Gaming Communities

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In this thesis, the author shares how different types of games have different kinds of communities with the aim of showing gamers and non-gamers alike how gaming communities can affect a person's life. The commissioning company of this thesis is LateGame, an Esports café and bar located in Tampere, Finland. The research question for this thesis is: ''How do the communities of games affect the players?''

Gaming communities are made up of gamers, stakeholders, developers, teams, tournaments, and the brands of certain games. (SGJ, 2021). First, this thesis goes into the meaning of an Esports community. Then, it examines how the communities can help and/or hurt the gamers. Next, it looks at how the communities are good but also in what ways they need to change, as well as showing the difference between genders within these communities. Furthermore, this thesis includes interviews with real life gamers as well as the owner LateGame.

After the conducting of this thesis, the author found a few key elements missing from gaming communities: administrators who communicate and listen, gamers who are less toxic and more accepting of newbies, and an efficient way to stop cheating.

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1   Introduction

In this thesis the author will explain what and how a gaming community is to fully understand how the communities affect the players. The research question being answered throughout this thesis is, 'How do the communities of games affect the players?' The author has chosen this topic because they have worked closely with a few gaming companies and will hopefully continue in the future. There is collaboration between the author and a company named, LateGame, located in Tampere, Finland, the commissioning company for this thesis. The author will go into more detail on what kind of company LateGame is later in this thesis.

What is a gaming community? Most people refer to a gaming community as an online community that centres around interaction within a game. (Standford.edu, 2019). But that is not where it ends. Gaming communities are filled with people from every level of the industry, from the gamers to the developers to the brands. And then there are the ways the communities interact, from text chat to voice chat to forums. These are places made by the people within the industry, at any level, for everyone to come and discuss. They can talk during their games to have better communication and strategy, they can rave over the newest games and why they are good or bad, and they can give their ideas on how to improve games. (Roy, 2021)

Gaming is a big part of a lot of people's lives. But where do these people meet and get to chat? Not all games have voice chat, which is one of the easiest ways to communicate. Most gamers prefer to chat over Discord, or any other Voice over Internet Protocol tools, with their friends and only use the voice chat in game when absolutely needed. And then outside of the game itself, gamers usually meet on Reddit or Discord. Reddit, in comparison, is a discussion forum and has hundreds of threads that are all about gaming and different games. So, it is easy to share one's gaming experience or even recommend games to others. While Discord is mostly used as a place to chat with friends during a match or game. (ParentZone, 2022)

The main reason for gaming communities is to help the whole gaming experience become more exciting. When playing online games, one does not need to have one's physical friends next to them, because the gaming community is there to talk to and play with. The author will share some real-life stories to show how the gaming communities can help anyone and everyone. And, as the video game culture grows, so do the communities. This is on one hand a good thing and a bad thing on the other. The author will go into further detail throughout this thesis. The main gaming communities featured in this thesis are the PC or computer and the 'real life' communities. PC or computer gamers refer to the people who like playing video games on a PC or computer – for example CS-GO or Dota 2. While 'real life' gamers refer to the people who play live in person with their friends – for example card or board games. The author will also go into the differences between being a female and male when it comes to being in one of these communities. So let us dive in and see what a gaming community actually is.

2 Theory

2.1 History of Gaming

While interviewing Anna, the owner of LateGame, she explained that gaming has been directed towards males since the start of gaming in 1972 when home consoles were becoming a common thing. The games that sold the most were the shooting games and more violent games. Of course, there were also some games, which were seemingly, made directed towards females with dogs and cooking, but the focus has been the males. The games targeted towards females with dogs and cooking can be games, for example, Nintendogs or Cooking Mama. Nintendogs, is a game where one can raise, train, and play with their own virtual dogs. And Cooking Mama is a game where one can cook different kinds of recipes while facing challenges like flipping a steak or changing the heat at the right time. Today, Anna states, there are more females in the realm of esports. This is not because the females now have tons more games to play, but because more females are starting to play first person shooter games like Counter-strike and Valorant as well as playing games like League of Legends and Dota 2. From the experience of Anna, the toxicity toward the females is still remarkably high. (Anna, 2022)

Toxicity refers, online, to the act of being rude, judgmental, mean, and/or aggressive to other people, either in chat or voice-chat. It is easier for most people to be impolite to others when not being face-to-face. This is one reason online gamers receive more toxic abuse while playing. Most gamers have heard comments while playing, that they would never believe someone could say in real life. And others may notice their own toxicity levels increase when with a certain group of friends or players. (The Decision Lab, 2022)

Picture 1 The Rise of Gaming Revenue (Wallach, 2020)
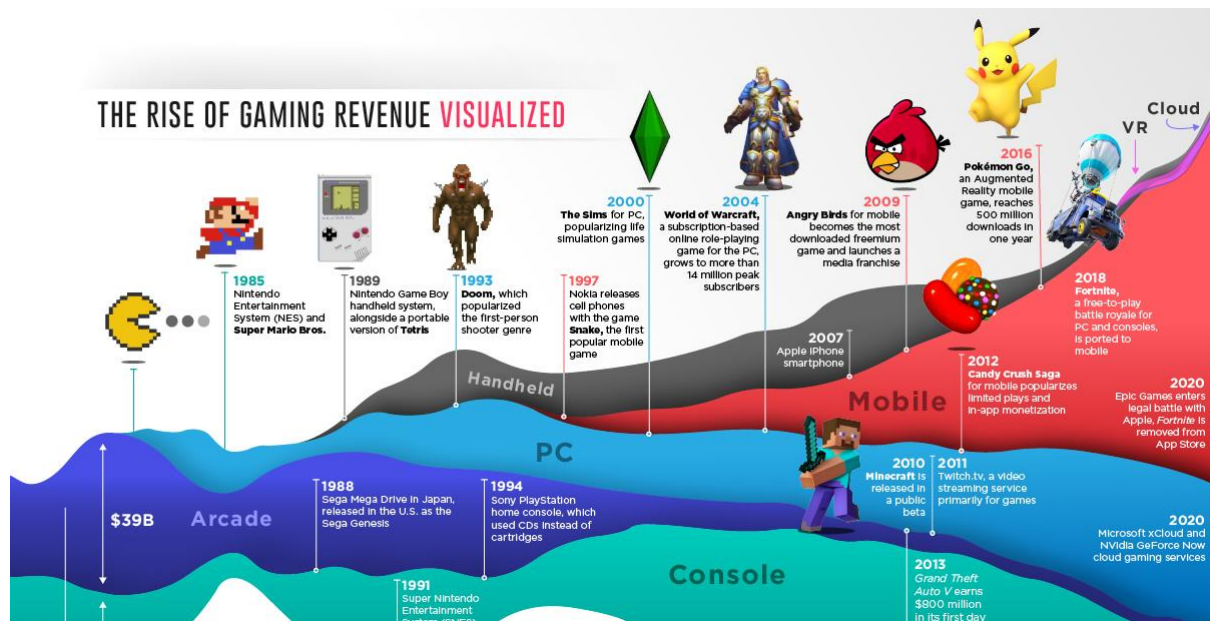
William Collis, the author of *The Book of Esports,* also had some insights in this area. He explained that esports started in a bar, which had a pinball machine. Not in someone's basement where some random kids were playing video games. The rise of esports happen because of four factors. He describes them as, SCAR: skill, community, accessibility, and reward. The games that were accessible back then are the ones that we still hear about the most today, for example Pong. A lot of people think Pong was the first video game, but in fact it was not, it was just the first most accessible game. Then, almost overnight esports and playing video games exploded. Nintendo came to the world and gave us a lot of the games still being played today like *Mario Kart* and *Super Mario Bros*. Next, games like World of Warcraft came out, which led to PC gaming picking up steam. Many gamers had to choose between staying with consoles or moving on to the computer. Today, people still do not have an easy time choosing Xbox, PlayStation, or PC. These are the most popular options and there are many arguments about which is the best. The problem to choose a certain device is confounded with the fact that not every device has access to the same games. (Collins, 2020)

The history of gaming starts in 1958, when a nuclear scientist created the game *Tennis for Two*. What he did not notice or realize at the time was that this would create one of the biggest butterfly effects in history. This butterfly effect was very noticed during the pandemic, when online gaming acted like a lifeline for millions, 63 years later. The pandemic has created a boom in the gaming industry, both Sony and Microsoft have recorded record revenue highs in 2020. So, why did gaming become such a lifeline during the pandemic? This is due to the fact that people tried to either entertain themselves or to stay connected to their social lives while being stuck inside. Gaming is usually depicted as isolating and anything but social. But as we now know, thanks to the pandemic, gaming is actually the complete opposite. And as we move towards the future, we must remember that the players drive the industry. If there are no gamers, no games will be played or bought. But in recent years the cost of gaming has gone way up. (Scwarczek, 2021). This price explosion is mainly driven by the price evolution of graphic cards over the past years. Their prices in 2021 were rising between seven and twenty-five percent per card. As a result, many PC gamers switched toward consoles again, since for a fourth of the price of a graphics card, one could have a brand-new console. (Kain, 2021). Others left the industry all together. Not all people can put half their savings into a hobby. During the pandemic people needed something to take their mind off of the fact they were stuck inside, so they were ready to pay. This led to the rise of prices, but we need to realize this will not last. (Scwarczek, 2021).

Esports is the way of saying electronic sports, where people can compete in video game tournaments. The professional players have become like celebrities within the esports world, due to Twitch and YouTube; two streaming sites that help the players reach more people. Esports, how we see it today, is still fairly new. But of course, there have been competitive video game events since the start of video games. The first televised esports event happened in 2006. They played Halo 2, and it was shown on the USA Network. But the big boom of streaming esports happened in 2011 with the introduction of [Twitch*](). (SIUE Esports, 2022).

Over the years, Esports has evolved from an exotic preoccupation of a small segment into a generally accepted mainstream sport. Some high schools, in the US, are accepting esports as an official sport or extra-curricular. These programs are especially helping the at-risk students find their purpose at school and have an activity for outside of school. This action

has led to an increase of 10% in attendance and a rise of 1.7 in GPA. These clubs and sports teams are rapidly growing and impacting the students' lives. (Generation Esports, 2022, Case Study). There are many students who are already making money from streaming their game play. And colleges are taking note. Nearly 200 colleges in the United States are offering Esports scholarships to high schoolers. One high school in Gretna, Nebraska even held a meeting with the parents of the high school to explain that Esports and gaming can lead somewhere, and they should allow their children to follow this path. Since most of these parents grew up in a time where video gaming led nowhere. High schools consider Esports a 'real' sport now and categorize it with sports like football and baseball. The teams meet after school and have regular practices like any other sport. (Flannery, 2021)

2.2   Gaming Communities Overview

Over the last few years esports has been booming. With Esports now gaining more and more attention it is said to be the fastest-growing sport in the world. More and more money is being put into esports and the viewership keeps rising**. Many big companies and media platforms are trying to profit on the still new idea. (Cabsat, 2022).

Picture 2 Twitch vs YouTube Gaming (**Iqbal, 2022)

Twitch vs YouTube Gaming: average concurrents
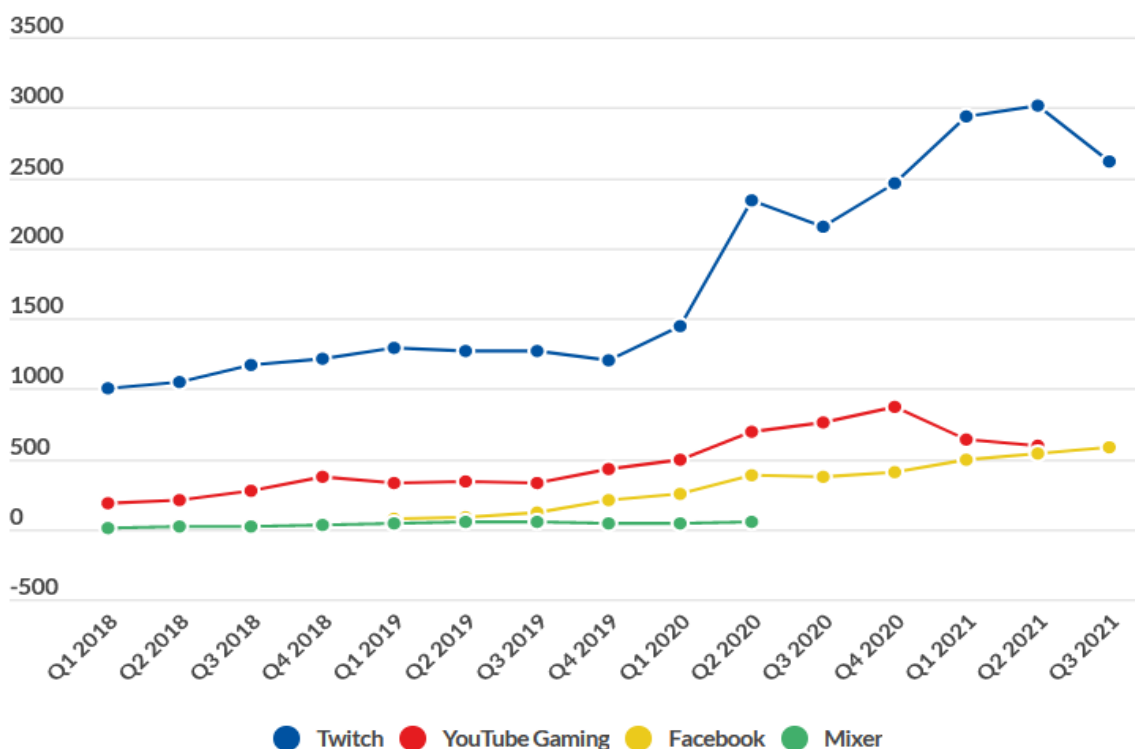
Take Overwatch for example. Their profits exploded and it was not due to their gameplay, it was because of their revenue stream. They changed the revenue gained by their game by instead of asking for subscriptions and microtransactions, they focused on driving sales of the game and sport. Instead of the gamer paying monthly to play, they pay a bigger fee and then get to play forever. Today there are games using both methods, and even if one is preferred over the other, if a company has a good enough game people will keep paying. (Collins, 2021)

Gaming communities can be put into various different categories, for example, online communities and real-life communities. As for the real-life communities, there are six main parts to most Esports communities. The main parts are the players, the teams, tournaments, broadcasts, venues, and the fans. The players are the biggest part of this community as they are the people with the skills to be at this kind of professional level. They also create teams, which is the next part. The teams are formed like any other sports, evenly skilled and with a suitable number of players for the game being played. The teams in turn need tournaments to compete and see who the best is. The tournaments are a good place to get all the players together and have competitive matches. Not everyone can always attend the venues, so most tournaments are streamed on either Twitch or YouTube. This creates an opportunity for all fans around the world to have a chance and see the competition. (Wride, 2019).

Not only are the events live streamed, but there are also individuals who stream on Twitch, YouTube, and Facebook Gaming daily. But even these 'celebrities' get hit by the toxicity of the online world. And most of these gamers even consider the toxic behaviors to be a 'normal' thing in gaming. Not only does online toxicity effect the player during the game, but the effects can also lead into their everyday life. In a study done in 2019, it was proven that one in ten adults who play online video games experience depression or suicidal thoughts. And with the newer and younger players joining the communities and hearing all the toxicity, they might think it is funny and/or cool and adopt the trait and keep the toxicity going. As well as these young players maybe not even being able to realize they are being bullied, while still gaining emotional/physical distress and depressive thoughts. (Wee & Tan, 2021).

In an interview with a 22-year-old male, he explained how some of the best communities are the 'real-life' communities, since the face-to-face participation can take away most of the toxicity.

2.3 Stakeholders

There are many different Stakeholders within the gaming industry. As seen below in the stakeholder's map from (Scholz, 2020) the map surrounds the players. All the stakeholder's need the other stakeholders to succeed. Beyond the stakeholder's mentioned in the map, there are for example, media, sponsors/investors, and providers. Many organizations within the esports industry follow a business narrative (Scholz), even with a lack of governmental regulation and not having the legal ability to have non-profit strategies. But not all are following this business narrative. The author will now go into detail on the top stakeholders of gaming communities.

Picture 3 Stakeholders (Scholz, 2020)
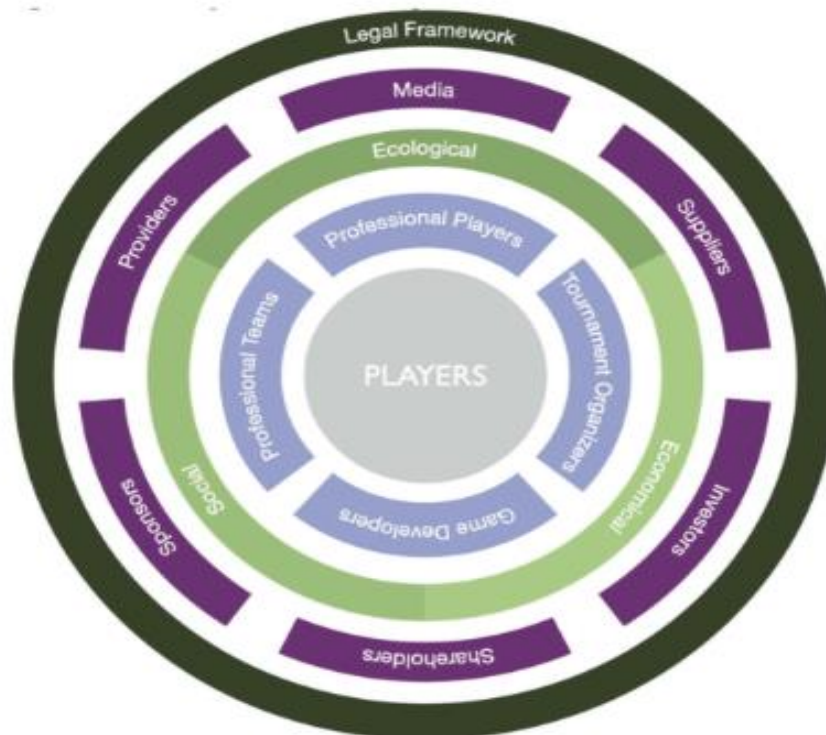
Gamers are the people who are players of the games in question. A 'gamer' can be a person who plays on a PC, console, or tabletop games. The gamers are exposed to the contents within the games and play/compete either individually or as a part of a team. The gamer is one of the most important stakeholders, since this is the customer and main audience for games. The gamers buy or download games and share their opinions about that game. If they say it is an amazing game, it is more likely that their friends or others reading their reviews will also purchase the game. (IGI Global, 2022)

2.3.1 Publishers/Developers

These stakeholders are at a very high importance level, since they are in charge of what the next game looks like and when it will be released. These stakeholders have the most riding on the game. They are the ones who have put the most work and money into the project to make a new and interesting experience for all gamers. They are also the people who own the intellectual properties behind the games. (IGI Global, 2022)

2.3.2 Tournaments

The tournaments are events where the gamers and teams can play competitively or casually against each other, show the world their skills, and find out who is the best. The tournaments have a high importance level, since they are what make gaming feel like a real sport. (IGI Global, 2022)

2.3.3 Teams

The teams consist of a group of players who compete together against other groups in a specific game. These teams compete on a professional level as well as a casual level depending on the tournament. Because gaming would not seize to exist if there were no teams, they are only at a medium importance level as stakeholders. Teams are mostly there as an entertainment value for the viewers. (IGI Global, 2022)

2.3.4 Brands/Sponsors

The brands and sponsor stakeholders refer to the organizations either that the players mention while playing or the teams have on their jerseys. This is a way to have the gamers or teams get a bit of money in exchange for the gamer or team to mention or have their logo on while streaming or playing. The sponsors and brands have a medium level of importance, since they do help financially, but are not completely needed. (IGI Global, 2022)

2.3.5 Platforms

Platforms refer to streaming platforms and buying platforms. Streaming platforms are organizations who show tournaments or games live, enable the audience to interact, and allow the players to make their own accounts to broadcast their gaming. The streaming platforms are at a very high importance level, since they are where most people have started hearing about gaming and get to watch or 'play' with their favorite players. Then there are the buying platforms where the gamers have access to all the newest games and can easily download them. The buying platforms are at a medium importance level, since they do add convenience, but gaming would continue without it. (IGI Global, 2022)

2.4 Pros of Gaming Communities

'Online gaming communities can provide companionship and social stimulation.' (Hawreliak, Langille, & Daviau 2022).

Online gaming has many social and psychological benefits. People who enjoy playing multiplayer games have been noticed to have an easier time identifying their social identity, have an increased self-esteem, and, in some cases, feel less lonely. These attributes occur because multiplayer games encourage the players to work together to achieve their goal. This act of working together adds a sense of closeness and community. (Hawreliak, Langille, & Daviau 2022).

The in-game chat options help players talk to new people while playing. The voice-chat or chat in general allows players to contact their friends and stay in touch. For example, if one

is playing *Animal Crossing,* a game where one can create a character and roleplay in their own town, one can go visit other players towns and interact face-to-face (in-game) or while in their own towns, they can still keep in touch over chat. And if the players do not want to have random people enter their towns, private servers can be set up, so it is only friends. (Hawreliak, Langille, & Daviau 2022).

Gaming communities have also been branching out in the last few years. They are not only for the sole purpose of gaming anymore. Some gaming communities exist to just talk or interact online. Some communities have online and real-life parties, while others get together to buy virtual land. Communities are becoming a safe place to hang out with people from all around the world who share the same interests. And finding these groups online has become much easier than finding a peer group in real-life. (Shah, 2019).

In an interview with a 24-year-old male, who is a casual gamer for about 12 years, who does not think he is a part of a certain community but instead rather plays games with his friend group. He has noticed that the games featuring adventure or creativity are less toxic communities than fps (first person shooter) games. As well as believing there should not be a difference between female and male gamers, but he still sees the noticeable differences in how some gamers treat other gamers depending on their genders. He thinks that in gaming, in general, female gamers should not have to endure harassment and toxic behavior more than the male gamers and is a matter that should not be relevant anymore this day in age.

2.5   Cons of Gaming Communities

At their best, esports communities can be vibrant. But, at their worst they can be opinionated, aggressive, and hostile. Of course, there is a code of conduct but almost every esports community has trash talk, especially towards women. Now that esports is becoming more mainstream this kind of toxic behavior is not tolerated as much. (Knorr, 2018).

Yes, it is nice to be able to play video games for a living, but there are downsides. First, being health concerns. Many professional players sit in front of their screens for hours just sitting all day. Professional gamers must play almost every day since hand-eye coordination can start to fade after just a few days. Sitting in front of your computer all day can lead to several

illnesses. One example being acquiring carpal tunnel syndrome. This is when you do many repetitive movements and gain wrist injuries that can end their careers. Another common illness is heart disease. Even with the same diet as someone who moves around all day, they just do not get out of their chairs enough to maintain a healthy heart. (Parenteau, 2019).

Also, there is not usually a plan B for professional gamers. Most players start young and might even drop out of school. There was one case where a 15-year-old dropped out of high school to play Call of Duty. This boy sent out a tweet stating, '*No way I did it, I convinced my parents to let me drop out!! School will never determine your success'.* Luckily the fact that the tweet got around 500 likes did not mean everyone accepted this as a good thing. And even a famous Call of Duty player, at the time, responded telling him to rethink the idea and shared the idea of online school to be able to have an open schedule but still get a diploma. One can always pursue a job in the field of esports, but most do not plan that far ahead. Some do get the chance to become a coach or manager, but there can only be one per team. Most players retire around the age of twenty-five which is not very old. The 15-year-old who convinced his parents to let him drop out of school, did not have a clear path for his future and thought school would not help him in life. Fortunately, most of the comments were saying he was silly, and he should re-think this idea. So, not all young gamers think the same way. But there have been many cases and many more will happen. Due to this there are some pro-gamers who have made videos of their experience becoming a pro while attending school. It does work! (Parenteau, 2019).

Schools that accept Esports as an official sport or extracurricular have to deal with the possibility of addiction to gaming, hurt wrists, neck injuries, funding, and gender inequality to name a few. When gaming for long periods of time, one can either get addicted to the game or suffer from many different injuries, for example wrist, eyes, and neck. Since gaming is usually done sitting down for long durations of time, it can have a strain on the few body parts that either are being used constantly or the ones that need to be in a certain position the whole game. And since gaming is not cheap, and there are many forms of gaming, funding is a big problem. Not every school has a budget to buy new PCs and consoles for more than ten students. (Flannery, 2021)

Next, the pressure of branding. With many professional players having millions of followers or subscribers it can be hard to filter out the bad people. Death threats and mean comments become more common when being 'famous'. Then, the toxic people within the industry. Esports has gained the attention of some of the best and some of the worst people on the planet. What people on the outside of these communities see can be far from the truth. And toxic people are lurking within these communities and the industry, just waiting for the next vulnerable player to appear. (Parenteau, 2019).

Ten individuals in the UK got asked about their experience in esports and the connection to their mental health while involved in esports. The author chose three that stuck out and went more into detail on their stories. The fist individual, Ashley, suffers from BPD and Schizophrenic Tendencies. She went on to explain how esports has both helped and harmed her over the years. Ashley was bullied both in real life on in online communities, to the point of trying to take her own life. She currently lives in a gaming house and enjoys having other gamers around who understand how it feel to be in an online community as well as having a common goal. They help her through the rough patches. Another individual who was interviewed is named George. He suffers from OCD and Asperger's. The gaming world is not perfect and esports is not always a given. The games change and the communities shift. But George found some positive things about being in the communities. It helped him socialize and make some new friends. He stated that there are a lot of good things about esports, but there are just as many, if not more, negative things about it. The next individual is named Josh. He has struggled with both depression and anxiety for most of his life. When Josh was young, he fell into gaming mostly as a coping mechanism for his panic attacks and loss of self-esteem. He goes into detail on how he found a community within Blizzard. He found lots of other gamers who also needed an escape. Josh spent as many hours as possible away from school playing, learning how to beat levels faster, and figuring out how to force items to drop. He felt better online, even if he was messing up his sleep schedule and was almost always online. He would rather be part of his online community and be in their presence than be with his real-life friends. By being able to throw himself into a game, he can escape his day-to-day problems. In his opinion, the competition might not be the best for anyone's mental health, but the challenges and the feeling when overcoming them is extremely rewarding. (Sacco, 2017).

In an interview with a 22-year-old female she explained how in the game GTA (Grand Theft Auto) the online servers are barely even playable, since once the game loads someone is already there to kill the character. There is, however, an option to not play online, and, from her perspective, this is how most people play, so that they can actually enjoy the game.

2.6   Different Gaming Communities

There are many different kinds of gaming communities. For example, PC gaming, console gaming, mobile gaming, real-life gaming, and Esports in general. The author will go into depth on each other these communities, to help gain a better insight into the gaming world. Below is a picture depicting the different percentages of the distribution of the players by platform.

Picture 4 Distribution of Players (Kevuru Games, 2021)
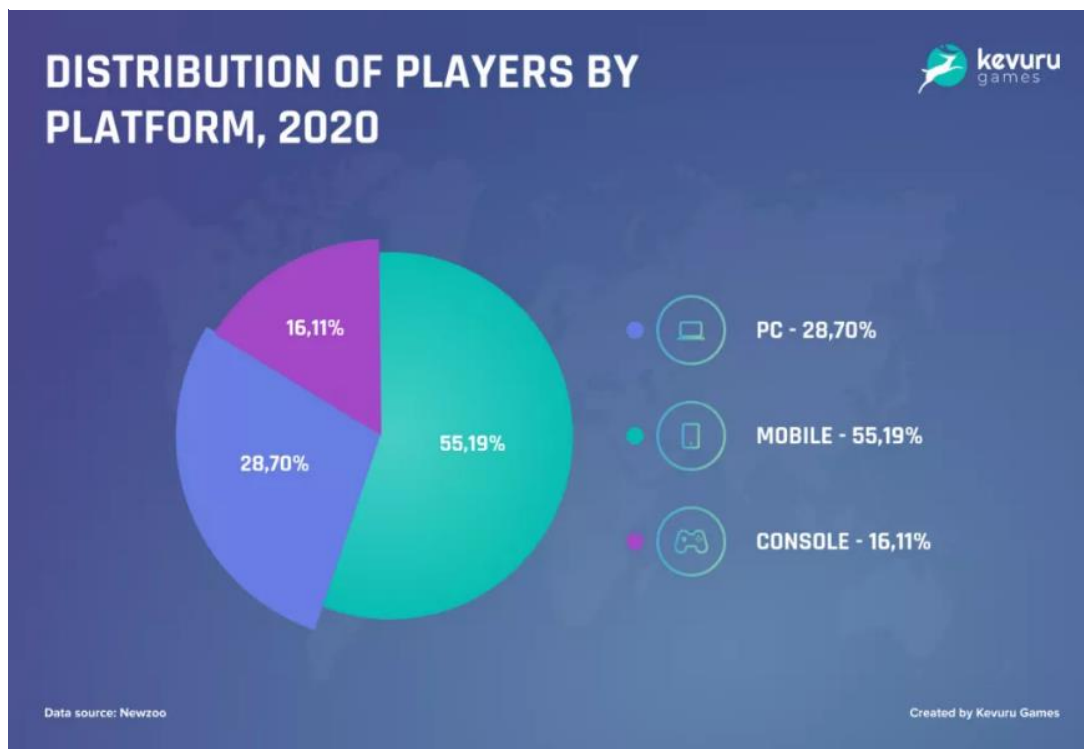
2.6.1   PC Gaming

PC gaming refers to playing video games on a Personal Computer. PC games, also known as computer games, can be played with and without internet depending on the particular game. Instead of using a controller the player uses their keyboard and mouse, maybe even a joystick. When owning a PC, one does not just go buy a new one when the newest item is

released, instead one upgrades their PC one component at a time. Yes, there are cases where one might just want a whole upgrade and does the whole computer at once. But the point is this is not necessary on PC. This is also the thrill for some gamers, since they get to build their own PC the way they like. Some PC games are strictly on PC and one can only play with their friends who own a PC, but there are games that let PC gamers play with console gamers. (Moore, 2019)

There are many games on PC to choose from, which has created many different communities. So, there are quite a few questions to ask oneself before jumping in headfirst. Competitive or just for fun? Single-player or multi-player? Cheat codes? Loyalty? And so many more. One question answered one way will send the player into a completely different direction. Community wise, there are three paths to take gaming subreddits, gaming websites, and gaming forums. Gaming subreddits are public discussion boards for anyone to write their opinion on. A subreddit is a thread on Reddit that has its own focus and topic. There are many different subreddits for PC gaming alone. Some help with building PC's, others try to decide the best game out there, and the others might discuss the difference in keyboards and mouses. In contrast, gaming websites, are news outlets that bring the gamers the latest news about their games and the gaming industry. There are many different reporters who bring the fastest or most relevant news. Gaming websites can be referred to as a media outlets for the gaming industry itself. Then there are the gaming forums. These are online message boards where gamers can openly discuss about games. They are often found on gaming websites or a game developers blog. This is a place to share tips, discuss new releases, and rave about video games. (Chivers, 2021)

In an interview with Anna, the owner of LateGame, we discussed her PC gaming and she said, *'All of my social life is practically online, I cannot think of a friend who I have not met through gaming.'* Her whole group of friends plays games or is connected to the people she plays with. She also plays with her husband of 18 years.

2.6.2   Console Gaming

A console can refer to a number of many different items for example a computer console, system console, a game console, or video game console. The author will go into depth on

gaming consoles and video game consoles. These are gaming boxes or devices that are usually connected to one's television. The most popular consoles used today are *Xbox, PlayStation,* and *Nintendo Switch*. The first game console came out in 1972 named *Magnavox Odyssey.* (Hope, 2022)

Video game consoles are normally used with a controller and television. Today, the controllers are starting to combine the aspects of controllers and hand-held gaming. For example, the *Nintendo Switch.* Its concept is having a console that one can take anywhere. One option is to use it normally with the controllers on the television, the second option is to take the controller, with a screen, out of the dock and play the games in the hand-held option. Consoles are a type of personal computer that is specifically used for video games. (Babu, 2021)

The biggest difference between having a personal computer vs. a console is a difference in game experience. As the PC can double as a gaming device and a normal computer, the console is exclusively made for gaming, which is why many people say the consoles have a better gaming experience. As of 2009, the consoles started to have the same components as a PC, making consoles just as strong internally as PC's. (TechnologyUK, 2021)

2.6.3   Mobile Gaming

Mobile phones are considered to be 'pocket PCs'. Mobile gaming is the act of gaming on one's mobile device. Mobile games range from many different styles and graphics, from *Snake* on older Nokia phones to sophisticated 3D realistic games. Mobile gaming has become a community in itself over the past years when mobile phones got major upgrades. One can even play multi-player games on smartphones now. However, since mobile phones do not have the same system resources, the graphics and features are nowhere close to the console or PC. Moreover, instead of using a controller, one uses the touch screen to control where the character goes or what it does. (Techophedia, 2019)

Mobile games go through a 'click-through rate' (CTR) test before being released. A CTR test quantifies how many gamers would click on the game and thus its chances to succeed. This

test helps developers know if they should move forward with their idea or if it is not worth their time. (Socialpeta, 2021)

Worldwide there were 3.9 billion smartphone users in 2021. Leading to the boom in mobile gaming, and, alone in 2021, there were 82.98 billion downloads of different mobile games. Most people, when playing on mobile phones, tend to play puzzle, strategy, or action games. The boom in mobile gaming is not only due to the fact that it makes gaming more accessible wherever one is, but also since the technology in phones today has reached a level where games like PubG and Raid Shadow Legends work smoothly on them. Mobile games almost look as smooth as PC or console games, and many gamers prefer mobile gaming due to the accessibility. (Knezovic, 2022)

2.6.4 Real-Life Gaming

Real-life gaming can refer to many different kinds of games. For example, board games, card games, tabletop games, or roleplaying games. The term 'Real-Life' refers to a game played or done outside of the virtual realm.

2.6.4.1 Board Games

Board games are games played on a specially designed board. Most of these games revolve around strategy and puzzles and usually have more than two moving pieces. Moreover, they often use dice or cards to help the game continue. There is a set of rules made by the creator of the board game. There is usually a common goal for all the players and only the one player (or team) reaching it first can win. Most popular goals are to collect a certain number of points, solve the puzzle/mystery, or to get to the last space. Some board games have very simple rules and others have very complex rules, making it easy to find a game perfect for the occasion. And finally, the time needed to master a game can differ greatly from game to game. (Defenitions, 2022)

2.6.4.2   Card Games

Card games are games played with specific cards depending on the game. There are often many different rules per game, since many people grew up playing their families rules instead of the given ones. As stated above there are games that use cards, but are not considered card games. For a game to be considered a card game the primary game play needs to revolve around the cards. (Defenitions, 2022)

2.6.4.3   Tabletop Games

Tabletop games are games one can play on a table. This is a broad term that can be used for card games and board games as well. But most people who choose to play tabletop games instead of strictly card or board games are people who usually specialize in a few games of a certain genre. For example, playing *Dungeons and Dra*gons along with *Catan.* Both strategic and long games, but very different set of rules and way of playing. This is also a category people find themselves in if they just have not found their favorite game yet. When one does not like a game or has not had the opportunity to play enough other games, this category of tabletop games allows the player to not have to decide yet. For example, if one does not know what college to go to, they might take a gap year. (Howard, 2020)

2.6.4.4   Roleplaying Games

Roleplaying games are games in which the players become the character they are playing. Some people go as far as to dress up as their character and start making a new accent just for that character. In roleplaying games there can be a board which the game is played around but the game can also take play outside and have 'real-life' challenges. For example, having the players find a certain piece important to the game either in the room being played in or even in the park. These games might also have conventions where people can come dressed up as their favorite characters. (RPGBOT, 2021)

2.6.5   Esports in General

Esports has many communities, but the author will focus on the community around tournaments. What is the Esports tournaments culture? Since tournament players are well known by most gamers and many look up to these professionals, it is believed to be the base of the culture in all online gaming. Tournaments are not only for the players to see if they are the best in the specific game being played. There are also the fans, who come from many different places just to see their favorite player in person. Then there are the media companies and sponsors. The media companies help provide the equipment and the sponsors help fund the event. Both of these contributors also get something in return, in this case visibility and a chance to be a preferred brand with the viewers and players. The culture at a particular event changes depending on the game being played. For example, the atmosphere in a League of Legends tournament is greatly different from that of Counter-Strike or Valorant. Moreover, independent of the fact that players are usually under 30-years-old the audience has a variety of different ages and genders. (Efrem, 2022)

2.7   Difference of Gender within Gaming Communities

In an interview with a 22-year-old female, she shared that she has seen differences between males and females in everyday life, but in gaming she saw males being more sexist toward female players.

Though Esports do not require any physical requirements other than having fast reflexes. But it is still very male sided. Nevertheless, the females are up and coming. There are now female only tournaments and teams. So, we are getting closer to closing the gender gap, just not the pay gap. The payouts for the professional female players are much less than the males. (Knorr, 2018). The author will go into more detail below.

In an interview with another 24-year-old male, he said, *'In my opinion female gamers are less toxic, but otherwise all gamers, no matter the gender, are not so different.'*

In a different interview with a 22-year-old male, he said, *'Women have fewer toxic traits because gamers are kind of homogenic which leads to the gamers outside of the homogenic group to be treated with toxicity.'*

Even though gaming has become part of the mainstream entertainment, and female gamers are just as active as males, the female player group is still marginalized in the culture of gaming due to their gender. In a study done in 2022, it was found that most females do not go out to play, they stay at home and play with people they already have relationships with, meaning they usually do not go to public places to play. Since many females do not show their gaming with streaming, their role in the industry is very hidden. This misleads the general public into thinking gaming is mainly male dominated. Many females make this choice to avoid the harassment that comes with gaming. About three in four female gamers have experienced gender effecting their gameplay. Many females choose to ignore the harassment and define their gaming by their own terms. This allows female gamers to take control of their experience and create their own gaming culture. (Friman, 2022)

As stated in the paragraph above, most female gamers prefer to play with familiar people and at home. But this is not the case at LateGame, the commissioning company for this thesis. LateGame has created a fun and inviting space where everyone feels welcome. And since LateGame does not only have PCs but also consoles and tabletop games, they appeal to every kind of gamer no matter the gender.

Today gaming does not necessarily mean that you are getting in the way of real-life or missing out. Today, people have the chance to make a profession in Esports. But for females it is much harder for several reasons. First, there is a lack of role models. There are many female streamers, but not many professional female gamers. Without their presence it is hard for younger female gamers to look up to the males and see themselves there. Second, the gender discrimination. Males rarely see the female gamers as equals and do not think they play as well as the males. And finally, the pay gap. Yes, this is a problem in almost every industry, but female gamers are getting paid millions less than their fellow male gamers. Only three of the top one-hundred top paid streamers on Twitch are females. (IntentaDigital, 2021). The problem lies within the gender gap and the gender discriminations. The first problem that arises is in the tournaments. When looking at the pay gap for females and

males, only one in five hundred top champions, on PC, that get earnings are female. And in the top ten earnings of tournaments in 2019 there is usually about a three-million-dollar difference between the males and females. The next problem is within the streaming field. When looking at the top two male streamers, both have more followers than all the top twenty-five female streamers combined. Then moving on to the bullying and harassment. About 57% of all female gamers are or were harassed when revealing their gender while playing. The top four insults include intelligence level, profane language, insults about gaming skills, and finally sexist comments. Most females have now used these top three methods to avoid being harassed or bullied while gaming: Blocking or muting toxic players, avoiding all verbal communication with other players, and avoiding any visual communication. So, what is it like to be a female gamer today? About 26% of females are accused of hacking or cheating whenever they play well. About 54% of all female gamers get asked for sexual favors while playing. Also, about 69% of females have considered stopping gaming all together. But luckily for the females the community is evolving and becoming more accepting. Not to say the pay gap will close anytime soon, but the toxicity is going down slowly but surely. (Casino.org, 2019).

The next interview was with a 22-year-old female, who plays mostly with her friends in 'real-life' but does sometimes play online. She explained how the only real difference she has noticed between female gamers and male gamers, is that male gamers are more committed to the games.

2.8   How to Change Gaming Communities

In an interview with a male gamer he stated, *'Gaming communities would be less toxic if people were to think of the game as a game and not a job, be easy going, and not as try hard.'* He enjoys gaming, but not the fact of needing to win every single match. He would prefer having a more relaxed experience.

Change will happen slowly, but the first steps need to be taken. One idea is to involve the community within the game. This can be done with in-game holidays. There are eight holidays a year (that almost all people celebrate), which create plenty of chances to create events. Even though some holidays are for different religions, there are some that are now

used for commercial reasons. For example, there can be a festive gathering around Christmas. The game can feature Santa hats, Christmas trees, and festive lights. Another great way to get the players together and have the players be involved is creating a Discord channel. Discord is already home to many online communities. Because it is a great way for the players to be able to communicate with the developers of a certain game. Players can give information about how they believe the game can be improved, how the community is going, and more. When this is done, the players feel valuable and heard. Furthermore, they are able to change what is wrong with their favorite game. The developers can also use the Discord platform to give insights to new expansions or quick responses to problems players are having. This kind of direct engagement lets the players feel a part of the team. (Sue, 2018).

One of the male interviewees said, *'The only thing I would change about my community is spending less time trying to change our losses into wins, and instead try the next day and maybe play a different game.'* This statement refers to players having different mindsets, some play to win and others play for fun. These different objectives can cause tension between players or teams.

A female interviewee said, *'What I would change about many gaming communities is how people treat their teammates and that people would finally start putting female players on the same line with others. Everyone should be able to play and have fun.'*

2.9   The Elements That Make a Good Gaming Community

Most games have been starring strong male characters with big guns, there have not been many female directed games. But today we are seeing the number of female gamers skyrocket, and they almost make up fifty percent of all gamers. Unfortunately, this is not true when looking for female streamers or pro-gamers. The males still dominate the 'image' of gaming. (Atzmon-Schmayer 2022).

When wanting to create a thriving gaming community, one must have a welcoming environment. Being able to answer the easy/amateur questions without making the person sound stupid for asking the question is part of the plan. Next, the community needs a

platform dedicated to them to expand and survive. This could be the game itself since many games do have voice chat in game and no need to exchange Discords. Furthermore, the people inside the community need to have the same kinds of personalities. This will allow there to be less awkward silences and less negativity. It is much easier to make friends with people who are similar in nature to oneself. Since this allows one to be open up faster and feel safe. Then, the community needs to be active and have people who care and support each other. Of course, it is normal for trash talk to happen, it happens in almost every sport. However, when the community is full of thoughtful people, it will be taken lightheartedly. And finally, the community needs admins who care. The admins are the ones in charge of the server/community. When the admins are also playing the games, they get a feel for how the people are interacting and know more about the topics being discussed. So, if one wants to start a thriving community it should have members who are willing to accept new members, admins who will listen and care, and have like-minded people. (Nguyen, 2018)

Picture 5 Elements of Good Gaming Communities
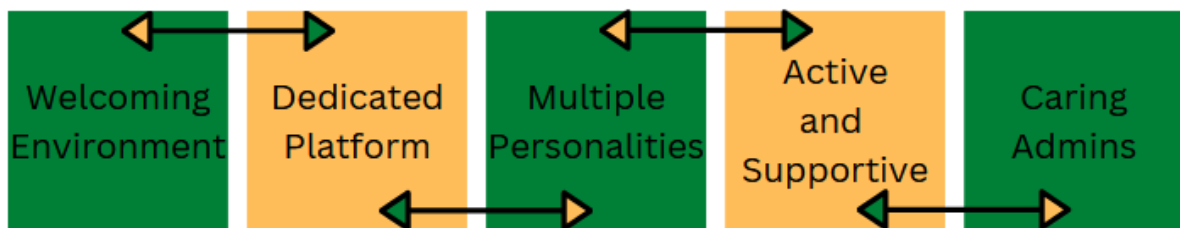
2.10 Benefits of being in a Gaming Community

Online games are a chance to change one's identity, because the physical one is removed. When starting a game, one gets a fresh start. Everybody starts equal and each players appraisal mostly depends on one's contribution while playing. (Stuart, 2013).

During the lockdowns for Covid-19, many people turned to gaming as a release and a way to connect with other people while staying inside. Many people still believe that video games are highly anti-social, but the World Health Organization, who has said gaming has many risks, came out with a campaign #PlayApartTogether. They even partnered with a few gaming companies to help encourage people to stay inside. Video games can lead to a lot of benefits, including helping with social skills. Gamers, who play multiplayer online games, also mention they have lower stress and higher self-esteem. When not going into the toxic communities, the gamer can experience a sense of compassion and community while

playing. Many gamers have stated that they have found friends online from different countries or continents, and they play together whenever possible. Aside from getting together with friends, it is also a great way to stay in touch with family that is not close by. Online multiplayer games can be enjoyed by anyone and can connect people who have known each other for years as well as bringing together new friendships and relationships. (Hawreliak, Langille, & Daviau 2022).

Two parents named Robert and Trude thought their disabled son, Mats, had a sad and lonely life. Mats was diagnosed with DMD and disorder that causes muscle degeneration which made him unable to walk and spend his days in a wheelchair. Mats was given until the age of twenty to live, therefore his parents were very concerned. Mats stayed up late into the night playing on his computer, playing World of Warcraft. He barley left his parents basement the last few years of his life. Mats lived to the age of twenty-five and then tragically passed away. Robert was giving his eulogy at the funeral when he noticed people mourning that he did not recognize and that were not part of the family. Robert was confused since he believed his son did not have any friends and was alone for most of his life. These people who attended his funeral where his online friends, those who he completed quests with and spent most of his days chatting with. Some lived close, but some came far distances just to attend. One even spoke at the funeral stating that there were people all over Europe lighting candles for Mats in his memory. The thing Robert and Trude did not realize is that their son had tons of friends all around the world. Robert stated that he was sad he and Trude have not been more interested in what their son was doing. They robbed themselves of what could have been more time to spend together. (Schaubert, 2019).

Michael 'Brolylegs' Begum was thirty-one at the time of this article being written. He suffers from a disorder called AMC that causes an infant's muscles not to grow causing deformities. Michael is a competitive Street Fighter player. The fact that his muscles did not develop does not stand in his way. He has a controller that he can use with his face and tongue. He is even a part of Team Inferno in 2019 consisting some of the best players in the world. He currently has a side-gig of teaching others how to play Street Fighter better. Since it might be hard to find help in their locations, he is now filling that void. He does not teach to make them champions, but instead to help them improve their skills and feel more confident. He teaches people one thing in general, how to find your comfort zone. Since nerves can get the

best of anyone, even a professional. He is not letting his disorder get him down, he is using his special gifts to help others who might not know where to start or how to start. (CapCom ProTour, 2019).

In 2020, there was a sad story for a lot of World of WarCraft (WOW) players who watched Byron also known as Reckful, a streamer, on Twitch. Everyone who was following him at the time was getting very concerned with his tweets. He started posting deep thoughts and weird ideas. He went as far as to call himself 'insane'. Reckful had been struggling with some mental illnesses and depression. He also suffered from Bipolar Type 2 since being a child. He was streaming for a long time, and the community he had created around himself was one of the biggest reasons he could survive his depression for as long as he did. But sadly, after some more deep tweets from him, the internet started hearing he had passed on. We now know that he did in fact commit suicide and the EMT was not able to resuscitate him. Since he was a part of the WOW community, many players paid tribute to him and were in mourning. Other streamers also made content about his passing, one in particular is a song made by a fellow streamer about how *'my friend Byron was a legend'*. The producers at WOW even added an NPC (non-player character) who looked like Reckful. So mourning gamers could have another chance to connect with Reckful. (Cooper, 2020)

In these kinds of stories, we can see how online communities influence people all around the world. It does not matter where one lives or what is going on in one's life. A great number people connect online and most of the communities are not too toxic, especially when one finds friends to play with and come online together.

2.11 How Gaming Communities Can Hurt Gamers

Not everything that happens in the online gaming world stays strictly online. Many gamers say that they feel better and gain problem-solving skills, but that is not everyone. The good experiences are shown more than the bad ones, and for good reason. But there are tons of toxic behavior in online gaming communities, which include sexual harassment, 'griefing', purposefully making one's team lose, and more. Often these actions are said to just be normal in the gaming world. This is not true. Many gamers have long-lasting effects even outside of the gaming world and after they have stopped playing. This is especially true for

those gamers who do not fall into the category of young white male. Even though there have been studies that show that female players are just as skilled as males when they have played for the same amount of hours, toxicity is predominantly aimed towards females. This forces many of them to play without their microphones, which leads to not being able to communicate during matches and not being able to play as well as they normally can. (Wired, 2020).

Of course, video games have a way of bringing people together, but not all interactions are good. There are a few main aspects that most gaming communities have. First, sore losers. These are the gamers who cannot lose without making one feel bad about beating them. Second, not everyone is a professional gamer. Many gamers do not realize that there are ranks to separate the skills set of players. Instead, they compare every player against the professionals of that certain game. Next, the entitled players. Gamers have a chance to speak their concerns to the game developers and their community, which is leading to the gamers feeling entitled to getting what they want. Finally, the toxicity within the games and communities. Children and adults alike throw insults around. The insults go from derogative comments about players skill sets as far as racial slurs, homophobic jokes, and sexist statements. Toxicity can ruin the gaming experience for many people and divides the community taking the attention from the actual game. (Nelson, 2018).

Video gaming can be a great hobby, but for some it turns into an addiction. This is not because video games are evil, it just happens that even a good thing can become bad when used too much. There are a few major negative effects video games can have. The author has chosen to discuss the three of them that have shown up the most in more depth. First, Alexithymia and emotional suppression. (L, 2020). Alexithymia refers to a problem or disturbance with handling emotions. Especially when it comes to realizing their emotions. (Chen, Xu, Jing, & Chan, 2011). The bigger problem coming from Alexithymia is not being able to stop playing video games since the brain does not know what is more important, gaming or school/work. Second, escapism and getting stuck in life. Video games can create an escape or a safe place for the gamer. But sometimes this becomes a bad thing. This can cause the gamer to not face real life problems head-on. One may see the video gaming world a way to push off deadlines and commitments, but this usually never ends well. Finally, Relationship issues. When getting addicted to anything, even video games, one often

neglects one's family and partner. If gamers are playing almost the whole day, there is not much time left to be with their family, let alone trying to go out and date someone new. (L, 2020)

After interviewing a 23-year-old female, who has been playing video games since she was six years old, has only recently gotten into the online multiplayer games. Currently she is playing League of Legends, and she would say this community is very toxic, and not only to the females. In League there isn't a voice chat, which is good if you don't want other players to start judging your gaming skills based only on your gender. It is very common that female gamers face a lot of bullying, no matter how "good" they are at the game. She said, *'Personally, I mute everyone almost every time before the game even starts, because I want to stay calm during the game and I know I am not the only one. That says a lot about the League community. And it always feels amazing when you notice that your team has a nice team spirit for once.'*

3 Methology

3.1 Qualitative Methods

The author has used qualitative research methods throughout this thesis. This means collecting data without numerical data. This is because the author conducted many interviews and had some information based on opinions and/or experience. Along with obtaining a smaller sample to have higher quality answers and asking open ended questions to have more variety and voice.

Since the author's research question is *, 'How do the communities of Games effect the players?'* qualitative research is the right choice for this thesis. The author used these interviews and sources to gain knowledge of how gaming communities work inside and out.

3.2 Data

As mentioned, the author conducted twenty anonymous interviews with gamers at LateGame Tampere. The same questions asked to all interviewees with a few extra, were also asked to Anna, the owner of LateGame Tampere. The author created these questions as

a way to get long and open-ended answers. This way there would be diverse answers and information to add to the author's existing research.

The interview questions were posed in English since most gamers know English and usually play their games in English as well. The questions were used several times over the course of completing the thesis, since there was more than one interviewee.

3.3   Commissioning Company

The commissioning company has been mentioned many times throughout this thesis. The author will now go into depth on what LateGame Tampere is. LateGame is an internet cafe with many different gaming consoles and equipment. They have PCs, PlayStations, Xboxes, and many board/card games. The upstairs of LateGame is a cafe and is very nice for gaming on couches or studying while enjoying sandwiches and cakes. The upstairs is also very inviting and colorful. Anna said, *'LateGame is safe-space for gamers all genders alike'*. The downstairs is more of a bar, one can order alcoholic beverages and there are mostly PCs in this level with the exception of some consoles and more board/card games. There is also a screen downstairs where they stream games, large and small alike. LateGame hosts many tournaments and events within the cafe/bar. Since Finland is rather small, when these events happen and the gaming community comes together, almost everyone knows each other. Even some high-ranking gamers might join and know the smaller gamers as well. There are not only gaming communities, but also other communities who might also enjoy gaming. For example, there is a group of gay gamers who come and enjoy the atmosphere. If one wants to create groups or tournaments, Anna, the owner, will most likely say yes and let anyone join or create groups and tournaments. The goal is to have many different kinds of events. This allows everyone to be involved. She is aiming to be even more diverse in the games played in the future. *'The worth of a video game does not come from how good the players are in the game'*, said Anna. She then went on to explain that there has been no sexual harassment, since this is more of a place that is inclusive and people who come through the door are a part of the community.

There is a mix between the people who come through the door. It is an even mix between people who come to play consoles, card games, and PCs. The consoles and card games are free to play. The PCs, since they are more expensive, are pay to play. There are different

options, 1 hour, 10 hours, or a certain price for the whole month. And while using any of the equipment, one can order drinks and/or food. There is a good mix between people who come to play alone and people who come in groups and play together.

LateGame works together with other gaming cafes in Tampere and Helsinki. For example, making a tournament between Tampere and Helsinki as well as having a 'bar crawl' between the cafes. The cooperation benefits all the cafes/bars, Anna quoted the owner of Hide Gaming Lounge saying, *'Instead of eating from someone else's cake, let's make the whole cake bigger.'* In this kind of business, where community is very central, it is better to work together.

4   Results

4.1   The Elements Gaming Communities Are Taking Advantage Of

Gaming communities differ from community to community, but there are certain elements that most gaming communities share or are trying to achieve.

The first element is creating a website and a branded forum. For each individual game there should be its own forum. This allows players to speak their opinions in the right place. And with regular contributions, the game can be edited to fit what the players are asking for and need. The second element is steam. Steam is a kind of app store where players can buy and download games. Steam is considered to be one of the biggest gaming communities, since most PC gamers have it. Steam can be used to sell items from different games, create profiles, customize profiles, ask questions, answer said questions, and more. The next ones are Facebook, Reddit, and Twitter. Since most gamers have at least one of these platforms, it is one of the best ways to reach the different communities. The last but not least element is Discord. Discord is an app where one can create different servers with all one's friends and talk one voice channels or text on text channels. This element is used between many different sizes of communities. Many communities have their Discord linked on their Reddit for easy access. (Owen-Jackson, 2018)

Another element that helped the gaming industry flourish was the pandemic. About 51 percent of people said they started gaming or started gaming more because of the pandemic. Not all these people are still gaming today, since the restrictions are almost completely gone, but many have kept this hobby going. Most of the people who got targeted were people aged 10 to 35. They enjoy the competitiveness combined with the ability to see the improvement in skill level while playing more. Along with new players there was also a boom in the number of streamers and esports audiences. Since esports can be streamed to viewers it was a perfect sporting event to have during the pandemic. Not only can the audience watch from their homes, but the players themselves can also play from their homes. Gaming communities took the expansion of the pandemic to establish bigger and better communities. Along with having many more outlets for their gaming and having more games being released to try out. (Jakob, 2021)

5 Recommendations

5.1 The Elements/Data Missing to Create a Good Gaming Community

There are many things that are not shared about gaming communities, and even more that cannot be seen if one is not currently in the gaming community.

The first element would be the area around cheating. There is not a good way to tell if someone is cheating, since the softwares today are very sophisticated and usually do not leave any traces. Cheating is a not a small mistake, and it is taken very seriously, especially in competitive games. Some gaming communities can see who has been 'marked' or banned before for cheating and will not invite that player to 'invite-only' events such as tournaments. When players are found cheating at a tournament they are disqualified, usually their whole team along with them (even if only one was cheating). Cheating players lose their credibility with all tournaments after the incident. The issue of cheating should not only be up to the admins of the community to find since this would put a heavy strain on their experience. There are also, to make it harder, many different forms of cheating. One of them is wall hacks. This is when a player can see through walls and see where their opponents are on the map. Another form is 'carrying.' This means having a higher-level friend either throw the match so the lower-level friend can win, or it means a higher level is

boosting a lower level to make them level faster. Throwing a game means not trying to win and letting the opponent win on purpose and boosting means not having to level the character alone slowly but instead having a friend make it go faster. Luckily, there are usually matchmaking possibilities to help avoid these cheating methods in competitive games. (Schreiber, 2021)

Another factor would be how well one knows their opponent or team. This factor is not usually mentioned as often as others might be. But if there is a tournament and there are people who play together often or from the same gaming community, it can give the team an advantage. This means they know how the other players play and what they usually do during matches. This works the other way as well. If one team has played together for over five years, they know how their team plays and what each call out means. While a team of strangers will have a harder time communicating and deciding where to go when the match starts. (Schreiber, 2021)

The next factor deals with how players are received. This is on the basis of how games end. Do they end when someone has won/lost or when someone has more health left than another player. In some cases, players win games with health left over, the player who ends up with over half their health left is thought to be better than the player who wins with only a fourth of their health left. But this is not always the whole story. The player with all or most their health might not have been in the action as much as the player who ended with almost no health left. So, it is important to not only look at who won, but also their player performance. (Schreiber, 2021)

6   Conclusion

The author has now gone into the good and bad sides of gaming communities, 'real-life' and online alike. As well as going into detail about the history of gaming itself, an overview of gaming communities, the stakeholders within the gaming industry, and some of the pros and cons of gaming communities. Within these four topics we covered the male dominance in gaming as well as the lack of games for females. The latter is leading females to join the male marketed games and be harassed for it. In many cases, if a female gamer opens her microphone to talk and/or plays badly they will hear about it until the end of the game or

match. As well as who is in the industry of gaming, and what their importance is. Next the author explained the different gaming communities and shared some information about the most used gaming communities. Then the author went on to show the actual differences between female and male gamers and how we should change the gaming communities. When only looking at the answers from the interviews, one can see a pattern. Male and female gamers alike, would like the toxicity to be less and that females are treated equal and only ranked based on their skill level. Moreover, most of the interviewees stated the one thing they would want to change would be the competitiveness within the games. If they lose today, they can try again tomorrow no need to lose any sleep. After that, the author explained the elements that make a good gaming community, the benefits of gaming communities, and how gaming communities can hurt the gamers. There were some very loving stories about gamers from all around the world coming together. But there were also cases were gamers had to quit their game or not be allowed to open their microphone without being harassed. There are many ways to view gaming communities, and in a way, they are always changing. This thesis was meant to open everyone's eyes to see these different behaviors and maybe start a change. And finally, the author went into the elements either missing from gaming communities or the elements gaming communities are taking

advantage of. In all, gaming communities have good sides, and they have bad sides. And there are not many easy ways of not having to experience the bad parts.

Below is an image showing the six main takeaways of this thesis. First, toxicity in gaming. This is one of the main takeaways because this is one of the biggest parts of gaming. Almost every gamer has seen or been exposed to toxicity while gaming, no matter their gender.

Picture 6 Main Takeaways of Gaming Communities
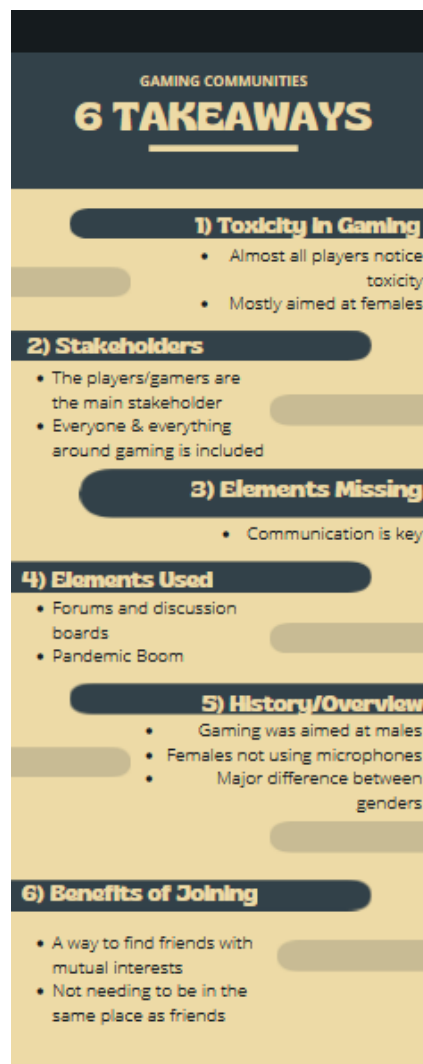
However, it is predominantly aimed toward female gamers. Second, the stake holders of the gaming industry. The most important stakeholder is the gamer or player, but everyone and everything surrounding the gaming industry can be included in the stakeholders. Third, the elements that have been missing from the communities so far. The main element is communication. Not in the sense that female gamers have to turn on their microphones, but instead that gamers voice their opinions, and the developers and producers listen and share

their own ideas. Furthermore, having rules for communities stated clearly and communicating within and outside of the community. This will lead to gaming communities becoming better for everyone and everyone within the community having the same mind-set towards toxicity.

Fourth, the elements that are being used. One being the forums and discussion boards in place where people can go and voice their opinions. The other being the pandemic. Many gaming companies jumped on the chance to create new games and hook more people into becoming gamers, by using the time where everyone was stuck inside and needed something to do and a way to stay connected. Fifth, the history and overview of the gaming industry. It is important to remember gaming was tailored towards males and is only slowly changing. As well as there being a major difference between the genders and the fact that many females do not even turn their microphones on while playing. And sixth, the benefits of joining the gaming community. Gaming is a great way to find new friends, who share one's interests. As well as not needing to be in the same place as one's friends while gaming, since there are apps like Discord and just the in-game voice chats that allow gamers to easily communicate while playing.

In conclusion, moderators can make or break a community. They are the ones who control who can join, stays, and leaves/gets kicked from a community. These people or robots create personalized rules for their community or platform. Moderators need unbiased guidelines to create a community that can be inviting to all participants. This can be easily done when the moderator(s) are doing their job with professionalism and an emphasis on knowing no two gamers are alike. Even if one participant is okay with a certain behavior, it does not mean the guidelines should be altered for that one person. The moderator(s) must remain strict and make tough calls, like kicking a fellow gamer/participant/friend out of the group when they do not follow the rules. When this is done there will be a better environment for the participants and lower the toxicity in the community.

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Appendix 1: Interview Questions for Commissioning Company (LateGame)

1. Can you see the gaming communities here at LateGame? How?

2. Has LateGame become a gaming community in itself?

    a. As you have many groups/tournaments here at LateGame, do you think you are helping the gamers of Tampere come together?

    b. Do you let anyone join or create clubs/tournaments here at LateGame?

3. Does LateGame work with the other gaming bars here in Tampere?

4. Has Covid-19 helped or hurt your business? How/Why?

5. Do most gamers come and play on the PC or the consoles or card/board games?

    a. On the PC, do more gamers usually have a lot of hours or small hours on their accounts?

    b. Do more people come with friends or by themselves?

6. Do you know what game is played the most here?

7. How have gaming communities shaped/changed your life?

8. Which gaming community is the best/worst in your opinion?

    a. What is missing (if anything)?

9. Do you think the game developers/publishers have any effect on the gaming communities as a whole?

10. What does the perfect gaming experience look like to you?

11. What does the perfect gaming community look like?

12. Do the communities of certain games affect is you will buy it?

13. What do gaming communities need?

14. What makes you choose a certain game over another?

15. Why do people come to LateGame in the first place, and what experiences are you looking for from LateGame (gaming along, with friends, or with a gaming group? Or are they just there to enjoy the atmosphere, and if so, what elements have you heard mentioned the most?

Appendix 2: Interview Questions for Gamers and Answers (Anonymous)

1. How old are you, and what game do you play?

2. How long have you been a part of this community?

3. What gaming community do you think is the best? Why?

4. What gaming community do you think is the worst? Why?

5. Do you think there is a difference between male and female players? What is it?

6. What would you change about your community? If anything?

Interviewee 1: ''I'm 37-year-old male. I am a part of a gaming community that organizes (private) events. I am one of the leaders of this community. This is my main community, and it has been around for seven years. Maybe more. And this is a real-life community and I think this is the best. Why? Because you can meet your friends face to face, drink beer, go to sauna, etc. There are currently no women in our community, but a few have participated in the past. I don't think there is a difference between female and male gamers.''

Interviewee 2: ''I'm a 24-year-old male and a casual gamer… I do not think I am a part of a certain gaming community, rather than play games with a friend group or friends. I've played videogames for at least 12 years. And I do not have a favorite gaming community, but I have noticed gaming communities in creative and adventure games are less toxic that fps games. There shouldn't be any different between female and male gamers but there still is noticeable differences in how certain gamers treat other gamers depending on their gender. In gaming, in general, female gamers still have to endure harassment and toxic behavior more than male gamers and it's something that really shouldn't be a thing anymore.''

Interviewee 3: ''I am a 22-year-old female. I mostly play with my friends from real-life, but I have found some friends online too. I'm using steam for communication, and I haven't tried anything

else, for example discord. Been a part of the community for about 6 years. And most of my male friends are more committed to gaming, but other than that I cannot really notice a different between male and female gamers. And I wouldn't change anything about my community at the moment.''

Interviewee 4: ''I'm a male gamer, age 22. I have played many games but mainly mmo and fps games. And when looking at the difference between male and female gamers, I have noticed females are less toxic and I believe this is because women have fewer toxic traits because gamers are kind of homogenic which leads to the gamers outside of the homogenic group to be treated with toxicity. I think people still believe most gamers are male, but that is changing.''

Interviewee 5: ''I'm 22-year-old female. I would say I'm most apart of the Sims community because I have been playing sims since I was preteen, I don't know what is the best gaming community but I know that GTA online community is bad cause other players really ruin the servers. You can't really go on public server without being killed right away. And yes, there is definitely difference between males and females in general, I have seen so many videos online where male gamers are very sexist towards female players. And I don't know what to change in my gaming community because I don't feel like I belong in any that much.''

Interviewee 6: ''I am 29 years old and male. I am not a hard-core gamer but do enjoy playing from time to time. I have not found a community that I want to be a part of yet, mostly due to time. I have seen no big difference between males and females since I am not too active. Which leads into the fact I do not know what to change about communities.''

Interviewee 7: ''I am a male gamer, age 22. I have been a part of a few communities but have experienced the best times when with a real-life community. When being face to face, the toxicity is much less. Mostly because it is harder to be as toxic when the other person is in front of you.''

Interviewee 8: ''I am a 22-year-old female, and I have seen differences between males and females in everyday life, including pay and treatment. But when talking about gaming in general males seem to be more sexist toward female players. This would be what I would change about communities as a whole, the toxicity.''

Interviewee 9: ''I am a 24-year-old male gamer, who has been playing for over ten years in multiple gaming communities. I have seen differences in genders, of course, but in my opinion female gamers are less toxic, but otherwise all gamers, no matter the gender, are not so different.''

Interviewee 10: ''I am 23, and a male gamer. I have not noticed much toxicity or anything like that, but I have left communities when I do not feel like I fit in anymore. Not everyone has the same humor or time schedule and sometimes the best solution is just to leave and find a new place.''

Interviewee 11: '' I am a female gamer and mostly play what my friends are playing that day/month. I personally enjoy gaming when I have people to play with. So, I am less choosy on what I play. It might seem annoying to change games so often, but I play video games for the social aspect not the game itself. So my community is made up of only friends on discord, and that is perfect for me.''

Interviewee 12: ''I am a male gamer, and I believe age does not matter. There are people of all ages playing and everyone received the same treatment. I grew up in the Call of Duty days where you were either bullied or you bullied others, unless you never played with anyone you didn't know. And gaming communities still are toxic and unfair. But I think gaming communities would be less toxic if people were to think of the game as a game and not a job, be easy going, and not as try hard. I enjoy gaming, but not the fact our team needs to win every single match. I'd prefer having a more relaxed experience.''

Interviewee 13: ''I'm a 25-year-old male gamer who enjoys face paced games. I don't mind playing with others when the matches are short. Since if someone is mean, trolling, or just bad at the game it doesn't matter. The round or match will end soon and I can focus on having fun and not on other peoples expectations.''

Interviewee 14: ''I am 24 and a male gamer. I have been a part of three different gaming communities, but for this interview I will us one (YDS) it's been almost 2.5 years. And based on what I have been experiencing I feel Apex Legends has the best community so far because even the games with 'bad players' aren't long, so it doesn't waste your time that much which automatically decreases the toxicity. In my opinion, female gamers are less toxic, but I haven't

seen any other differences between male and female gamers. On my own gaming community, I would change that we spend less time trying to turn our ship from losses back to a win and try a different day instead because this usually ends up being even longer of a loss streak.''

Interviewee 15: ''I am a female gamer aged 20. I play LOL and it is not the best environment. I am usually with my friends on discord and then mute the game chat. If anything, important happens they can tell me, but I know when my voice comes up, they will either hate me because I am a female or hate me because they think I am a male pretending to be a female.''

Interviewee 16: ''I am a 22-year-old male gamer who plays CS-GO. I enjoy playing this game but only when I have a full team, and we are all on discord. I do not enjoy playing when we have to have a random in our team and try and make that work. It is much easier and calmer when I get to play with friends. We have been playing together for a while and know what we like to play. No hassle. So, my community would be mostly just my friends who pay the same games as me, this of course changes since people play more than one game, usually. But we have females and males, and we treat everyone the same, everyone is welcome.''

Interviewee 17: ''As a male gamer, I do notice some harassment, but not usually towards me, unless I threw the round. But once I saw a female gamer was on my team and the standards the team held for her was ridiculous. If she made any mistake or was late to get to her mark, even if I was later, everyone would be obnoxious towards her.''

Interviewee 18: ''I'm a female gamer, age 23. I have played video games since I was maybe 6, but I only started playing these online multiplayer games like two years ago, so I'm pretty new to this gaming community thing. I play mostly League of Legends and I started to play it regularly maybe a year ago. In League there isn't a voice chat, which is good if you don't want other players to start judging your gaming skills based only on your gender or so. It is very common that female gamers face a lot of bullying, no matter how 'good' they are at the game. Personally, I mute everyone almost every time before the game even starts, because I want to stay calm during the game and I know I'm not the only one. So, I guess that says a lot about the League community. And it always feels amazing when you notice your team has a nice spirt for once. So, what I would change about many gaming communities is how people treat their teammates and that people would finally

start putting female players on the same line with others. Everyone should be able to play and have fun.''

Interviewee 19: ''I am 27 and male. I am in a real-life community, and it is great. We get together face to face and just hang out. We sometimes discuss new games, but mostly just enjoy the company in a non-toxic way. People in person are usually much nicer than online, that's why I try and stick to real-life communities.''

Interviewee 20: Anna from LateGame, on an audio file.