# Arsenal drives 90% drop in online abuse with AI partnership amid rising football toxicity



Arsenal Football Club has emerged as a leader in addressing the pervasive issue of online abuse in football, not just through its successes on the pitch but also via a robust strategy aimed at safeguarding its players, staff, and supporters from harmful vitriol. Following a series of high-profile incidents, including the distressing abuse directed at Kai Havertz and his pregnant wife Sophia after their FA Cup defeat to Manchester United, the club has amplified its commitment to combatting online harassment.

Havertz’s experience highlighted a troubling trend. Following his penalty miss in January, social media targeted the couple with horrifying threats, including one that threatened harm to their unborn child. The public backlash and subsequent outrage led to a unified response from within the club, spearheaded by manager Mikel Arteta, who emphasised the urgent need for change. “We really have to do something about it,” Arteta stated, underlining the emotional toll such abuse has on players and their families.

In response to this growing crisis, Arsenal has partnered with Signify, a British data science firm, since 2021 to leverage their expertise in fighting online abuse through their Threat Matrix AI service. This technology has been instrumental in monitoring and analysing digital platforms, leading to a dramatic reported reduction in online abuse—specifically, a 90 per cent decrease in incidents targeting club members since the partnership began. The core of this initiative lies in analyzing over 11.3 million posts, which has enabled the identification and subsequent banning of numerous individuals for posting abusive and discriminatory messages.

According to Arsenal's CEO Vinai Venkatesham, this collaborative effort extends beyond mere punitive measures; it aims to foster a safer and more inclusive environment for all. The partnership's success has prompted an extension of their agreement for an additional three years, reflecting both parties' commitment to using technological advancements to create meaningful change within the sport.

Signify's Threat Matrix operates on a two-tier verification process to accurately categorise online threats. Their methodology combines advanced machine learning with human oversight, ensuring that discriminatory content is both identified and contextualized properly. A Signify spokesperson mentioned, “Context and nuance are crucial for accurate analysis,” indicating that their approach is nuanced—distinguishing between innocuous comments and threatening language.

The proactive stance taken by Arsenal has seen the club implement stringent measures against those found culpable, including imposing lengthy bans on season ticket holders. In recent times, Arsenal has sanctioned bans for 31 individuals for abusive behaviour, showcasing their resolve to tackle both online and in-stadium misconduct. They have also escalated certain cases to law enforcement when appropriate, further embodying their commitment to uphold player safety.

Interestingly, while Arsenal is at the forefront of addressing this issue, other clubs in the Premier League are also beginning to implement their own measures. For instance, there are reports of another Big Six club employing blocking systems on players' phones that allow them to filter out abusive comments, thereby creating a controlled digital environment where athletes can focus better on their performance.

The landscape of online football is becoming increasingly toxic, fuelled by anonymity and an environment that often enables and overlooks harmful speech. Arsenal’s efforts, along with their partnership with Signify, represent a vital response to this growing challenge. The initiative seeks not just to police free speech but aims to create a healthier atmosphere in which athletes can perform without the mental burden of abuse detracting from their game.

The issue of online harassment in football is multifaceted and deeply entrenched, but as Arsenal continues to lead the way in addressing these challenges head-on, it sets a precedent for other clubs to follow. If every institution across the football league engaged comprehensively with tackling online vitriol, it could drastically change the culture of fandom and ensure a safer experience for all involved in the beautiful game.

As Arsenal looks to improve its performance on the field, there is little doubt that their strategic initiatives off the pitch will be crucial in supporting their players' mental well-being, enabling them to focus on their craft without the spectre of online abuse looming ominously in the background.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11: Source [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-14707323/Arsenal-social-media-abuse-Signify.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
2. Paragraph 3, 4, 6, 10: Source [[2]](https://www.signify.ai/blog-feed/signifys-threat-matrix-delivering-results-for-arsenal-fc-1)
3. Paragraph 3, 5, 11: Source [[3]](https://www.arsenal.com/news/our-ongoing-drive-against-abuse-and-discrimination)
4. Paragraph 4, 11: Source [[4]](https://www.arsenal.com/news/24-supporters-banned-abusive-behaviour)
5. Paragraph 3, 5, 10: Source [[5]](https://www.signify.ai/blog-feed/threat-matrix-selected-by-arsenal-fc)
6. Paragraph 4, 6: Source [[6]](https://www.arsenal.com/news/stoponlineabuse-our-next-steps)
7. Paragraph 4, 6: Source [[7]](https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/58204441)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-14707323/Arsenal-social-media-abuse-Signify.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.signify.ai/blog-feed/signifys-threat-matrix-delivering-results-for-arsenal-fc-1> - Signify's Threat Matrix service has been instrumental in Arsenal FC's efforts to combat online abuse. Since its implementation in August 2021, the service has analyzed over 11.3 million posts, leading to the identification and banning of 18 supporters for sending targeted abusive, threatening, and discriminatory messages. Arsenal CEO Vinai Venkatesham emphasized the club's commitment to creating a safer environment for the entire Arsenal family, stating that new technology is changing the way they support their communities. The partnership with Signify has been extended for an additional three years due to its success in protecting players and minimizing online abuse.
3. <https://www.arsenal.com/news/our-ongoing-drive-against-abuse-and-discrimination> - Arsenal FC has taken a strong stance against abusive and discriminatory behavior by banning 31 members and season ticket holders for such conduct since the start of the 2021/22 season. The bans, each lasting three years, were imposed for offenses both online and in the stadium. The club has been collaborating with data science company Signify Group since August 2021, utilizing their Threat Matrix service to monitor social media channels and identify abusive accounts. This proactive approach has led to the examination of over 11.3 million posts, with verified abusers being blocked and reported to platforms and authorities. CEO Vinai Venkatesham highlighted the importance of creating a welcoming environment for all Arsenal supporters and the role of technology in achieving this goal.
4. <https://www.arsenal.com/news/24-supporters-banned-abusive-behaviour> - Arsenal FC has imposed bans on 24 supporters for abusive and discriminatory behavior during the 2023/24 season. The sanctions include 21 bans for in-stadium offenses and three for online abuse, with durations ranging from one to three years. The club continues to collaborate with Signify Group, using their Threat Matrix service to combat targeted online abuse. This partnership has been instrumental in detecting and reporting content targeting Arsenal's players and coaching staff. Managing Director Richard Garlick emphasized the club's commitment to taking strong action against such behavior, including escalating cases to the police when appropriate, to ensure a safe environment for all Arsenal supporters.
5. <https://www.signify.ai/blog-feed/threat-matrix-selected-by-arsenal-fc> - Arsenal FC has partnered with Signify Group, selecting their Threat Matrix service to enhance the club's efforts in protecting players, officials, and fans from online hate and discriminatory abuse. The service focuses on identifying and unmasking abusive accounts on social media platforms. This collaboration aligns with the Premier League's new guidelines and the Prime Minister's call for clubs to take more action against online abuse. Arsenal's proactive approach includes working with Signify to identify perpetrators who hide behind anonymous accounts, ensuring that meaningful action is taken against those responsible for abusive behavior.
6. <https://www.arsenal.com/news/stoponlineabuse-our-next-steps> - Arsenal FC has outlined its next steps in combating online abuse, including the imposition of a three-year stadium ban on a season ticket holder who incited violence towards Granit Xhaka and abused a Tottenham Hotspur player on social media. The club is working with Signify Group to identify anonymous abusers and is in the process of using their technology to address abuse directed at Bukayo Saka following the Euro 2020 final. Arsenal emphasizes the importance of collaboration with supporters, fan groups, and social media companies to create a safer environment and is committed to taking strong action against all forms of discrimination and abuse.
7. <https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/58204441> - Arsenal FC has imposed a three-year ban on a season ticket holder who incited violence towards midfielder Granit Xhaka and abused a Tottenham Hotspur player on social media. The ban aligns with the club's sanction guidance and is part of the Premier League's new anti-discrimination measures, which encompass both online and in-person abuse. Arsenal has begun working with data technology company Signify to identify those who send abuse from anonymous social media accounts. The club is also liaising with the police to address the issue of online abuse directed at players like Bukayo Saka following the Euro 2020 final.