





# WHY GAMING SHOULD BE SEEN AS A FORCE FOR SOCIAL GOOD

By Tim Wilson, founder of Qutee

From UK soccer stars playing Fortnite together between World Cup matches, to the rise of international esports competitions with multi-million dollar prize pots, gaming has become more popular and more high-profile than ever before. A new Call of Duty launch generates headlines all over the globe; FIFA releases cards around the block queues while demand for new online games crash web servers.

Where gamers were once caricatured as teenage geeks sat alone in their bedrooms, today gaming has rightly become far more accepted as successive generations have grown up recognising its value both as a form of entertainment as well as a beneficial, educational and productive pastime. The academic world also acknowledges these benefits, with several studies in recent years pointing to the positive impact gaming can have on everything from multi-tasking and problem solving to improved spatial attention and driving skills (Anderson et al, 2010; Green et al, (2012); Colzato et al, (2014).

And yet, there remains a sense of controversy about the gaming community. For many, it's the idea that gaming is still a subculture, reserved for those in the know rather than the masses, despite all of the market statistics implying that gaming is now clearly a part of the mainstream. This view may limit the accessibility of gaming, but it does not diminish, in per se.

The media cannot be held for the ongoing propagation of anti-gaming sentiments by commentators within both the game and the political realm. These range from the old-fashioned (it's socially isolating) to the unfavourable (gaming addiction destroys lives) to the wholly unsubstantiated (violence in video games is a precursor to real-world incidents).

This is not to say that the gaming world is a magical utopia devoid of problems and issues we face elsewhere in our lives. Gaming can cause isolation, it can be addictive and dangerous, and there may even have been isolated examples of criminals explaining away their unlawful behaviour as a consequence of playing too many violent video games.

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There is a debate to be had about the value that gaming brings, to individuals as well as to society at large. But what we have now is not a debate – it's one-way traffic emanating from some of gaming's most vocal and most influential critics, while millions of gamers worldwide are left voiceless and unable to get their perspectives heard or considered by those with power.

We set up our Gaming and You data discussion in April 2018 to correct this injustice and level the playing field for gamers. Working with a host of leading gaming influencers, we invited gamers to share their thoughts and feelings about what gaming means to them, the benefits they've realised through their pastime and why they see gaming as a positive force within society, or indeed where they have any reservations.

The response we received was as astonishing as it was profound – a unique insight into a thriving and vibrant but also hugely misunderstood community. This is a world in which, yes, depression, isolation, social anxiety and myriad other troubles are indeed commonplace. However, in the vast majority of comments, not as the cause, but as a vital support mechanism – as the escape and release from problems elsewhere in gamers' lives.

Our Qutee platform processed, analysed and categorised hundreds of comments ranging from the enlightening and insightful to the deeply moving and humbling. In this report, we're honoured to be able to present their views back to the wider world.

Gaming and You is not designed to deliver the final say on the value that gaming brings to the world. Far from it – it's the start of a better informed conversation...

Qutee



## GAMERS IN PROFILE

2.341 billion active video game users worldwide according to Statista. Figure expected to grow to 2.725 billion by 2021.

The average video gamer is 35 years old and has been playing for 13 years according to ESA 2017 accessed via ukie.org (pp 16).

54% of the most frequent players play with friends according to ESA 2017, accessed via ukie.org (pp 17).

Nationality, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic or religious background have no significant effect on whether people are likely to play games, according to Nesta 2017, accessed via ukie.org (pp 48).

75% of the most frequent gamers feel that video gaming provides mental stimulation or education, according to ESA 2017 via ukie.org (pp 17).

In 2017, there were 32.4m gamers in the UK and 180 million gamers in the US, according to New Zoo, accessed via ukie.org (pp 48).

## Gaming and You: Analysis

As part of the Gaming and You discussion, a panel of leading gaming influencers ran several polls to gauge gamers' attitudes to a range of topics from friendship and mental health to skills and careers. There were more than 4,500 interactions across the poll questions, generating a wealth of insights into how gamers feel their pastime has impacted on their personal development and society more broadly.

These findings were reinforced by circa 900 informed, provocative and largely in-depth comments left by gamers in the main discussion thread, as well as by the overall rating of the Gaming and You discussion, through which 89% of gamers rated gaming as beneficial to society.

## What do you think is the main benefit of gaming to society as a whole?

Perhaps the most notable finding across the Gaming and You polls is that 43.6% of gamers surveyed feel that the main benefit gaming brings to society is improved emotional well-being. This is striking given the current level of public discourse around gaming's negative impact on mental health and well-being.

Given that every year, approximately 1 in 5 experience a mental health problem in the US, a figure that rises to 1 in 4 people in the UK\*, the potential for video gaming to support mental health and emotional well-being mustn't be overlooked. As @jordanmccrann comments:

"I'm a 17 year old lad who suffers from severe depression and anxiety and gaming is my way of escaping from the real world... [It] got away from all that's going on in my life. Playing games has helped me so much and it's my way of leaving all my problems behind."

Another gamer, @the\_wat14, explains:

"Gaming for me has provided an escape from my struggling mental health. At a time when I feel like I have no one, I can log on to a game and get myself lost in its world and ignore the problems going on around me."

Additionally, a gamer shared how gaming is being used as a means to connect with others facing emotionally challenging times:

"At work, I have seen a lot of young children go through some harrowing situations. There are those who have seen their dad hit their mum, those who have lost their parents or siblings, been sexually abused... I have used being a gamer in this situation and many others, to engage with children and break the ice when talking with them on the streets... In these situations being a gamer has had a positive effect, allowing me to interact and relate to the children and young adults that I deal with day in, day out."

A further 17.2% of gamers felt that gaming's greatest societal benefit was in building friendships, while more than one third (34%) pointed to gaming's ability to improve problem-solving, cognitive and social skills.

@reedheaded-dc explains that:

"Gaming provides a shared social medium for people to interact in. A simple dialogue may be difficult to initiate and sustain for certain people, particularly those with anxiety – a growing concern in modern society. So, space, where people can roleplay and focus on a shared task, can be much easier to interact in... There's less pressure when you're anonymous online, making it easier to talk or simply share a task with others. You can geek out about the same things - get excited with others you may barely know - and that's beautiful. Isolation is hell, so I'm very thankful for gaming for this very reason."

REFERENCE:

\*<https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-By-the-Numbers>

## How many good friends have you made via gaming?

The continued proliferation of digital media within our lives has resulted in more and more of us forging friends online as well as offline, meeting like-minded people and making lifelong friends on social media, discussion forums and comment threads, and of course, via gaming.

A whopping 41% of comments in the Gaming and You discussion touched on the topic of friends and friendship, demonstrating just how important the social element of gaming is to gamers today. 36.5% of gamers surveyed had made at least six great friends through gaming, rising to two thirds (63.4%) who had made between 1 and 5 good buddies. This is an important counterweight to the outdated stereotype of gamers as being antisocial. The discussion paints a picture of a dynamic and engaged community of people sharing interests, stories and support with gaming friends from all over the world.

As gamer @kaspergronninglyngso puts it:

"I've always been astounded by the kindness some people show when playing... Overall I really love spending time with friends from all over the world which I have only gotten the chance to meet through gaming."

Similarly, @tusken1602 comments:

"You have no idea if your teammates are Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh, or Jewish. And the best part about it is: it really doesn't matter."

The global aspect of gaming has meant that borders and languages do not act as barriers to forming friendships. Games such as League of Legends and World of Warcraft have a global reach of millions of players, with different demographics. This was spoken about extensively in the discussion, with players talking about friendships formed with people from every age group, gender and race, from every corner of the world, without judgment or bias.

@centurion-titus explains:

"Gaming allows for worldwide friendships. Distance means nothing to the gaming community and this is amazing. More and more people are able to interact with each other... I know people from America, Europe, Asia and Australia... Age means nothing in the gaming world, so you can have a 12-year-old gaming with 30-year-old. If these friendships were to occur in 'real life', if they met up and went out with each other, then they would seem odd, but in the gaming world, age doesn't matter."

Overall the Gaming and You discussion provides evidence of the sometimes life-changing relationships being forged everyday through video gaming, as well as gamers' ability to seamlessly connect people from other backgrounds and cultures. Many gamers noted challenges with socialising and forming bonds in the offline world, the value of these gaming friendships is eminently clear.

1-5 (380 votes | 63%)

6-15 (175 votes | 29%)

More than 25 (27 votes | 5%)

Fun (334 votes | 59%)

Competition (92 votes | 16%)

Achievement (26 votes | 5%)

Math or Science (27 votes | 5%)

Team play (11 votes | 2%)

Design (20 votes | 4%)

History (86 votes | 15%)

None (80 votes | 14%)

Other (69 votes | 12%)

IT (68 votes | 12%)

Art (42 votes | 7%)

Sports (38 votes | 7%)

Math or Science (27 votes | 5%)

Design (20 votes | 4%)

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