

“is dondald trump woke?”¹ and Other Trolling Questions: Rise and Fall of the Woke Content Detector Steam Group

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In March 2024, the Steam group “Woke Content Detector” (WCD) is created by Furin. The group’s stated goal is to establish a list separating games with “woke content” from others². The group appears to be made up of individuals who share a traditionalist view of society. They are driven by the desire to fight a “woke enemy” allegedly acting unilaterally to weaken Western societies, particularly through the spreading of DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) standards in popular culture (Mahoudeau 2022): representation of non-white people, women in position of power, non-heterosexuality, or left-winged stances in general. While this desire is not expressed in the group's stated objectives, it appears through the conversations (Surinx and Charlier 2025). It is also more understandable given that WCD is an extension of the Gamergate 2.0 (McCann 2025; Morrissey 2025). However, unlike groups on other networks (Maes 2023; 2025), the WCD does not openly engage in harassment and repression of its opponents. It relies on the use of a formal methodology to help people identify woke content in videogames. Furthermore, the moderation rules imposed by the group's creator condemn insults and *ad hominem* arguments in favour of establishing “objective” criteria (even if not all members share the same opinion). Therefore, observing the WCD is interesting as it reveals the argumentative strategies employed by anti-woke individuals (sometimes close to the far right) in a media environment that compels them to a certain level of cordiality.



Figure 1: Ironic message of a Woke Content Detector new member

However, in May 2025, as WCD reached 3,500 members, it was thrown into turmoil by the unexplained disappearance of Furin. Since then, its original mode of operation has been questioned. Furin was not only the group administrator (holding the power to delete messages and ban members), but also the initiator of a guideline to distinguish woke from non-woke games (Surinx 2025). His absence quickly led, on the one hand, to numerous trolls invading the group and mocking the original members and, on the other hand, to the emergence of more doubts about the methodology established by WCD's founder. This presentation will review the discursive and interactional changes that have occurred within the group following Furin's disappearance.

We adopt a qualitative semiotic and rhetorical approach to explore three related questions. Our analyses are manual and restricted by the principle of saturation (data collection continues until no new cases appear; Derèze 2009). Our method is inspired by the distinction established by Rabatel (2005; 2012; 2013) between under-enunciation, over-enunciation, and co-enunciation, in order to observe how people interact and share (or try to seize) the authority.

Firstly, we will describe what methods are used by new members to “troll” the original community, and to what end. In line with the codes used by the original members, newcomers do not resort to harassment but prefer to use various forms of irony (and few insults) to deceive anti-woke members while being still recognizable by other observers (Barnabé 2022; Ekkehard 2009) (see Figure 2). They also resort to “flooding” to prevent original members to engage in serious conversations and disrupt their usual way of functioning. Alternatively, debates may arise between individuals from opposing sides, but without any real progress. Indeed, while the arguments retain a certain level of formal logic, the assumptions of each camp remain irreconcilable. The goal of the invaders is rarely stated, but it seems to stem primarily from a desire to destabilize a group with a right-wing political orientation. However, newcomers seem to take pleasure in mocking original members. Thus, it's difficult to call them woke. They are more like “anti anti-woke”.



Figure 2: Chocilota sets an anti-woke bait by mimicking the expressions of other members and DTN_YT falls into the trap. Then, LadyAnnatar, one of the troll leaders mock the member's inability to recognize a distortion of the group's usual writing codes.

Secondly, we will discuss how the initial community manages to express itself despite the presence of intrusive messages. While Furin's departure does not prevent the group from pursuing its initial goal, the presence of trolls sabotages their efforts to establish a list of woke videogames. Even though the community remains relatively small, former members cannot always distinguish those who share their values from those who seek to imitate them to make fun of or to destabilize the group. This difficulty in recognizing allies is compounded by the complexity of establishing a clear definition of wokism. As a result, some members prefer to leave WCD because they are frustrated by the group's inability to function properly, while others persist and try to reaffirm their grip on the definition of "woke".

Thirdly, we will investigate how WCD's definition of wokism has changed since the creation of the group. Originally, the members had very diverse opinions on the meaning of "woke" but only the most extreme views were considered or uncensored (Surinx 2025). However, the departure of the main administrator does not really benefit greater diversity of opinion. The arrival of trolls increases the polarization between right- and left-winged opinions and people. This phenomenon further increases the need to tighten the definition of wokism to counter a so-called "left-wing enemy" who allegedly seeks to destroy an anti-woke "safe space" (even if original members refute the use of this term as it is mainly used by progressive communities, see Figure 3).

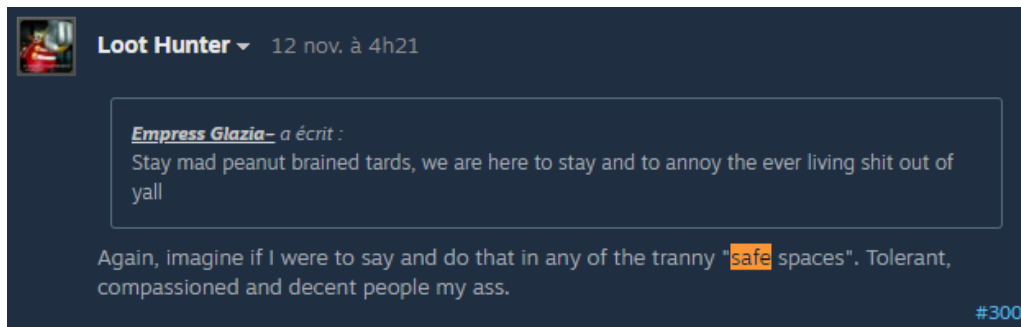


Figure 3: One of the original members reacts aggressively to an insult from a new member. The term “safe space”, used by the trolls, is poorly regarded by the anti-woke members.

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize the need for further research into interpersonal interactions within more closed reactionary groups. On social media such as Facebook or X, online communities are more visible to external users. On the contrary, small communities like WCD have less contact with outsiders. Consequently, they tend to create their own codes and engage in a form of emulation within a kind of “safe space”: members offer each other a form of ideological and intellectual support against an outside world deemed as hostile or in decline, they feel understood and secure since they consider themselves oppressed by the same enemy³. Therefore, even if a false cordiality persists, the study of interactions within such a group, by insisting on its co-construction through knowledge and mutual esteem rather than on attacking another community, is revealing of how members shape the category of “woke videogames” and provides a better understanding of how reactionary narratives related to the media are formed over time, and what assumptions underlie such conceptions. Furthermore, it highlights privileged relations between the gaming culture – which roots in masculine and militarized cultures (Lignon, 2024) – and other phenomenon, such as manosphere, far-right online community and conspiracy theories (Grange, 2024; Morin and Mésangeau, 2022).⁴

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ENDNOTES

¹ Reference for the title in Figure 1.

² At the time of writing, the list is still accessible at the following address:
<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1AVTZPJij5PQmIWakYdDahBrxDiwqWMGsWEcEnpdKTa4/edit?gid=0#gid=0>

³ Paradoxically, the Steam platform itself is considered by members to be governed by a progressive agenda. Indeed, the group's methodology is linked to a fear of being censored for comments that are too hateful or right-wing.

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