

Toxicity in gaming: unveiling the 'Closed Club' and revolutionising cooperative play

A frightening reality hides behind the surface of the enormous digital universe of gaming — toxicity. We hear it a lot, but what does it imply in the context of gaming? And why? In this exploration, we dive deep into the heart of the matter, deciphering the enigma of toxicity and understanding its roots in the gaming world.

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Uncovering the various types of toxicity

In this vast digital landscape, gamers must navigate an uneven playing field that is rife with toxicity. Since 2021, reports of toxic attitudes among online gamers have increased from 64% to 72%, highlighting the broader social issues at hand. This toxic experience leads to a significant dropout rate, with over 67% of gamers admitting to leaving the gaming space due to toxicity. This isn't just a challenge; it's a daily occurrence for the world's 3.2 billion gamers, with 68% facing “physical threats, stalking, and harassment”.

Exposing the various types of toxicity

In the gaming world, toxicity can take numerous forms, ranging from verbal abuse to discriminating behaviour. We look at real-life examples to show how poison presents itself in many ways. In order to stop toxicity in gaming cultures, it is important to understand the psychological

foundations and social theories that perpetuate such behavior.

A comprehensive exploration of causes, from competitive pressures to anonymous online interactions, reveals the intricate layers of this complex issue. A multi-year study by [GameTree.me](https://www.gametreeme.com), an AI data-driven social platform, unveils a paramount need in gaming - playing with “more courteous, less toxic players”. Shifts from private servers to random player encounters contribute to a lack of accountability, fostering an environment ripe for toxicity. Notably, renowned games like League of Legends, labeled as “The most toxic game”, showcase the challenges, where Riot Games restricts in-game communication due to rampant toxicity.

Nowadays, toxicity is generally considered as behavior and actions that create negative experiences for others. Friends tend to get the benefit of the doubt, or you can talk it out if they are just having a bad day, but it's much easier to assume the worst about a stranger. While it is known that anonymity can bring out the worst in people, Riot Games discovered that only 10% of perceived toxicity is blatant trolling, but mostly misunderstanding and miscommunication.

For example, if one player does not approve of swearing but another does, the first may consider the other's behavior toxic. A player who is competitive and takes the game seriously may find the other toxic, even if they are at the same skill level. Players playing off-meta characters & builds, which some enjoy, might be viewed as trolling by others. These are just a few examples of how having the wrong people playing together and accidentally rubbing each other the wrong way with perfectly reasonable behavior can be toxic to someone else. Friends' actions, at the very least, can be given the benefit of the doubt.

Coinciding with this, GameTree's research revealed that clashes in personalities, demographics, and values are the most frequent causes of

toxicity, particularly affecting marginalised groups like women and the LGBTQ+ community.

Toxicity costs more than just hurt feelings; it risks the very fabric of gaming communities, leading to reduced participation and enjoyment. The chilling effect of toxicity discourages engagement, with two-thirds of players admitting they're likely to quit a game due to abusive behaviour. Only 18% view gaming as a community-centered activity, yet such a perspective is threatened by the prevailing toxicity that dissuades participation at events and communal gatherings.

I can confirm that according to GameTree.me research, females and gay-gamers are especially affected by toxicity. They are more likely to not speak in-game because they're afraid of being harassed, belittled, or pushed out of the server due to toxicity. *71% of female gamers* state they do not use voice chat.

Challenges in gaming infrastructure

Combating toxicity requires innovative solutions, ranging from complex chat filters to encouraging positive player behavior. However, the fragmentation of the gaming ecosystem presents challenges, with different games supporting isolated systems that impede communication between platforms. This segregation isolates gamers, preventing them from coming together and fostering social interaction.

The root causes in psychology

The source of toxicity is not in the games themselves, but in people's psychology, which presents a significant challenge for studios. Improving player matching and addressing toxicity requires a deep dive into gamers' psychology and relationships. Companies like GameTree use data and AI to understand player psychology, potentially creating a game-changer.

Technology as a driver of change

According to the data, the GameTree algorithm and technology will revolutionise gaming interactions by predicting friendships and reducing toxicity from 72% to 16%. This innovative approach paves the way for a more inclusive and courteous gaming ecosystem as we navigate the future of gaming.

Taking a step into the future

Let us carry the torch of understanding and acceptance as we embark on the future of gaming. Recognising that gamers are not inherently toxic, it is our responsibility to assist them in finding like-minded companions. We can reshape the gaming industry by using new data, approaches, and technological solutions to reinvent what it means to be a gamer.

Together, let's take the game on in the direction of a better gaming future.

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