to the playtest session to avoid any delay. Also, they had to use an account that hasn't played Dauntless before, so that they would have access to the tutorial. We held our game test sessions on discord and had them share their screen, so that we could watch and record it. Once they began to play they went through the whole tutorial that teaches them about the basics of the game, and fought the first behemoth, Gnasher. Then, participants went to the training ground to try on different weapons. With different trials, participants can learn about the diversity of different weapons and the corresponding weapon combos. After completing the tutorial, the participants played the first hunt for the next behemoth, Embermane, and the third behemoth, Boreus. To keep the sessions as similar as possible, we had the players play solo, so that other people wouldn't affect their feelings towards the game. After the second hunt, the playtest section will be finished and the participants will then be required to fill out a survey that will take about five to ten minutes to complete. After they have finished the survey, we will have some follow up questions about some things that we observed from the playtest.

Research Questions and Variables

The main focus of our playtest was on the tutorial of the game and how well it prepares the player for the main game. Dauntless provides a tutorial that covers the basics of the game, such as the controls, game goals, weapon and item usability, to help new players to get prepared for the adventure. In addition, finding a weapon that they enjoy using and the behemoth's behavior plays a huge part in Dauntless. It will also affect how new players approach the game and can be a deciding factor if the new player will continue to play the game after their initial experience. With this in mind, we focused our test to measure the effectiveness of the tutorial, how players feel about the weapons, and the enjoyment of behemoth encounters from new players.

The survey covers the overall experience of the 30 minute game test in different aspects, including the tutorial, behemoths, and weapons. Participants were asked about previous experience and overall feelings of the game. In the tutorial section, participants were asked about how the tutorial helped them be prepared for the game by giving enough information on different areas. The participants rated each mechanic explained in the tutorial on a 5-point scale, this data will give us an understanding on what participants are fully comfortable with after the tutorial and what mechanics need to be explained better.

In the enemy section, participants were asked about the opinions on those behemoths they faced and the difficulty to finish a hunt. We will have them use a 5-point scale to rate how fun and difficult they found each behemoth. This data was gathered to let us know if the participants are enjoying the behemoth's fights and if they are having any difficulties in the hunts or if it is too easy. We also asked the players if they had any difficulty finding the behemoth once the hunt

had started. Participants will rate this on a 5-point scale, which gave us data on if they felt it was too hard to locate the behemoth when they would lose track of them.

In the weapon part, participants had been asked about their favorite weapons and how comfortable with their weapons. We also asked them why they liked the weapon that they decided to use over the other weapons available. From this data we were able to gather what weapons were most popular and why participants preferred them over the other ones.

Hypotheses

Before we ran our study we had three different hypotheses about how the new players would feel about Dauntless after playing the tutorial and the first two hunts. We believed that players would enjoy the gameplay in Dauntless. The first hypothesis was that we felt that players would like the variety of weapons that the player can use because it will allow them to find a weapon that fits their desired playstyle. We asked the player what their preferred weapon was and why they liked it over the other weapons that they had to pick from. We thought that if we were to find that players weren't finding a favorite weapon and dislike all of the weapons then we will know that there isn't enough variety for the players to choose from.

Our second hypothesis was that the tutorial would properly prepare the player for all of the gameplay aspects of the main game and that the player would be able to fight the first two behemoths confidently and wouldn't need any more information than what was provided in the tutorial. To measure this variable we asked the player to rate on a 5-point scale how they feel about the game's goal, enemy behavior, weapon combos, the basic controls, items, and the UI. From this data gathered we were able to tell how the participants felt they know the basics of the

game from the tutorial that they played and then we can use that data to show what the game needs to improve on in the tutorial to properly prepare the players.

Our final hypothesis was that the players will like the first two behemoths that they have to hunt. We believe that the participants will find the enemy battles fun and to be a fair fight that isn't too difficult. We have measured this variable by asking them to rate on a 5-point scale how much fun they had while fighting each behemoth and how difficult each one was to fight. From this data we are able to have an understanding of how the players feel about the first two behemoths that they had to fight and if we find that the participants are having fun with the fights and don't find them too difficult then we can confirm that the first two behemoths are an enjoyable experience for new players.

Results

Tutorial

In the tutorial 63.6% (7) of the playtesters felt that the tutorial properly prepared them for the game. When it came to combat 45.5%(5) of the playtesters felt comfortable with combat after the tutorial. Playtesters were then asked if they understand the game goal, enemy behaviour, weapon combo, basic controls, item use, and the game's UI; Chart 3 shows our results.

Behemoths

The first behemoth players faced outside the tutorial was the Emberane. In the fight with this behemoth 36.4%(4) playtesters enjoyed the fight and 45.5%(5) playtesters found the fight to be easy. Boreus is the second behemoth playtesters faced after the tutorial. When asked, 45.5%(5) of the playtesters enjoyed the fight and 54.5% found the fight to be easy. These results

are good as a tutorial should be easy to encourage players to continue playing by building up their confidence.

Weapons

The weapons in Dauntless are a huge part of the game's appeal and core mechanics. When asked, do you understand how to use your weapon, 63.6%(7) of playtesters said yes. Among the 7 unique weapons in the game, the War Pike was the favorite with 54.5% (6) of playtesters and the chain blades came second with 27.3% (3). The Axe and Ostian Repeaters tied for 3rd with 9.1% (1) each.

Findings

From the data that we gathered we have found some valuable information and have five main findings about the game Dauntless. Our first finding is that we believe that the tutorial in Dauntless prepares the player well for combat. It provides clear instructions on game goals, basics control, and weapon combos. With 82% of the participants saying that they felt prepared for the game after the tutorial. Multiple participants also made comments about how they felt that they had a good understanding of the combat after finishing the tutorial.

Our second finding was that players were confused on some of the UI elements in the game and struggled with quest tracking. The tutorial does not provide enough information on UI elements as most of the playtesters found themselves helpless in understanding the UI. We observed that the majority of the participants were confused on where to go after the tutorial had ended and sent them to the town area.

For the weapon choice, most of the playtesters tend to choose fast-pace weapons, such as chain blades and war pikes. If Phoenix Labs is planning to include more weapons of choice to

the game, game designers can consider adding more fast-paced weapons that can fit the majority of players. We observed that the majority of the players would briefly use the slower weapons in the tutorial but change back to the faster weapons almost immediately, not taking the time to learn the weapons strengths.

Moreover, playtesters felt the behemoths were easy to defeat. The majority of players said that they found the behemoths to be easy to fight but they also said that they enjoyed fighting them. Even though the behemoths players faced were introductory levels, raising up the challenge of both behemoths can fascinate more players to stay on playing the game.

Last but not least, playtesters felt that adding a mini-map would improve their navigation. Some of the playtesters felt it was hard to locate the NPC in the town and behemoths in the field. Adding a mini-map can help new players get familiar with the game world quicker so that they can adapt and put themselves into the game better.

Limitations

There are a few limitations to our research that we notice while testing. The first is a threat to the construct validity known as evaluation apprehension. This is when the participants know they are being observed during testing and perform differently to impress the researchers. This is a serious treat as the purpose of our research was to get the players natural first impressions of the game's tutorial. If they are acting more cautious or anxious while playing then the data collected is not natural. The second construct validity threat is interaction of testing and treatment. This is when the testing method affects the outcome. Our tests were conducted on the player's PC device with the Discord application running in the background. Discord was needed

inorder to observe and record our participants but it could've also affected the performance of the game.

Another threat to the research's construct validity is mono-method bias. This when a single method is used every time and place for the testing. Unless researchers use different methods for collecting data it can be presumptuous to say that these results are true all the time; the results may vary depending on the method used. The Dauntless game is available on multiple platforms so the player's impressions of the tutorial level may vary based on the platform they are playing on. One of our playtesters mentioned that they only played games on Xbox so playing on PC with mouse and keyboard was something new for them. For future research on the tutorial the participants should be able to play on any platform that is comfortable to them.

Conclusion

Overall the tutorial in Dauntless (Patch 1.3.2) is effective in helping players feel prepared for combat, however, the tutorial was ineffective in teaching players about the behemoth's combat mechanics. The game's UI and navigation could also be improved for some quality of life to the game. For future research we will gather more personal data on the playtesters to gain knowledge on their gaming background, as we feel that this may affect the playtester's first impressions of the game. Increasing our sample size will also prove useful as it will allow us to test a larger variety of gamers.

When it comes to game usability and testing this type research should be applied to game production teams. According to Laitinen (n.d.), In games, usability is about delivering a better and deeper experience with less unnecessary interruptions or challenges that have not been

designed by the developers. In our research we were able to use usability and testing to identify areas in Dauntless tutorial to help improve new player first impressions. Laitinen (n.d.) also mentioned even the smallest glitch or hiccup in the user interface may render an otherwise good game into a rather annoying experience.

Using usability and testing in games would improve the design process by giving the team the ability to find issues that players will run into while playing the game. Using usability tests would allow the team to find out if players are able to successfully use all of the systems provided to them and what needs to be added or adjusted. A play test would allow the team to find out what mechanics players are enjoying and what they feel needs to be improved. Both testing methods allow the team to gather useful data from participants who don't have the same bias as the development team and give the team the ability to find issues before the release of the game.

Graphs

Chart 1

Did the tutorial properly prepare you for the game?
11 responses

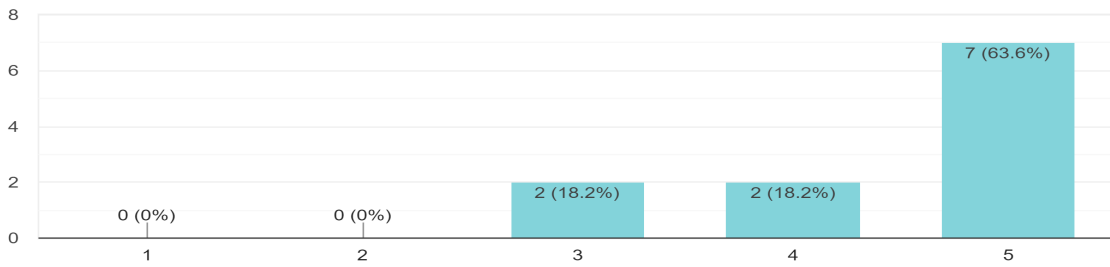


Chart 2

After the tutorial how comfortable are you with combat?
11 responses

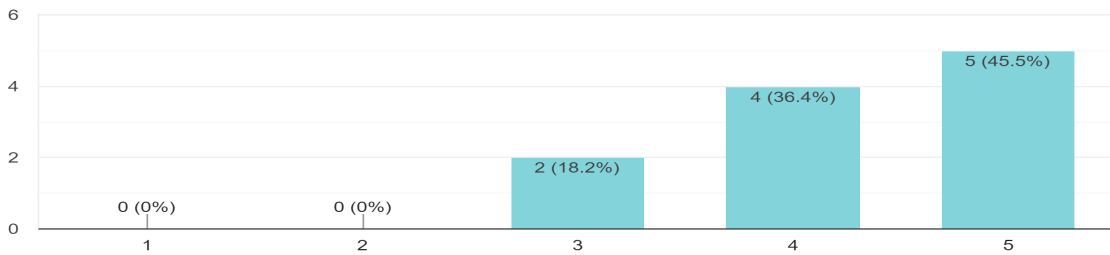


Chart 3

Does the tutorial help you understand the following items?

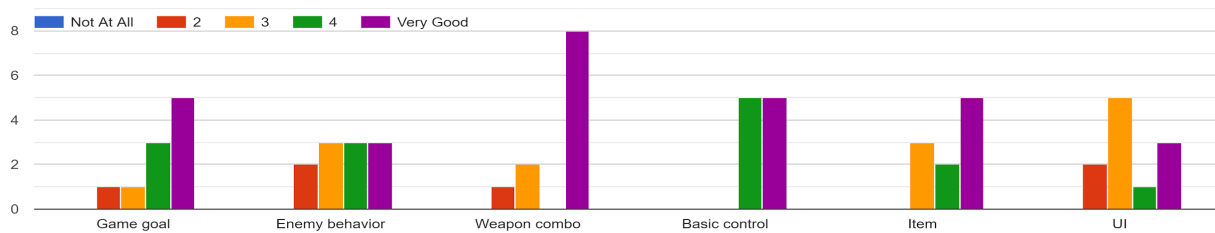


Chart 4

Did you understand how to use your weapon?

11 responses

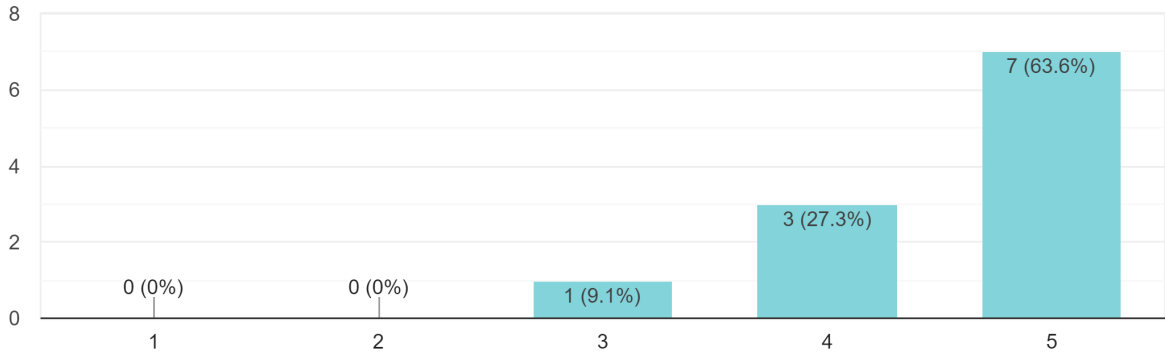


Chart 5

What was your favorite weapon?

11 responses

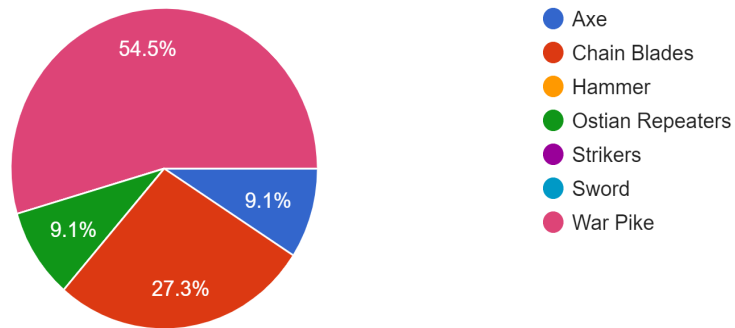


Chart 6

Did you enjoy fighting the Embermane?

11 responses

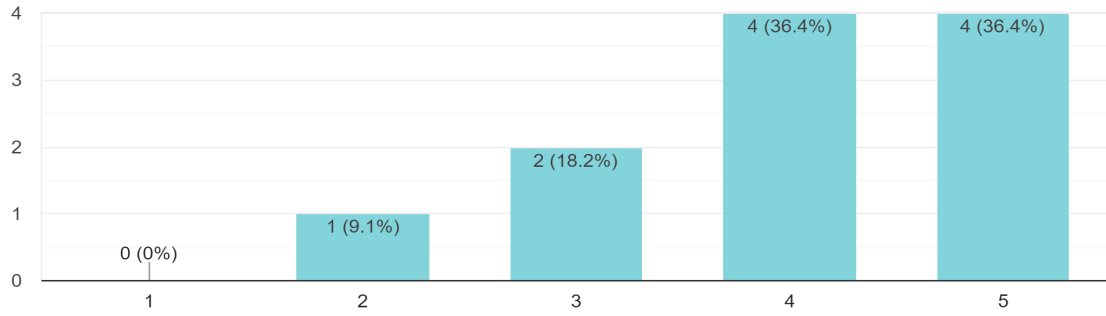


Chart 7

How difficult did you find the fight with the Embermane to be?

11 responses

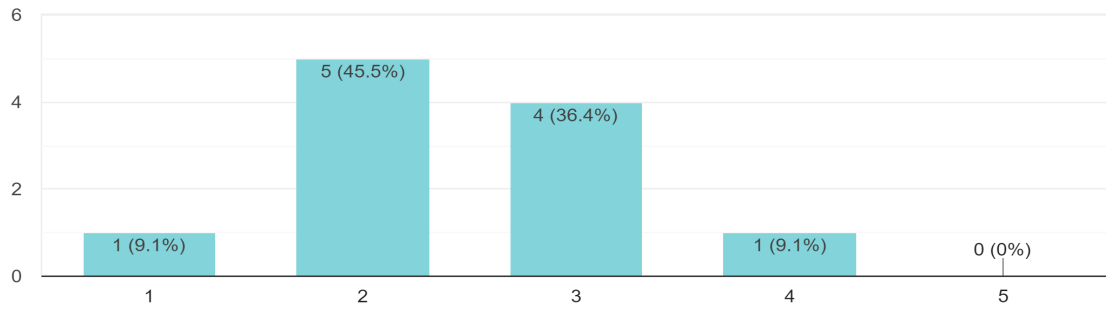


Chart 8

Did you enjoy fighting the Boreus?

11 responses

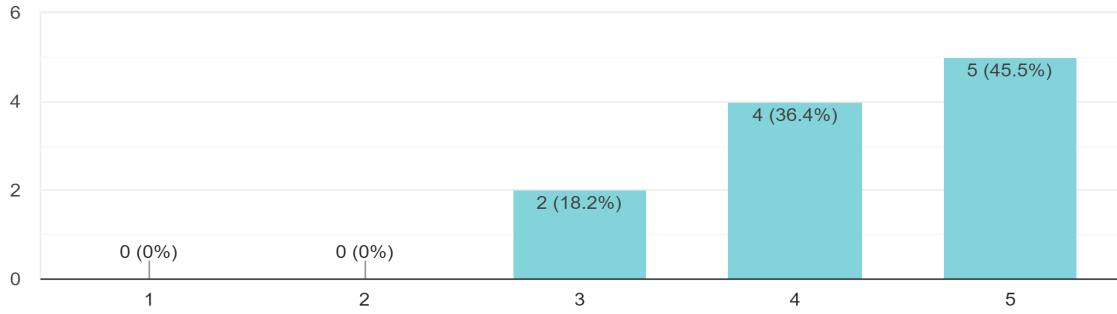


Chart 9

How difficult did you find the fight with the Boreusto be?

11 responses

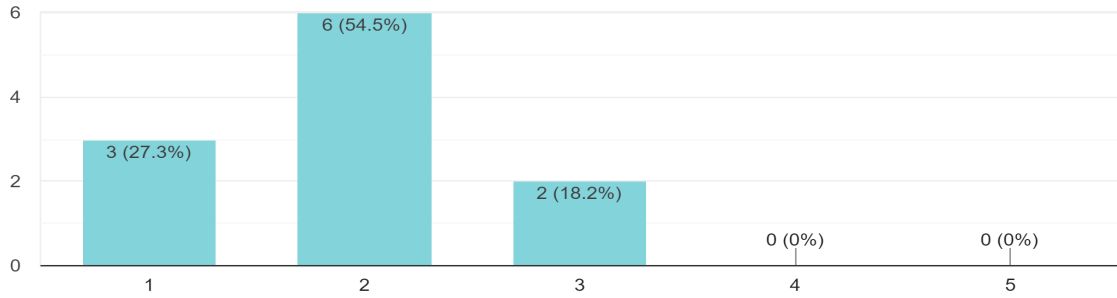


Chart 10

Would you recommend this game to others?
11 responses

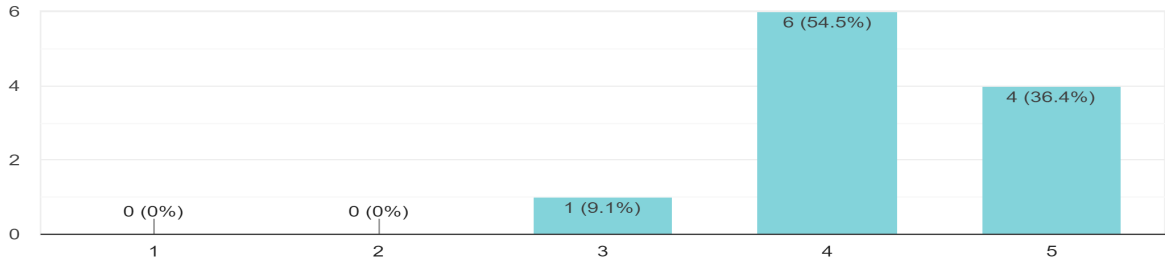


Chart 11

Would you continue to play this game?
11 responses

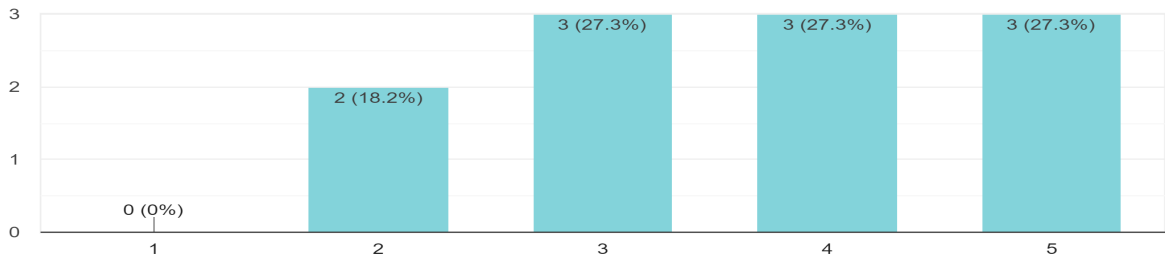
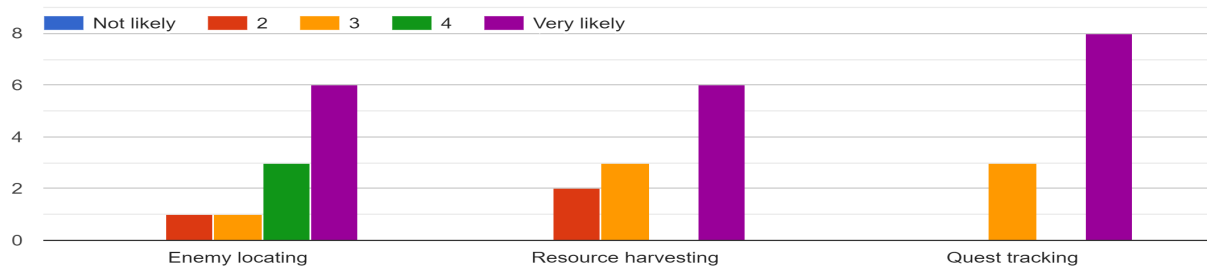


Chart 12

If a mini map was added, in what degree it will help to boost your gaming experience?



References

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