Shephoria: A Platform for Women Gamers Coping with Online Harassment

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Abstract
Online games have become an essential part of the entertainment industry with the development and widespread adoption of technology since it includes competition, cooperation, and social activity. However, online games can also be an environment that is hostile, aggressive and toxic. This may result in various problems in peoples life like depression and anxiety. Furthermore, there is lack of study on online-gaming especially focused on female gamers and the problems they have. Therefore, our study aims to create a website platform where people can find peer support or professional support as a solution to this problem. This design could be beneficial for people who try to get help and handle their problem due to harassment.

Keywords: online harassment, multiplayer video games, support platform, gender equality, website design, UI/UX design

ACM Reference Format:

1 Introduction
Online games have become vital thanks to advancing technology, providing opportunities for competition, cooperation, and social interaction. Recent studies show that less than 40% of gamers play single-player games, which means that there is a significant number of players who engage in multiplayer gaming. [9]

Female gamers constitute 46% of the gaming communities. Despite the fact that video games have equal leisure activities both male and female, the video game world is known as a male-dominant field. [6]

Online multiplayer game environments are known as toxic, moreover, female players often encounter behaviors that are discriminative and tending sexual harassment [10] [12]. People who receive more negative reactions from male gamers tend to be lower performers in the game or female players, and in some cases, female players get negative messages just because they are female [1]. Female players use some coping strategies to avoid harassment in online multiplayer games, these coping strategies are mostly seeking social support inside or outside the game, hiding their identity, and avoiding communication in the games. [7]

There are approaches to avoid expressions that tend to harass especially in online gaming forums, but it is hard to detect them, and forum moderators cannot handle many messages manually. Evolving Natural Language Processing techniques could also help this purpose and it can be made automatically. Recent studies show that the Toxic-BERT model performs well. [4]

1.1 Purpose of the Study
Harassment in online gaming could end up with unwanted situations, stress, anxiety, even with self-harm [7], and there is lack of studies and implications on those issues. Therefore we aimed to create a website platform where female gamers can support each other, also they can get help from volunteer professionals on the same platform, but the platform is of course, open to all genders. Improvements in technology and gaming platforms have made games more accessible to a wide range of people, which can lead to certain issues, particularly harassment towards female gamers. However, technology can be used to create a positive impact and address this problem, ultimately reducing gender inequality in gaming. We hypothesize that Shephoria will provide psychosocial support for female gamers who is harassed in gaming platforms.

2 Method

Figure 1. Website Design Landing Page
Five-second testing is used to evaluate the prepared UI/UX design, since it could give user insights quickly and understand their impressions on the design [2]. 55 users have participated in the questionnaire via Google Forms, questionnaire contains UI/UX templates and these questions "Have you ever been exposed to sexual or gender discrimination or negative situations by your peers while playing online?", "Do you think these designs target the right audience?", "Would you like to use this platform?", "What are your impressions about the design?" the common feedback is the given design emphasizes to support female gamers, and the design seems user-friendly, on the other hand, it is noted that distribution of colors can be different. "Design could be better, but the idea is favorable and I would like to use the platform", "The illustration on the landing page was a good choice," are one of the answers of the open-ended question. 45.5% of participants are faced with any kind of harassment during online gaming, and 58.2% of them agrees on the using this platform in the future, they participated in the survey voluntarily. We also aim to be able to prevent messages that tend to harass in the support platform, so we will be using both moderation and automatic detection approaches using recent NLP models, study for this purpose is ongoing. This study group consisting of a computer science student, a psychology student, and a UI/UX design expert to get feedback on design.

2.1 Dataset & Scales

Online Harassment Scale Turkish Version [3] results will be correlated with Beck Depression Inventory Turkish Version [8], Beck Anxiety Inventory Turkish Version [11], Warwick-Edinburgh Well-Being Scale Turkish Version [5] results for measure to online sexual harassment towards female gamers who may have psychosocial problems in Turkish sample. Data collection according to given scales has not begun due to pending ethics committee approval. Once approved, the preliminary studies will swiftly transition into this phase.

The results of the study, in which 293 women from 30 countries participated, indicate that women tend to ruminate about their experiences of harassment. However, they often do not report the harassment and frequently withdraw from the game [10]. Online harassment in video games has been found to result in mental health issues, according to a sample of 270 participants from various ethnic backgrounds. 81% of participants score above 2.0 which means their level of harassment are high in gaming environment [12]. A study of 340 Turkish participants reveals that online sexual harassment leads to mental health problems, which examined all online environments, not just gaming. [3]

3 Conclusion

The positive feedback received from users during the five-second test, as described in the Method section, suggests the usefulness of this platform. Additionally, given the limited number of quantitative studies in this area, the data we will collect with a sample from Turkey is expected to contribute to the existing literature. This approach is not exclusive to the video game industry and can be applicable to various future online harassment scenarios.

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