Trolls and Trolling: An Exploration of Those That Live Under The Internet Bridge

Michael Nycyk
MICHAEL NYCYK
TROLLS AND TROLLING: AN EXPLORATION OF THOSE THAT LIVE UNDER THE INTERNET BRIDGE
Trolls and Trolling:
An Exploration of Those That Live Under the Internet Bridge

Author: Michael Nycyk

Design: Michael Nycyk
Front Cover Images:
Troll – Beware Of Trolls (Author liftarn) From Wikimedia Commons
   https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BewareOfTrolls.svg
   Used by permission Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.
Bridge – Pixabay
   Used by permission CC0 Creative Commons
Publisher: Michael Nycyk, Brisbane, Australia
ISBN: 978-1-64204-373-0
©2017

Contact

The author at michael.nycyk@gmail.com

This publication is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Australia (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0 AU)

See https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/au/ and https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/au/legalcode

No article in this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means without permission in writing from the author.
# CONTENTS

## Acknowledgements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter One - Introduction</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trolls and Trolling: Explanations and Examples</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bridges on the Road: Where Trolling Takes Place</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Law and Trolling: An Australian Example</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying Social Media Policies to Stop Trolling: The Case of Twitter</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This Book’s Exploration of Trolls and Trolling</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Contents</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potentially Offensive Material in Book Alert</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter Two – Trolling History and Types of Trolls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background to Documenting the History of Trolling</th>
<th>22</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Troll History and Environments</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trolling in Web 1.0 and Early Internet Environments</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Electronic Bulletin Board: Early Trolling</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Usenet: Trolling Gets Vicious and Organised</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexism, Racism and Homophobia: Trolls Use Weapons</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trolls Get Creative</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trolling in Web 2.0 and More Sophisticated Internet Environments</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Trolling History and Troll Environments</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Troll Types</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions and Summary</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

Figure 1: A threat to Amira Al Hussaini in 2011 from a Bahraini Twitter troll sourced from Activist Blogger Jillian C. York (York, 2011) 4

Figure 2: Example in a virtual forum criticising a horse stable (Hardaker, 2015) 4

Figure 3: American radio presenter trolled on her Twitter account (Lee, 2015) 5

Figure 4: Sexist Internet meme designed to cause outrage (Milner, 2013) 5

Figure 5: Trolling of former politician and sportsperson Senator Nova Peris on Facebook 6

Figure 6: Facebook memorial troll defacing from Daily Mail Australia (2012) 12

Figure 7: Levels of Twitter communication adopted from Bruns and Moe (2014) 15

Figure 8: Example Facebook Interface, 2011 example Ghani (2011) 15

Figure 9: An example tweet message 16

Figure 10: Fictitious example of flame echo 25

Figure 11: Usenet trolling interface and troll message 26

Figure 12: A response to Guy Macon’s super rant 32

Figure 13: A virtual community example 36

Figure 14: mIRC chat line interactions in one room (Adair, 2014) 37

Figure 15: Paltalk interface (Softonic, 2016) 38

Figure 16: Trolling about the Jewish Star (Meme Center, 2011) 41

Figure 17. Pushing woman back into sea (Help Feed the Troll, n.d.) 41

Figure 18. Name that band (Help Feed the Troll, n.d.a) 42

Figure 19. Blog troll example 43

Figure 20. MySpace trolling by spam (Wallis, 2008) 44

Figure 21. Interaction between a troll and a Facebook user (Gatollari, 2015) 46

Figure 22. Troll joke comment (Help Feed the Troll, n.d.c) 47

Figure 23. Fake customer service representative trolling (Nextshark, 2015) 47
Figure 24. Patton Oswalt troll tweet (Evans, 2013)  
Figure 25. Sharna Bremner’s interaction with a troll (Bremner, 2015)  
Figure 26. Trolling on YouTube disrupting a conversation (Help Feed the Troll, n.d.d)  
Figure 27. Troll comments on Reddit posted in r/rape SubReddit (Sankin, 2014)  
Figure 28. Before image of a man (Reddit, 2016d)  
Figure 29. Altered Photoshop image of a man (Reddit, 2016d)  
Figure 30. Merritt reproduction of a meme suggestions fat women want attention  
Figure 31. Reddit trolling of trolls (Ahmed, 2013)  
Figure 32. Trolling on Pokemon Go  
Figure 33. Ralph’s trolling in Second Life (Know Your Meme, 2016c)  
Figure 34. Trolling Second Life by creating shocking imagery (DaScatman, 2009)  
Figure 35. Trolling interaction on app chat program Omegle (n.d.)  
Figure 36. Android phone hack screen (Prophet Hacker, 2016)  
Figure 37. Example of discriminatory language on a blog  
Figure 38. Trolling language used in a possible acceptable environment on YouTube (Machinima, 2011)  
Figure 39. The Pet Collective (2016) start of cat video  
Figure 40. A civil language exchange in the comments section of The Pet Collective’s Video  
Figure 41. An uncivil language exchange in the comments section of The Pet Collective’s video  
Figure 42. Web 1.0 environment of trolling beginning in the early 1990’s  
Figure 43. Web 2.0 environment of trolling after approximately 2004  
Figure 44. Disruptive argument on Electronic Bulletin Board (Fictitious)  
Figure 45. Anti troll meme (Photobucket, n.d)  
Figure 46. Justine Sacco’s inflammatory joke tweet from Huffington Post (Stuart, 2013)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 47. Common popular phone apps where trolling occurs</th>
<th>102</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 48. Cat facts trolling app from Tctechcrunch (2014)</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 49. Twitter troll message with hashtag show on Sunrise television show</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 50. Dawson confronts one of her alleged cyberbullies</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 51. Aro’s troll mock up photo ‘for hire’</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 52. Video screen shot 1</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 53. Video screen shot 2</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 54. Web page of Mv-lehti portraying Aro as a drug dealer</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 55. Mocking women for their feminism (Everiss, 2015)</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 56. Mocking and stereotyping feminist meme (Quick Meme, n.d.)</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 57. Anti-feminist tweet advocating physical violence against feminists (Dent, 2015)</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 58. Tweet attacking Lauren Rankin (Rankin, 2013)</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 59. Alt Right figure Milo Yiannopoulos insults actress Leslie Jones on Twitter (Knight, 2016)</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 60. Facebook post of a troll threatening Paloma Newton (Connaughton, 2016)</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 61. Avid Reader Bookshop anti-feminist troll comment 1</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 62. Avid Reader Bookshop anti-feminist troll comment 2</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 63. Avid Reader Bookshop anti-feminist troll comment 3</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 64. Tweets between Avid Reader and trolls</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 65. Anti-Troll celebratory cake</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 66. Troll meme showing Donald Trump wrestling Vince McMahon with superimposed CNN Sign on his face</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 67. Ramirez’s Troll Face Figure (The Meme Wikia, n.d.)</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 1: Sites on the Internet and mobile phones where trolling takes place 10

Table 2: Eight Usenet prefixes used to locate newsgroup topics based on Big-8 (2013) 27
website description

Table 3: Fifty types of trolls 68

Table 4: Technical differences between Web 1.0 and 2.0 83

Table 5: Summary and stories of the three extreme trolling cases 112

Extra Table in Chapter Five within Research Article

Table 1. Themes and sub-themes in shaming anti-feminist trolls’ vitriol 158
Acknowledgments

This is the second book in a series exploring Internet issues. The first was called *Adult-to-Adult Cyberbullying: An Exploration of a Dark Side of the Internet*, published in 2015.

The fascination with cyberbullying and trolling comes from personal experience, but also observations that as the Internet spreads, more people are being bullied and trolled, as well as becoming bullies and trolls. It is true that academia is continuing to explore this issue. However, governments worldwide are also recognising this as a serious social issue. The troll has gone from being an individual operating in one part of the Internet to the organised trolls who have played a part in influencing the 2016 United States Presidential Elections. Though we have to choice to use the Internet we cannot avoid having to interact with it. Knowing what trolls are and how they operate, as well as strategies to manage them, can avoid distress and consequences that many who have encountered a troll experience.

Like my first book, it is written in three ways: academic, stories and advice, drawing on a wide range of resources. Although technology will change, peoples’ misuse of it will continue. Therefore, knowing what cyberbullies, trolls and hackers can do gives us knowledge to combat their behaviours.

I especially thank these two knowledgeable and respected academics that also assisted with my first book as well as this book; their help has been invaluable:

Dr Peter Cahill – For proof reading this book
Dr Thomas Apperley – Advice on book layout

I also must acknowledge the work of Dr Emma Jane as her publications in this area have been valuable to read and use in understanding trolling behaviours.

The help of my Facebook group Older Wiser Learners is also acknowledged. Wonderful advice and support thank you all especially Fiona, Peter and the Shut Up and Write groups.

Finally, I am much appreciated for the help of Mr Chris Currie formally of Avid Reader Bookstore, West End, Brisbane, and its management for the information given on the troll incident that occurred in 2017.

PLEASE BE AWARE THIS BOOK 
CONTAINS MATURE CONTENT 
WHICH SOME MAY FIND OFFENSIVE
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Internet “trolls” do not live under a bridge nor do they have loveable features like crazy bright coloured hair. They are individuals who engage in online behaviour that is provocative and offensive and which is intended to gain online attention and create a negative emotional reaction. – MacDonnells Law

The anonymity and distance created by the internet provides security and a sense of invulnerability that gives trolls and bullies the courage to say things to people they wouldn't ordinarily say to someone in person. – James Gobert, Everyday Digitals Blog

In Scandinavian and Norse folklore a troll under a bridge stops travellers from going forward, harming the traveller and doing mischief to people. To apply an analogy to the Internet, the bridge is a part of the Internet network, the traveller is the Internet user on a journey to find something and the troll wants to disrupt the user’s journey. One day you may post a comment on a Facebook page and when you go back the next day to check it someone has posted an insult at you. You are angry, sad, or annoyed, but maybe even just amused. You have been, in Internet speak, ‘trolled’.

The troll, along cyberbullies, hackers, cyber stalkers and flamers, have been a part of the Internet who cause disruption, upset, anger and even tragedy to those using it since the invention of electronic networks and communication. Although trolls may consider themselves comedians who think their comments are harmless, trolling is recognised as a serious social problem and is called antagonism purely for sake of amusement (Hardaker, 2013). Trolling interrupts our Internet experience and calls to prevent it and punish trolls have grown across many countries.

Trolls severely disrupt flows of online civil conversations between people. They can be annoying or dangerous to public figures and celebrities. Many troll out of annoyance, hurt, anger or amusements. Trolling people and Internet sites addresses a need in people to vent anger, hate and sarcasm, or to get attention.

Yet trolling, like cyberbullying, is subjective because the person being trolled has the choice to ignore it. In my previous book on cyberbullying, I strongly argued that offensive online interactions do matter as they upset people unnecessarily. We live in an Internet networked world we rely on. Sometimes online rudeness is difficult to always ignore (Nycyk, 2015). There are differences between trolls and cyberbullies, where cyberbullying is a collective label of behaviours where bullying, a form of harassment, occurs via the Internet, mobile (cell) phones or other electronic devices where the intention is to harm others usually repeatedly (USLegal.com, 2014; Price & Dalgleish, 2010).

Trolling by contrast is different and for this book is defined by The Urban Dictionary (2016), amusingly, but accurately, as:
The art of deliberately, cleverly, and secretly pissing people off, usually via the internet, using dialogue. Trolling does not mean just making rude remarks: Shouting swear words at someone doesn’t count as trolling; it’s just flaming, and isn’t funny. Spam isn’t trolling either; it pisses people off, but it’s lame. The most essential part of trolling is convincing your victim that either a) truly believe in what you are saying, no matter how outrageous, or b) give your victim malicious instructions, under the guise of help. Trolling requires deceiving; any trolling that doesn’t involve deceiving someone isn’t trolling at all; it’s just stupid. As such, your victim must not know that you are trolling; if he (sic) does, you are an unsuccessful troll.

This informal definition sets the tone for this book suggesting trolls are self-centred people who derive pleasure from disrupting others from their Internet use. Disruption is the key strategy that causes the distress, especially on social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Out of nowhere a troll will post an offensive or inflammatory comment and the site descends into chaos and hate as insults and arguments abound. The toll is satisfied their trolling has had that effect and either will continue to provoke or move on to other Internet sites to cause more mischief.

**Trolls and Trolling: Explanations and Examples**

The slogan ‘don’t feed the trolls’ is a common saying in popular culture but is advice not often taken. People feel the need to take on trolls for invading their Internet spaces. Some people may ask you why you bothered to engage with them. Yet trolls have become sophisticated in their attacks on people and Internet sites, at worst resulting in the shutting down of these sites. In this section I explain trolls and trolling, illustrating with diverse examples what it looks like.

Trolling is considered a serious societal issue and a vexing problem. A notable example of serious trolling can be seen on social media micro blogging platform Twitter. Women are especially trolled in sexist and misogynistic ways with threats of physical violence. Researchers Matias, Johnson, Boesel, Keegan, Friedman and DeTar (2015), reporting to the Women, Action and Media (WAM!) organisation, condemned Twitter for the company’s lack of action in stopping the trolling of women. This trolling seen in the tweets included: threats of death, rape, comments on sexuality, revenge porn and doxing (publishing personal information such as home addresses and phone numbers). Vijaya Gadde, a Twitter company lawyer, admitted in 2015 that the social media site was too slow to react to such trolling (Edwards, 2016). Twitter has received substantial media attention for their failure to manage this issue.

Other world events and social issues can bring out trolls on social media with general and specific targets. Three well-known examples that caused widespread trolling were: marriage equality in the United States, worldwide terrorist attacks and the 2016 United States Presidential campaign. An argument often stated when people criticise trolling is that the Internet should remain a place of free speech. Censoring the Internet in any form stifles the potential of it for the free-flowing of information and opinion (Electronic Frontier Foundation, 2016). Yet the Australian Human Rights Commission acknowledges that the Internet challenges the limits of free speech and that restrictions to ensure user safety are recognised as sometimes necessary (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2016). Trolling challenges the idea of free speech because of its disruptive and sometimes tragic
consequences. In Australia, a well-known example of trolling using Twitter was the hatred posted against model Charlotte Dawson that was claimed as a factor in her suiciding (McLeod, 2014).

What does trolling look like? The following five examples show the diversity of trolling messages in text and picture across a variety of Internet sites and platforms. You may react to them in terms of thinking they are harmless or funny. The aim of these examples is to show trolling’s diversity; they disrupted, harmed, made people angry and, importantly, provoked a reaction. The first is an example of Twitter trolling followed by other trolling examples:

Example 1:

![Figure 1. A threat to Amira Al Hussaini in 2011 from a Bahraini Twitter troll sourced from Activist Blogger Jillian C. York (York, 2011)](image1)

Example 2:

![Figure 2. Example in a virtual forum criticising a horse stable (Hardaker, 2015)](image2)
Example 3:

Figure 3. American radio presenter trolled on her Twitter account (Lee, 2015)

Example 4:

Figure 4. Sexist Internet meme designed to cause outrage (Milner, 2013)
Example 5:

Nova fuck ff. You were only endorsed by Juliars because you were a black ----. Go back to the bush and suck on witchity grubs and yams. Stop painting your fucking face with white shit in parliament. Other than being a runner you are nothing.

Figure 5. Trolling of former politician and sportsperson Senator Nova Peris on Facebook

These illustrate the types of trolling that occur. All of them may evoke differing emotions but if one is the target of them it may cause distress. The key determination of assessing trolling is how you respond to the text or image according to your own personal beliefs. Additionally, the troll’s intent needs to be taken into account as the degree of mischief and behaviours they are doing may not be always to harm someone, but is done out of anger or wanting to make light of serious situations.

To illustrate the extent of distress trolling can have on individuals and organisations, these five reported cases are examples of the circumstances and consequences of trolling. These are drawn from news reports. Although they are written from the view of a newspaper and its reporters, they are examples of trolling’s potential distress and consequences.

Case 1:

Cameron McEvoy is an Australia swimmer who is representing Australia at the 2016 Rio De Janeiro Olympic Games. His father Rod declared bankruptcy due to a business failure.

“McEvoy, the world No.1 in the 100m freestyle and who could potentially set an Australian Olympic record with six medals in Rio next month, is in the final stages of training before heading overseas next week.

The 22-year-old university student has been targeted by internet trolls since the story of his family’s debt first broke and as a result of the ongoing attacks, turned his Instagram account to private yesterday.” (Balym, 2016)

Case 2:

Australian television and radio personality Meshel Laurie made a comment on a television show saying it was winter so put on more weight deliberately. This resulted in a Facebook post admonishing her.

“One of the men sent her a private message: “You just told us on The Project to fatten up for winter, look in the mirror and maybe hibernate fatso.” A second man wrote: “You are a very, very unattractive and talentless woman. Yuk...!” He went on to suggest Laurie was ‘horribly overweight’ and ‘should require a special licence to go out in public’. ” (O’Brien, 2016)
Case 3:

Jessikka Aro, a Finnish investigative journalist, in 2014 began an investigation on Russian trolls who have developed a sophisticated troll operation that operates non-stop online abuse to many from one central location. As a result she experienced serious threats and trolling on her Twitter account.

“In one of the early calls, someone phoned her mobile and fired a gun. “[It was] a Ukrainian number,” says the 35-year-old Finnish journalist. “It was like the sound of a firing gun. I tried to ask in Russian ‘who are you? I’m listening to you’ but he didn't say anything. It was just shooting.” Undaunted, she kept poking. And the growls have been getting louder. Last spring someone sent her a text message pretending to be from her father - who died 20 years ago – telling her he was “watching her”. Another wrote a song, mocking her as a bimbo ‘James Bond’ NATO agent with a drug habit. There is even a music video online, with Aro portrayed by an actress in a leotard and wig. It would be funny if it wasn't dripping with venom.” (Miller, 2016).

Case 4:

Zane Alchin, 25, was accused of trolling women on dating phone app Tinder.

“The offence occurred after Chris Hall, 31, posted a screen shot of Sydney woman Olivia Melville's Tinder dating profile to Facebook in August 2015. Ms Melville's Tinder profile included a picture of her and Canadian hip hop artist Drake's lyrics: “Type of girl who will suck you dry and then eat some lunch with you”. “Stay classy ladies,” Mr Hall, who has not been charged with any offence, posted alongside the screen shot. “I'm surprised she'd still be hungry for lunch.” Thousands of people shared the post, with many leaving abusive and derogatory comments about Ms Melville. When Ms Melville's friends defended her on a separate post, Alchin left 55 comments, many obscene, over a two-hour period, including a reference to the "best thing about raping feminists". “I think you should have ya tubes tied baby,” he posted at one point.” (Kembrey, 2016)

Case 5:

Daniel Hegglin, a former banker with a high profile financial institution based in Hong Kong, was trolled on many Internet platforms. He reached a settlement with Google over the trolling to remove the comments as they caused distress over their defamatory and false nature.

“A former Morgan Stanley banker has settled his suit with Google over "vile" comments on the internet accusing him of being a Nazi and a member of the Ku Klux Klan. Hegglin, who is based in Hong Kong, was subject to abuse on more than 4000 different websites, Tomlinson said. He was accused of being a corrupt businessman, insider trading, and of laundering money on behalf of the Italian mafia, according to a pre-trial ruling earlier this year.” (Hodges & White, 2014).
All these trolling cases suggest some form of harm to an individual. These are:

1. Case 1 – harm to a family member because of the actions of another family member.
2. Case 2 – harm based on a person’s physical attributes and looks.
3. Case 3 – harm based on threats to one’s personal safety.
5. Case 5 – harm based on loss of reputation.

Therefore, the fact that distress was caused by the troll or trolls by their actions, and in some cases how that was recognised in a court of law provable, concludes that trolling is a serious societal problem. Judith Donath studied early troll behaviours calling them outsiders who dedicate time to infiltrating an online community to cause confusion and irritation. She concluded that the harm they do to the proceedings, openness, structure and relationships between people within the community, site or platform is unconscionable (Donath, 1998). The idea that troll behaviour is morally reprehensible is generally agreed upon.

Statistics on perceptions of trolling are continuously emerging proving how widespread it has become. Gammon (2014) quotes a United States study asking people about their experiences of trolling that suggested the following:

46% of adults believe that the line is crossed when a commenter is clearly attempting to upset someone else, and 50% believe that it is when the commenter is attempting to upset many different people at once. 44% of adults are ready to call someone a troll if they don’t stop their behavior even after being asked to.

This suggests internet users can identify trolling and are prepared to confront it. Dr Barbara Spears, an Australian expert on bullying behaviours, offers her view on trolling trolls as serious bulling (Blatchford, 2016):

“Trolling is, I consider to be, the extreme end of online bullying, and when we're talking about bullying, we are talking about the misuse and abuse of power and how that power is portrayed and played out online.

“It can be to the great delight of the troll to note how many other people are coming back at them and the torment they can achieve.

“It's a very typical bullying arrangement. They get pleasure out of the pain they cause.”

However, some feel the problem requires more regulation and that a new, more hateful society has emerged because of trolling (Chen, 2014):
It is generally no longer acceptable in public life to hurl slurs at women or minorities, to rally around the idea that some humans are inherently worth less than others, or to terrorize vulnerable people. But old-school hate is having a sort of renaissance online, and in the countries thought to be furthest beyond it. The anonymity provided by the Internet fosters communities where people can feed on each other’s hate without consequence. They can easily form into mobs and terrify victims. Individual trolls can hide behind dozens of screen names to multiply their effect.

I stated in my first book (Nycyk, 2015, p. 5) that there are constant calls to ‘just turn the computer off’. This is not always easy because our lives to various extents have become reliant on the Internet:

Someone may say to you “why don’t you just turn off your computer (or mobile phone)”? Cyberbullying is done with persistence and constant attacking. These cannot always just be turned off at will. Many can, and do, ignore and avoid those who bully them, but the potential for harm is real. Others are so affected by it they suicide. We have also asked victims what they did to encourage others to cyberbully them.

Often accusations of victimhood are dismissive of the distress the individual experienced from trolling. Trolls can also be highly organised as Jessikka Aro found when researching Russian trolls and that they can threaten one’s livelihood and life. As Sutton, Smith and Swettenham (1999) state, the troll may not act alone but may be cold, manipulative experts using subtle indirect abuse in groups. This is concerning for all of society that values civil and peaceful behaviours while respecting free speech and the right to state unpopular opinions. Trolls blur boundaries between debates and abuse.

The Bridges on the Road: Where Trolling Takes Place

An Internet site is a broad term meaning a place to post or upload information in many forms and share it. This is the metaphorical bridge. Over time the ability for anyone with Internet access to do this has become easier and the software to create sites has as well become easier to use. There are 14 popular sites, also known as platforms, where trolling takes places. This is not an exhaustive list, but Table 1 names and describes these sites:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internet Site, App or Platform</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td>A blog is a personal website where the user posts their opinions about anything they are interested in, using software such as Wordpress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chat Lines</td>
<td>Client or web-based software where users chat to each other in real time, that is, when they are online at the same time. Examples include Paltalk, Chat City, Skype, Internet Relay Chat and the now widely used Snapchat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Mail (Email)</td>
<td>Client or web-based software where text, files photos are sent between users with Carbon Copy (CC) and Blind Carbon Copy (BCC) features allowing the email can be sent to many people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Social networking site where people friend each other and like pages, join groups, share photographs, comments and links</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>This is an online mobile photo and video-sharing service which allows editing of photos and uploading to social network sites quickly, including features to digitally alter images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>A professional networking site where people list their skills and experience much like a resume and write opinion articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsgroups</td>
<td>Once text only, these are places where people share news links and opinions, such as Reddit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Computer Video Games and Virtual Reality Worlds</td>
<td>These are networked games, mostly involving warfare themes or violence such as Minecraft, Counter Strike and World of Warcraft, while Second Life is a virtual reality simulation of social situations in the physical world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone Applications (Apps)</td>
<td>These are software applications that are designed specifically to run on mobile devices especially smart phones and tablets, used for many reasons by users from communication to business, entertainment and social networking with dating apps such as Tinder and Grindr widely used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Message Service (SMS)</td>
<td>These are text messages and images sent from a mobile phone to another and sometimes other electronic devices such as tablets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tumblr</td>
<td>Tumblr is a popular micro blogging platform but accepts more characters and larger format photos than Twitter and often does not censor or remove content relying on the author who posts it to do so</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Twitter

This is a popular micro-blogging software platform where messages are limited to 140 character spaces but also photos and videos

Virtual Communities

Also called Internet forums they are usually based around a theme or interest where people can post opinions and photos, for example, SkyscraperCity which is mainly about sharing information and opinion on construction projects

Wikipedia

A worldwide online free encyclopaedia where people contribute content using software called wiki

YouTube

This is a video sharing site where users upload videos and post comments and although others such as Vimeo and Daily Motion exist, YouTube has become a huge repository of varied content from business, music and film to politics, education and self-promotion

This list is as at 2017 and will grow as new technologies are created, particularly those that are mobile and use ‘on the run’ apps making trolling more widespread. Trolls operate without time or place restrictions so they can do trolling activities anytime from anywhere. Trolls can use protection from being tracked such as using Virtual Private Networks (VPN) and other identity cloaking methods, some being highly sophisticated, as well as operating from disguised servers or organising groups on the deep web to conspire.

Psychology researcher John Suler (2004) theorises that people using the Internet are disembodied from consequences because they are not physically present. Trolls often lack the empathy to realise the harm they are doing. His idea has influenced our understandings of why people troll and cyberbully. However, it is also a collective responsibility to stop trolling. Companies such as Twitter and YouTube struggle to stop them despite clear community rules governing their use. Laws across the world exist to manage trolling but often it crosses transnational boarders and cannot often be prosecuted.

The Law and Trolling: An Australian Example

Although there is a struggle to prosecute trolls, Australia has taken steps to use laws to punish trolling activity. In Australia the current legislation for prosecuting trolls is the Australian Attorney-General’s Department Crimes Legislation Amendment (Telecommunications Offences and Other Measures) Act (No. 2) 2004 (Australian Government, 2016). It is part of a criminal code, Part 10.6, and it is an offence that attracts various punishments depending on the decision of the judge in applying the penalty.

Examining Part 10.6 Division 474.17(1), the aim is to regulate Internet services when someone uses any part of the Internet including mobile devices to menace, harass or cause an offence to a reasonable person (Australian Government, 2016; FindLaw, 2012). Laws worldwide have had mixed results in gaining compensation. However, news media and social
media have shamed trolls, naming their full real names, addresses, personal and their professional details.

The key part of this legislation is if trolling would distress or cause offense to a reasonable person. Reasonable in cultural terms is subjective but in law has specific testable meaning based in torts and criminal law. A reasonable person exercises average care, skills and judgement in their conduct (The Free Dictionary, 2016) and does not do calculated behaviours to wound the feelings and arouse anger, disgust or outrage in the mind of a reasonable person (FindLaw, 2016).

The current laws in Australia have been used to prosecute trolls. One area of trolling considered heinous is when people set up a memorial page and it is desecrated by troll comments. This type of trolling inflames public debate with people calling for more action to be taking against trolls. Usually such trolls use fake accounts but increasingly some do not hide their names. Phillips (2011) describes how memorial pages operate:

Best described as interactive newspaper obituaries or even virtual funeral parlors, these so-called RIP pages allow fans and members to post condolence messages, communicate with other users and keep track of group announcements. Although one must join a group or like a page in order to gain access to this information, RIP pages are often open to anyone interested in participating, making them ostensibly private but effectively public social spaces.

These are considered sacred and trolls are judged as heinous for the comments and photos they leave on online memorial sites.

As an illustration of their distress, Figure 6 is a Facebook memorial page for English singer Amy Winehouse showing a troll’s has comment about her death and others’ reaction to his post:

*Figure 6. Facebook memorial troll defacing from Daily Mail Australia (2012)*
The person posting these comments is named and his past trolling revealed on the Daily Mail’s website, then placed on an English anti-trolling site (The Crocels Trolling Academy, 2012). It is important to note that although this defacing may cause offense, that is subjective as Amy Winehouse had a reported reputation as being affected by drug and alcohol abuse. Nevertheless, two people did take offence and responded in turn encouraging the troll to post more.

There is a difference between trolling being a moral and a legal issue. Before showing some examples of prosecution under Australia’s criminal code, an academic approach to the morality of trolling is well explained by Shin (2008) that suggests a lack of clear codes of behaviours exist online:

According to Durkheim, the order of society is maintained by morality. Morality has definite rules and conducts which every member of the society agrees upon and depends on. Morality is functional since it has authority and regularity. Therefore people know how to behave and what is right or wrong offline. In the Internet space, however, people do not perceive clear codes of conducts on the Internet, nor authority and regularity, according to the result of this study. Unlike offline morality reinforced by education, that online morality have not been shared and not even discussed so provides the existence of Troll.

Supporting this view, Bishop (2013) and Walter, Hourizi, Moncur and Pitsillides (2011) agree that it is a moral issue and claim that trolling on memorial Internet and social media sites are done from spite and not humour. This makes such behaviours seem unreasonable to the reasonable person but also such trolling incurs the wrath of the public who find this behaviour sickening and repulsive. It is highly disrespectful and inappropriate, yet some believe it is exercising freedom to say what one wants, which is frequently argued used to justify such behaviours.

The first case in Australia to prosecute under the Act a person who trolled was Bradley Paul Hampson in Brisbane, Australia. In 2011 he was convicted and jailed, but this sentence was later suspended. This reporting by Carbonell (2010) reflects the issue and also the reaction of law enforcement:

A man accused of defacing two Internet tribute sites is facing criminal charges in Queensland. Police say it could be the first time an Australian has been charged over Internet trolling, which is the practice of posting deliberately offensive material on social networking sites.

The man is accused of posting pornography on Facebook sites set up to honour two Queensland children who died earlier this year.

Police have also criticised Facebook for not removing the material fast enough and have called on Internet users to be more vigilant in protecting their sites from Internet trolls.

Since that case in Australia more successful prosecutions have occurred, although judges give suspended sentences rather than incarceration. For example, Jessica Cook was prosecuted for defacing a murder victim’s with hateful comments and images, although she received a suspended sentence and claimed to be ‘remorseful’ (Elsworth, 2010).
To successfully prosecute trolls, the burden of proof is on the prosecution to convince the jury that the picture and/or text must be offensive to a reasonable person. Section 474.17 (Australian Government, 2016) part of the Act states:

474.17 Using a carriage service to menace, harass or cause offence
(1) A person is guilty of an offence if:
   (a) the person uses a carriage service; and
   (b) the person does so in a way (whether by the method of use or the content of a communication, or both) that reasonable persons would regard as being, in all the circumstances, menacing, harassing or offensive.

Penalty: Imprisonment for 3 years.

But what is offensive is contentious and it can be argued that there are so much trolling comments across many sites it would clog up the justice system for years. Although being offended is subjective, clearly ‘reasonable’ people are offended to the point where they will engage law enforcement and law processes. In online memorial defacement, this trolling is considered to represent the lengths some will go to in causing harm and disruption, hence why trolls have received considerably more public attention.

What is important to realise is that pursuing trolls is very difficult despite sophisticated methods of tracking them. Internet and news media shaming can be effective. As this book will discuss, there are ways to manage and eliminate troll behaviours on the Internet, but clearly trolling will continue to grow. Therefore, making a decision on how to manage and eliminate it has become an area of research and the subject of government and legal debates in many countries. The problem lies in people assuming they can use free speech to post whatever they wish however unpleasant and distressing.

**Applying Social Media Policies to Stop Trolling: The Case of Twitter**

Social media sites have become the centre of trolling activity. When a person agrees to use these sites they are legally bound by a code of conduct, terms of service (TOS) or other informal or formal rules when using them. Twitter has become a focus of media attention as the relentless trolling on it has resulted in serious harm, court cases and widespread condemnation of the failure for Twitter to protect its users from trolls. To illustrate this problem and the attempt to enforce social media policies, Twitter will be used here as a case example. It will demonstrate that although not always effective, social media companies do have rules that must be followed or the troll will be subject to a range of punishments such as suspension of their account.

Twitter was launched in 2006 as a microblogging service where textual messages, called tweets, can be shared with other Twitter users. Tweets can only be 140 characters maximum length, although in 2017 tweet characters increased, which is marketed as its main feature (boyd, Golder & Lotan, 2010). Limiting tweet messages means one has to think about space constraints in posting a tweet, in a way described by co-founder Biz Stone as ‘being more creative because of constraint’ (Zinko, 2009). Despite claims that tweets from active users of Twitter have been in decline since August 2014 (Edwards, 2016) but it still continues to be used at a large rate. The company Twitter claims as at March 31 2016 the company has 310 million users (Twitter, 2016a), while it is estimated 500,000,000 tweets a day up are sent worldwide (Internet Live Stats, n.d).
Twitter functions on three communication layers, according to Bruns and Moe (2014), as macro, meso and micro levels illustrated in Figure 7:

Figure 7. Levels of Twitter communication adopted from Bruns and Moe (2014)

The hash tag (#) is not compulsory to use, but helps the user at the macro level access specific topics, who you follow is the meso level which, unless you unfollow someone or they remove their account, remains static, while at a micro level who you reply to is represented by the at (@) symbol which is the basic level of communication to one or more persons you do. To join Twitter you need an email account to set up an account. After setting up an account you choose a user name and password. Figure 8 is an example Twitter account interface:

Figure 8. Example Facebook Interface, 2011 example (Ghani, 2011)
The interface has a box with the words ‘What’s Happening?’ (Twitter, 2016a) where text up to the 140 character limit shown in Figure 9 is typed, although photos and videos can be added. Note the hashtag #net11 makes it easier to find other Twitter posts with the same tag:

![An example tweet message](image)

*Figure 9. An example tweet message (Nycyk, 2009)*

When composing a tweet if you want to be seen in a particular tweet set you create a hash tag or use your own. For example #StarWars 7 will be seen by all using that tag if searched for. Hash tags are very important as they keep information on a topic flowing. Retweeting is also optional but is constantly used if you want others to see the tweets of other Twitter followers. There are options to keep tweets private and block others’ Twitter accounts.

Twitter has been described as a social, mundane communication banter tool for message and information exchange (Zimmer & Proferes, 2014; Miller, 2008), but has become a widely-used tool for information exchange and organising events. It is used by activists to mobilise people to action with information about where to protest as seen in Turkey in 2016 but significantly in the 2011 Arab Spring Protests (Huang, 2011). People organise random public dance routines called flash mob. There is constant advertising from companies sometimes unwanted and prediction of the short-term performance of stock markets (Zhang, Fuehres & Gloor, 2010). But three significant uses of Twitter have been: missing person’s alerts and child abductions, tracking natural disasters (Zimmer et al., 2014; Bakshi, 2011) and tweeting news stories and photos of breaking events.

Twitter has been the subject of trolling for many years, coming under increasing pressure from society and governments to manage and ban trolls. The vitriol and hate from trolls has been beyond reasonable and are they have been proven to be responsible for serious psychological harm to individuals. The case of Charlotte Dawson, as previously mentioned, who took her life after months of relentless insulting from trolls especially on Twitter, is well-known. Trolling on Twitter is not just insults but also threats, inflammatory photographs and videos, offensive hash tags (for example #rapeisgood) and an alarming practice called doxing where the personal details such as names, physical addresses, email addresses and phone numbers are published.

Twitter is facing pressure to pro-actively manage abuse, rather than falling back on legislation. New laws to require social media sites to reveal the identities of trolls are being considered. However, a significant problem facing Twitter is the issue of banned trolls
creating new anonymous accounts when their existing accounts are suspended. The NoBullying.com (2014) web site describes this problem as:

I’m sure people aren’t surprised by the fact that it’s so simple and easy to start bullying on Twitter and elsewhere. Cyberbullies, also known as “trolls,” can easily create fake accounts to launch their bullying cyber-attacks against people they don’t like or disagree with. However, there are also many people who use their own personal accounts to be abusive to others, as well.

Those are the people that are easiest to deal with. The “trolls” are more difficult, because they can use false information to create accounts and if you delete an account of theirs for inappropriate behavior, they’re very likely to just create another fake account to continue right where they left off with their cyberbullying attacks.

The extent of this problem was illustrated by the case of Caroline Criado-Perez. She had suggested a change to an English banknote in its design. Hattenstone (2013) interviewed her with this extract showing the extent of the problem she encountered from trolls:

Then there were the death threats. “One was from a really bright guy who said: ‘I've just got released from prison.’” She shows me her phone: “I'd do a lot worse than rape you. I've just got out of prison and would happily do more time to see you berried [sic]. #10feetunder.” The tweet is signed Ayekayesa. There is another one, equally chilling. “I will find you, and you don't want to know what I will do when I do. You're pathetic. Kill yourself. Before I do. #Godie.”

To prevent or minimise such incidents, Twitter has a set of policies that are not always strictly enforced, but exist to protect all Twitter users. As at September 2017, those specifically covering trolling are:

1. Twitter Rules (Twitter, 2016b): https://support.twitter.com/articles/18311#

2. Online Abuse (Twitter, 2016c): https://support.twitter.com/articles/15794#

3. Private Information Posting (Twitter, 2016d): https://support.twitter.com/articles/20169991#

These are used by Twitter in decisions to suspend accounts or ban people from using Twitter. Past tweet data can be subpoenaed in many countries as evidence in prosecuting trolls.

To illustrate the problems Twitter faces in managing trolling, an example of a trolled account is given. The victim’s Twitter account is Brittany Venti’s (https://twitter.com/BrittanyVenti), a young girl who has made videos as a Vlogger; that is, she posts videos on YouTube and Twitch of her discussing her life. She attracted trolls due to her high pitched voice, gossiping and her criticisms of being an attention-seeker. Internet personalities who self-promote often attract such controversy. The troll’s account is called FAGSMUSTDIE55 (https://twitter.com/FAGSMUSTDIE55).
Demonstrating how Twitter would manage the troll’s account, someone would first need to mark the account as violating Twitter’s rules. The assessment of the text on the troll’s Twitter account is that it does violate such rules as this example shows:

@BrittanyVenti Ur a cu**. Bitch. Landwhale. Go die like ur mum did in 9/11 u terrorist

@BrittanyVenti ur a fucking cu** and u need to die and quit streaming forever u terrorist scumbag mothefcuker. just like ur dead mum 123123

The account FAGSMUSTDIE5 breaks these Twitter conditions of use:

1. **Graphic content**: You may not use pornographic or excessively violent media in your profile image or header image.

   Account has a pornographic image of genitalia and two fishes placed on the anal area

2. **Violent threats (direct or indirect)**: You may not make threats of violence or promote violence, including threatening or promoting terrorism.

   Account indirectly wants person to harm themselves

3. **Harassment**: You may not incite or engage in the targeted abuse or harassment of others. Some of the factors considered when evaluating abusive behavior include:

   - if a primary purpose of the reported account is to harass or send abusive messages to others
   - account was set up to harass and send abusive messages as no further tweets appear

4. **Hateful conduct**: You may not promote violence against or directly attack or threaten other people on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious affiliation, age, disability, or disease. We also do not allow accounts whose primary purpose is inciting harm towards others on the basis of these categories.

This example shows how harmful and offensive trolling can be. In terms of violating Twitter’s rules, matching the tweets and the Twitter account to the community guidelines, it clearly warrants removal because it uses words that threaten, harm and offend.

To summarise, this section is representative of the type of trolling issues social media, virtual communities and other Internet sites experience. Each has its own rules and set of moral and ethical behaviours it will or will not tolerate. The site will decide for itself the boundaries of behaviour. To illustrate an example where trolling is tolerated, a study by Mitra (1996) about racist comments between Indians and Pakistanis in a soc.cult.indian newsgroup found trolling was generally tolerated because of the historical friction between both countries. Allowing such behaviours is dependent on the groups or Internet site’s owner’s decision on what to allow or tolerate. It is, however, advisable to have rules and polices governing conduct and have in place punishments to deal with trolling.

This section showed an example of how trolling is managed using Twitter as a case study. Further discussions of this will occur in the book’s chapters.
This Book’s Exploration of Trolls and Trolling

The book takes an exploratory approach to trolls and trolling using a variety of academic and anecdotal material to look at what trolling is, why it is done and what can be done to address it. The underlying question of the book is, what are trolls, what do they do, how can they be managed and what are the consequences of their behaviour?

The book uses a combination of academic and anecdotal styles covering the topic of trolling from pre-web eras when the Internet was being developed to the year 2017 where sophisticated trolling activity takes place. It also references all sources used and follows standard ethical procedures in conducting research activities. All material is sourced from public domains unless stated otherwise.

I take an objective approach to trolls and trolling behaviours because it has become such a widespread social problem. The intention of this book is to inform readers about the topic. I also disclose caution when reading this book as the material presented can contain swearing and unpleasant descriptions of what trolls do.

Chapter Contents

This chapter was an introduction to trolls and trolling, emphasising that it is a serious issue for individuals, communities and governments. The disruptive nature of it is a key reason why it is a problem for Internet users. It was defined with examples, the Australian trolling laws discussed to illustrate a country’s response to it and an example of trolling and applying a site’s rules to manage trolling given using Twitter as an example.

Chapter Two documents and explains the history of Internet trolling and gives a comprehensive and deeper discussion of the types of trolls and their activities.

Chapter Three is a literature review of trolling with an emphasis on the various incarnations of it which grew in numbers with the spread of the Internet and the sophistication of the software. I also discuss a facet of trolling that has been examined; the concept of societal civility and how it is claimed the Internet has fostered societies that are ruder and less caring, to which trolling plays a role in this idea.

Chapter Four discusses three case studies that go in-depth into extreme trolling experiences and their consequences. The cases examined are: Julian Dibbell’s story of a rape in cyberspace, the case of Charlotte Dawson and the trolling of Jessikka Aro, a Finnish investigative journalist, who was trolled by the Russian Troll Army.

Chapter Five is an example of a study of trolling on Twitter displaying what such research can tell us about such activities using the problem of feminist trolling that has become prominent on Twitter. A case study discussing Avid Bookshop, a bookstore in Brisbane, and its encounter with anti-feminist trolls will also be discussed.

Chapter Six is a practical chapter that discusses what you can do about trolling and debates the effectiveness of such strategies where the effective slogan ‘Don’t Feed the Trolls’ may not work.
Chapter Seven is a brief summary of the book and assesses what questions have been answered from this exploratory approach to trolling.

**Potentially Offensive Material in Book Alert**

Be advised that there is explicit language and photo images used in this book and descriptions of situations and events that may cause offence or distress. These included use of racist, sexist, homophobic, religious and culturally insensitive words and other types of offensive statements that are seen in online troll postings.
Notes


2. Quote taken from James Gobert’s blog called Everyday Digitals Blog http://everydaydigitals.com/heres-what-i-think/3/v9k7tkph89n98aitduhz62xzzlkpy8


4. Although this book does have offensive language, at this period in time the C swear word is still considered contentious and highly offensive despite its widespread us. In view of this, this word was removed from this Facebook troll post example.

5. It is advisable not to view https://twitter.com/FAGSMUSTDIE5 as the profile contains swearing and a photo of two fish placed into a man’s anal cavity. It may be removed in the future, but as at December 2017 when the final draft of this chapter was completed it is still publically viewable on Twitter.
CHAPTER TWO
TROLLING HISTORY AND TYPES OF TROLLS

I began venturing out into less suspecting sections of the site like: Fashion > Accessories or Health > skincare and would answer questions honestly and provide a link, but the link would redirect to meatspin.com. If you’ve never heard of the site, please don’t go there. I can’t imagine how many people I tricked into going there that were looking for sunburn relief. Eventually Yahoo! banned and deleted my account. – Kotaku.com¹

Trolling has a long history dating back to the when the Internet became available for public use. This chapter explores the history of trolling from pre-public Internet to Web 1.0 and Web 2.0/3.0³. It uses academic studies, opinions and anecdotes from authors and bloggers, and YouTube videos to show how trolling has developed to an organised form of bullying and disruption. Exploring the history and types of troll behaviours alerts us to its seriousness and assists in recognising troll behaviours, as well as attempting to understand why people troll.

Background to Documenting the History of Trolling

For centuries humans have treated each other badly with threats, blackmail, name-calling, shaming, gossip and spreading rumours. Even in less technological times word-of-mouth acted as method to cause distress by harassment and misinformation. Historian Deal (1998) extensively documented how people in Chester, England, in 1560 would label widows as witches, causing those who were not widows by choice or circumstance to be shunned by people as gossip about them spread running their reputation when they tried to move to another location. Though not trolling, Deal’s work shows how peoples’ reputations can be destroyed by those seeking to do so, and such practices have existed over time.

Words were supplemented by handwritten letters and printing devices to spread information. Later, radio and television, though less anonymous, were used by greater numbers of people to slander a person. Now it is the Internet, particularly social media that affords greater amounts of people to troll but also to be trolled by those geographically far away from you.
Although the Internet has been in existence since 1962 when the United States wanted to share information electronically, spurred by worry about foreign powers intercepting their information, trolling began appearing early. Although a technical discussion of the Internet’s development is beyond the scope of this book, two points about the Internet are relevant to the spread of trolling. First, the laying of cables and development of wireless networks since the 1980’s, combined with the development of a protocol called transmission control protocol/internet protocol (TCP/IP) allowed people with computers to connect with people (Dynamic Web Solutions, 2008).

The second factor that made trolling easier was by taking it from purely text and file to an easier graphical system was the invention of the World Wide Web. This was a term given to it by Sir Tim Berners-Lee in 1989 (W3C, 2016) and defined by Beal (2014a) as:

> The Web, or World Wide Web, is basically a system of Internet servers that support specially formatted documents. The documents are formatted in a markup language called HTML (HyperText Markup Language) that supports links to other documents, as well as graphics, audio, and video files.

As Berners-Lee (1989) states, the creation of the World Wide Web is an information management issue which addressed the loss of information that was occurring in an organisation he was working in. Finding, organising and displaying information quickly and easily is what the Web offered. As time progressed, the Web grew in sophistication making it easier to share files, photos and videos. Social media took advantage of these developments, hence why MySpace, Friendster, early Facebook variants, grew into the large communication and information sharing platforms they evolved into.

In documenting the history of trolling and showing the types of trolls that exist online, this chapter aims to give an understanding of the technical and cultural reasons and events that made this a significant problem. Cultural in this sense means a person ascribes to certain values, attitudes and beliefs which influence peoples’ behaviours (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). Therefore, what a troll values and believes, combining with their attitudes towards others will determine the type and level of trolling they undertake. With this concept of culture, focusing on those things that shape the history of trolling, the documentation of it begins with the history of our understanding of the word troll.

Troll research, although a growing area of Internet studies enquiry, is still a fairly new field. Cyberbullying has received far more research attention. This chapter uses many sources to document the history and types of trolling, drawing on the work of three key scholars in this area. They are:

1. Julian Dibbell at the Center for Internet and Society at Stanford Law School, who in 1993 wrote the highly cited account of a troll called Mr. Bungle in a highly descriptive story called A Rape in Cyberspace: (Or TINYSOCIETY, and How to Make One) (Dibbell, 1993, 1998). His work will be discussed in Chapter Four.

2. Jonathan Bishop, Councillor and founder of the Centre for Research into Online Communities and E-Learning Systems, Swansea University United Kingdom, who published a book that substantively examined the many concepts, issues and implications of Internet trolling (Bishop, 2013).
3. Whitney Phillips (2015), Assistant Professor of Writing at Mercer University, who wrote an influential book on the history of trolls and their place in various cultures.

**Troll History and Environments**

**Trolling in Web 1.0 and Early Internet Environments**

The word troll in Internet and criminal terms has remained fairly static in meaning until it became popularised in 2011 and applied to many forms of online messages (Bishop, 2014). Bishop accurately describes the history of the term in this passage of his 2014 paper (Bishop, 2014, p.8):

The word ‘troll’ when used to refer to persons who try to provoke others might have originated in the US military in the 1960s prior to the realisation of the internet for mass communication, with the term, ‘trolling for MiGs’ (Wilcox, 1998). The term’s difference is likely to have come from fishing, because of one ‘reeling in’ one’s opposition, which is also often considered the source of the use of the word trolling in relation to the internet (Shah, 2004). The term in this context was reputed to have been used by US Navy pilots in Vietnam in their ‘dog-fighting’, popularised by the film starring Tom Cruise called Top Gun.

Interestingly, this description correlates with the idea that trolls are not actually aggressors. In the movie Top Gun the pilots would bait and ‘pull in’ enemy fighters so they could get a good aim at them. But this strategy was more as protection rather than aggression. This suggests trolls were not always the mean-spirited people who wanted to harm others. Yet this is not how trolls are portrayed in the current media.

Trolling is now considered a mainstream activity, meaning that it is easier to troll because the software is easier to use and the Internet is globally widespread and growing. Condis (2016) also suggests that trolls were once not malevolent and intent on disruption but rather they attempted to keep the Internet an elite space for themselves:

To answer this question, one needs to understand the values systems underpinning those cultures. You see, trolls weren’t always the marauding barbarian’s intent on destroying discourse in pursuit of lulz. Once upon a time, back when Internet was starting to shift from a space belonging to a few elite computer hobbyists to an “information superhighway” open to every Tom, Dick and Harry, trolls served as gatekeepers helping users to distinguish between experienced web-dwellers and an incoming deluge of newbs.

Jansen and James (1995) and Bishop (2014) concur with Condis that trolling was intended as peaceful provocation to challenge peoples’ online postings. Trolls had an ethos and an unofficial ethical code of behaviours. What can be inferred from this is, as the numbers of Internet users grew people saw others’ trolling behaviour and copied those behaviours. This made the Internet a vitriolic place and the ferocity of trolls increased.
The Electronic Bulletin Board: Early Trolling

Trolling was first recognised in early text-based bulletin boards (BBS), though the behaviours were called flaming. The inventors of the BBS were Randy Suess and Ward Christensen who launched it in the 1980s. It required the person using it to have a dial-up modem and a computer. It was for a long time just text although some creative users could make patterns on it that looked like images. Part of this system housed groups of many types that people could join to post messages. As Bartlett (2014) states within a year of the BBS being in operation, insults and debates aimed to provoke and disrupt group discussions were occurring. These arguments were termed Flame Echoes and are considered the first known example of trolling. An example of this is shown in Figure 10:

![Figure 10. Fictitious example of flame echo](image)

It is said that this was the birth of the troll and also gave rise to the debate of free speech rights that the Internet was said to have been designed for. The BSS fostered the idea that people could treat others as they wanted to including being abusive. Trolls began moving from mere argument to deliberately seeking out people to harass.

The Usenet: Trolling Gets Vicious and Organised

As software developed the ability to post music and other files and photos began. During the time the BBS was taking hold, another system that was to be highly influential in breeding trolls emerged. Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis in 1979 were dissatisfied with a system called the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET). This was established in 1969 to network universities and research centres, using an early form of Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP). The cost of using it was prohibitive at first, but Truscott and Ellis wanted people to use it freely if they had an Internet connection. Usenet was part of the Internet but not part of the World Wide Web, yet its significance in trolling history is important and has been written about long after its demise.

Usenet is a significant example in trolling history highlighting two points. First, it increased the audience and the belief that you could type what you liked online. Second, although tracking peoples’ physical locations were they were using the computer to access it was
possible, people used pseudonyms to disguise themselves. A cornerstone of Usenet was the belief that anonymity was vital to engaging with others and protected one from prosecution.

Usenet is a computer-based distributed discussion system like a global electronic bulletin board in sets of newsgroups devoted to a topic or interest (Burkhalter, 1999; Lehnert, 1998). The newsgroup collected messages participants sent to a group where other users, part of the group or not, could download them linked in threads, the main first posting being called the thread. A subject line to each thread helped people see what the discussion was about. The group’s messages in the threads look ordered but usually participants will usually only respond to the last few messages (Burkhalter, 1999). Reading messages required the downloading and use of software called a news client reader. Messages were archived so theoretically they could be accessed in the future.

Figure 11 displays the interface of a Usenet newsgroup and shows an example of a troll comment (Gat, 2011):

Figure 11. Usenet trolling interface and troll message

Any user could start a group but the interest or topic had to match a hierarchical scheme of topics. In 1987 seven, later eight, hierarchies were created to organise messages so they could be found. Classification of groups into subject matter was important as this distinguished between moderated and unmoderated groups. This was important not only for finding interests and groups, but for people to judge the level of controversial or offensive topics that may appear. However, moderation of groups, generally failed; as Usenet users grew as did trolls.
The Usenet hierarchies are important to explain because they determined what content was able to be discussed in them. Table 2 shows the eight Usenet prefix code and their description:

Table 2
Eight Usenet prefixes used to locate newsgroup topics based on Big-8 (2013) website description

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Usenet Prefix</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. comp       | About computer topics, hardware, software and security issues  
Example: comp.data.administration |
| 2. humanities | Discussions of, but not limited to, anthropology, history, languages, law, philosophy, psychology, sociology and social sciences  
Example: soc.history.ancient |
| 3. misc       | Mixture of newsgroups that are considered not fitting in the other six  
Example: misc.taxes.moderated |
| 4. news       | News about Usenet such as technical or policy  
Example: news.usenet |
| 5. rec        | Discussions about recreational topics such as music, sport, hobbies  
Example: rec.photo.digital |
| 6. sci        | Discussions about science and technology such as engineering or physics  
Example: sci.physics.electromag |
| 7. soc        | General and broad discussions of society, social issues and general socialising  
soc.genealogy.surnames.global |
| 8. talk       | Discussions about topics that encourage debate mostly about politics  
Example: talk.politics.china |

However, two people using it were unhappy with the inflexibility of the hierarchy in that, under soc and talk especially, controversial issues could not always be discussed due to moderation. Brian Reid and John Gilmore convinced Usenet to create a new prefix called alt, which stands for alternative, which became a place to discuss such topics. It accelerated troll behaviours, but a new issue emerged where trolls banding together in an organised fashion to disrupt groups and harass newsgroup members.
Several studies have examined the behaviours of those using Usenet. A general conclusion is that in many newsgroups, but mostly alt groups, trolling and flaming occurred frequently but also substantially grew in intensity and organisation. The main idea of the groups, whether moderated or not, was that people felt they had the right to post whatever they wanted. There were various levels of tolerance of trolling behaviours and owners of newsgroups, and on the Internet elsewhere, tried to install netiquette which were unspoken or written down rules on how to behave towards each other when using newsgroups. These were generally ignored. Trolls posted for disruption, for fun, for trying to control their space and also for sinister reasons such as wanting to ‘pay out’ on others for their race, gender, sexuality or social position in society.

Examining why trolling occurred so much on Usenet, there were significant reported and documented events that suggested people thought newsgroups were fertile grounds for disruption. As Usenet became widely known as a place to share information and interact with others, many new users, called newbies, joined the newsgroups. Like the academics on the BBS before them, the established trolls, called Usenetters, resented this intrusion (Bartlett, 2014). Therefore, as Phillips (2015) observed, trolling newbies became a sport for trolls eager to discourage participation. Although the more controversial newsgroups, such as alt.sex, had this occurring more frequently, trolls would still invade newsgroups discussing issues such as pet ownership, history, hobbies and, especially, politics with their strategies of abusive comments to disrupt the communication flows of the groups.

**Sexism, Racism and Homophobia: Trolls Use Weapons**

Trolls posted inflammatory and hateful words and later posted hyperlinks (web addresses) to offensive material or to spam sites (useless websites) then began posting images to newsgroups. A newsgroup called alt.folklore.urban was where the term trolling became known as, and accepted as, the now common label for such behaviours. In that newsgroup trolls would post myths about urban legends, stories that were not true, to obtain reactions from newbies and discourage the newbie from posting in the newsgroups (Bartlett, 2014). It was expected you knew the myths and could discuss them with others. If you did not the trolls would bombard the user with hateful remarks and name-calling. This trawling and reeling in of people to abuse was considered the original archetype of trolling behaviour that continues to the present day.

Researchers noticed well before law makers and governments that this behaviour was significantly challenging the notion of free speech on the Internet. In a study of the positive and negative effects of trolls, Krappitz (2012, p. 40) found a quote on alt.flame, a famous newsgroup made for people to abuse each other, that illustrates the historical context where trolling appeared:

> The earliest mention of the word Troll that is associated with Internet Trolling I’ve seen was on alt.flame by a user called Troll.

> “Just some credentials: I am called Troll. I didn’t get the name because I’m a fun guy. I am the champion of channel +insult on irc and I have thrice defended the title before the channel went down, so I can flame with the best. Flame away if you like, but ‘I’m gonna deal it back to you in spades. ‘Cause when I’m havin’
fun ya know I can’t conceal it. Because I know you’d never cut it in my game.’ -
Guns N’ Roses’ 99

This reported troll’s comment suggests some malicious intents but also of taking a stance of being ‘right’ to do such behaviours. The troll may be a ‘professional’ but if this comment is indicative of troll behaviours then it suggests trolls do set out to aim to disrupt the Internet.

Common inflammatory trolling involves people attacking particular aspects of others, usually physical appearance or sexuality. The examples shown in Chapter One showed the type of posts that do this. Trolls reproduce stereotyping through words such as ‘nigga’ ‘faggot’ or ‘retard’ among many others. Back, Keith and Solomos (1998) argue that newsgroups disseminated racial hate and bullying, even recruitment, from white racist groups for example. Perry (2001) was critical of newsgroups arguing that they were a supportive and enabling place for racist trolls. While accurate, this still occurs on social media and other parts of the Internet today.

One significant study of a Usenet newsgroup illustrated how trolling became a concern because of its discriminatory hateful content the trolls were posting. Mitra (1996) studied the newsgroup soc.cult.indian where members would flame and troll each other because of the historical conflict between Pakistan and India. The conclusion was the posts were racially discriminatory, harassing and hurtful relying on people’s bodily characteristics and appearance as well as what both countries have done to each other in wars and conflicts. The study also showed how not moderating content gave trolls the ability to perpetuate stereotyping and racism. Studies like Mitra’s are important because they alert us to the seriousness of the issue, unpleasant though they can be to read.

A part of the history of trolling during this period was the anonymity of trolls; it was a practice not to use your real name online in newsgroups. Anyone could be a troll. This lead to The New Yorker’s, an American magazine, illustrator Peter Steiner drawing the famous cartoon ‘On the Internet no one knows you’re a dog’ where one dog sat on a chair in front of a computer, saying this quote to another dog sitting on the floor (Know Your Meme, 2013a). A study by Burkhalter (1999) confirmed that identity deception online was becoming standard troll practice, hence trolls could be anonymous and not be caught for inflicting disruption on others.

Burkhalter’s study reflected the dilemma of how to identify and deal with trolls who flamed soc and alt newsgroups. It is significant because he showed how race issues and hatred are reproduced online. In this extract, Burkhalter (1999, p. 70) documented an exchange between someone accused of posting racial comments in a Usenet group, a moderator and another member of the group, showing how trolls disrupt Internet sites:

Lee:> If you don’t like my dialog, then put me in your killfile rather than subject blacks to your pro-white agenda. Everybody here ain’t Toms.

Sam:> Please post your non-Tom list, so we know who’s OK and who isn’t. Why do I get the feeling that this is another white racist troll?

Toni:> You must have not been here, last time. [Lee] just got back. He’s got *lots* of problems, and when he airs them directly or not in this newsgroup, grab some popcorn and sit back- it’s *Showtime*!
Lee is accused by Sam of being a white racist troll due to previous postings but Lee says they are pro Black African-Americans, almost begging Sam to put the messages in a killfile. The point of this exchange is, if Lee was allegedly posting racist comments and claiming to be supportive of African-Americans, why is Lee deceiving the newsgroup? This point has interested researchers and lawmakers - why use a false identity to troll? Although it is obvious people do not want to be accountable for their trolling actions, using a false identity is simultaneously frowned upon yet commonly accepted. People want to say what they wish online without consequence.

Sexism and homophobia were also a part of Usenet trolling activity. The homophobic term ‘faggot’ became a commonly used vernacular, but was not always meant to identify homosexuals. Those that identified as women in Usenet or used female names were trolled because of this with sayings such as ‘get back in the kitchen’ and ‘bitch’ frequently used. During this period of time troll maliciousness and disruption escalated, and there grew recognition by those running Usenet that this was a serious problem. The diversity and frequency of trolling grew as people began to mimic troll behaviours and join in on abusing others.

**Trolls Get Creative**

An increase in the reported incidents of trolling and how they were morphing into new types of trolling accelerated as the technology that allowed more and new types of content to be posted grew. Usenet, especially the alt and soc newsgroups, were flooded with trolls trying to outdo each other. The other two types of trolling that emerged were: going into innocuous newsgroups and posting offensive material that flamed arguments and allowing hyperlinks (links to outside websites) and photos to be posted publically for all to see. This caused trolls to creatively prank other Usenet users. Four significant well-known incidents that show the extent trolls went to in shocking and disrupting are discussed: Goatse, Guy Macon, Moby and the Meow Brigade

**The Goatse Prank**

The photo of Goatse was significant because it became the first widely-known shock photo used by many Usenet and other trolls to shock people. Pornography was appearing on websites and could be exchanged with other users on Usenet. However, Goatse was different because of the way it was taken up by trolls to disrupt and shock people because of its graphic appearance.

Goatse was a website created in 1999 with several images of a man performing a bodily act of stretching his anus, graphically exposing it. The colour tone of the photo emphasises the redness of the anal area, the man being thin and almost gaunt, with his genitals also slightly exposed. Chen (2012) reported he had interviewed the man in 2012 who was Goatse proving he was a real person. Although the website Goatse appeared on was discontinued in 2004, the image can be still easily found on the World Wide Web.

The Goatse site was labelled what is commonly termed ‘Not Safe For Work’ (NSFW) acting as warning of adult content to those that wanted to view it (Bartlett, 2014). Its significance in the history of trolling was how trolls used Goatse to shock many people and place it in other newsgroups under false file names such as hello.jpeg. These encouraged the user to open the
photo thinking it was another type of photo. It also began the debate over what freedom of speech is because at that time the Internet was less regulated and censored than it is in 2016.

**The Insult File: Guy Macon’s Super Rant**

Individual trolls gained reputation for their activities. One who became well-known from Usenet’s computer newsgroups was Guy Macon, an electrical engineer living in Los Angeles. Although Macon’s flaming and trolling activities are now commonplace, especially on social media, a reply to one person’s view on the alt.os.linux.slackware newsgroup offended many for its tone and content.

Macon’s replies are considered a significant example of trolling because it exemplified the sarcasm and insults trolls do. His trolling occurred in 1997 in a newsgroup called alt.os.linux.slackware where Macon responded to a flame comment where the user had used capital letters in a message to magnify the insults. Macon’s response was considered to be one an example of effective comedic trolling as he responded with a very long insult response. This was hailed by trollers as an effective comeback to those who trolled others first. Macon archived the response and it viewable, as at 2017, on the World Wide Web.¹⁹

The reason why it is considered by trolls to be worthy of mention was the way he collected many of his insults over a long period of time and joined them together for one large insult. Some extracts from his message show how amusing the message was, with many parts of it used by trolls to insult others (Macon, n.d.):

> You swine. You vulgar little maggot. You worthless bag of filth. As we say in Texas, you couldn't pour water out of a boot with instructions printed on the heel. You are a canker, an open wound. I would rather kiss a lawyer than be seen with you. You took your last vacation in the Islets of Langerhans.

> You're a putrescent mass, a walking vomit. You are a spineless little worm deserving nothing but the profoundest contempt. You are a jerk, a cad, and a weasel. I take that back; you are a festering pustule on a weasel's rump. Your life is a monument to stupidity. You are a stench, a revulsion, a big suck on a sour lemon.

> You are a thick-headed trog. I have seen skeet with more sense than you have. You are a few bricks short of a full load, a few cards short of a full deck, a few bytes short of a full core dump, and a few chromosomes short of a full human. Worse than that, you top-post. God created houseflies, cockroaches, maggots, mosquitoes, fleas, ticks, slugs, leeches, and intestinal parasites, then he lowered his standards and made you. I take it back; God didn't make you. You are Satan's spawn. You are Evil beyond comprehension, half-living in the slough of despair. You are the entropy which will claim us all. You are a green-nostriled, crossed eyed, hairy-liveried, goisher kopf, inbred trout-defiler. You make Ebola look good.

He advises those who want to use it that for maximum disruption or insult copy and paste the whole text (Macon, n.d.).
For full effect, I *strongly* advise using the full insult file. Yes, I know that it goes on and on. That's what makes it funny. Trust me on this one. One insult is insulting. A *bunch* of insults are funny!

Although some view Macon’s message as comparatively tame or amusing compared to current trolls, it could be at best annoying to receive such a message when you visit an Internet site. Yet people were outraged with this response, posted on a public site (Derkeiler.com, 2005), indicative of how people viewed it as unacceptable trolling:

> -=overcomer.men@xxxxxxxxxxxxx wrote in message
> news:1134364727.939135.32465c@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
> > You admit by definition you Engineer (aka Guy Macon) are a troll. And
> > quite a persistent little troll at that. Everybody just look at:
> > Engineer’s troll posts as trolls themselves,
> >
> > 1] a post that induces lots of newbies and flamers to make themselves
> > look even more clueless than they already do,
> > 2] regularly posts specious arguments, flames or personal attacks to a
> > newsgroup,
> > discussion list, or in email for no other purpose than to annoy someone
> > or disrupt a discussion
> > 3] For example, one not infrequently sees the warning “Do not feed the
> > troll” as part of
> > a followup to troll postings.
> > There you go shooting yourself in the foot again! You post your
> > trollware to disrupt discussions and annoy readers! You’re a troll’s
> > troll,
> >
> > But the overweight, badly behaved, serial hypocrite, just cannot see it in
> > himself. ;[o;]

Figure 12. A response to Guy Macon’s super rant

This method of flooding is considered an effective troll strategy and is used by hackers to deface websites.

When Moby Asked for Advice on Cats

One incident can escalate into multiple people engaging in insults with each other when something becomes widespread. Trolls feed on the participation of involving many in their game, considering this an achievement. One well-known incident illustrating this was a posting by a Usenet user named Moby in 1993. It demonstrates how something as innocent as advice-seeking which begins as an innocent comment starts a flame war where trolls disrupt others who have had no involvement with the original message posting.

Moby, a male, was interested in a female that lived near him. He owned two cats that were both on heat and behaving as cats in season do leaving messes and smells around his apartment. He did not want to get rid of the cats but wanted to impress the woman. Posting in the alt.tasteless Usenet group, he asked for advice. The problem with him doing this was, although he was being serious in asking for advice he requested that others did not troll him for the comment. It was a serious and genuine question he was asking.
Trolls saw this as funny and posted humorous and cruel comments about what to do to the cats to get them to stop. As Bartlett (2014) reported, these messages included doing sexual acts with the cats, torturing and executing them and, one suggestion that offended many, burning them. Trolls from other news groups disrupted the alt.tasteless newsgroup by relentlessly posting comments in the newsgroup angering the members of alt.tasteless. Some members took their anger out on Moby for posting the message asking for advice. Usenet users have a stake and ownership in their newsgroup considering it their owned space. Generally, some Internet users are sensitive to seeing comments, in this case animal cruelty, and when they fight against the trolls they become upset when they are targeted (Nycyk, 2015).

**The Meow Brigade: Trolls Get Organised**

Another significant Usenet incident that occurred in 1997 showed how trolls began to get organised and collectively attack others. This was a group of students calling themselves the Meow Brigade or Meowers. The incident was fascinating for showing how trolling was no longer just a solo effort by one troll, but could be organised by one person into groups to attack others across Usenet.

In 1997 students at the prestigious Cambridge Harvard University in the United States found and joined a Usenet group that was no longer used. The newsgroup was called alt.fan.karl-malden.nose named after Karl Malden the American actor who was famous for his broken nose that after healing was bulbous in shape. The aim was to discuss what was happening on campus but several decided to troll other Usenet groups.

The trolling was done to ‘rile up stupid people’ (Bartlett, 2014, p. 28). The Harvard students planned which other Usenet groups to target and how they would target them. A newsgroup called alt.tv.beavis-n-butthead, named after the Music Television (MTV) cartoon characters, caught their attention. However, an unknown user found out and posted a warning in the alt.tv.beavis-n-butthead newsgroup the Harvard students’ plans for trolling them. This outraged the Usenet members in that group and they attacked the Harvard users first in pre-emptive strike, with insults and spamming messages making the group’s posts unreadable.

This flame war between them was vicious and long-lasting because the alt.tv.beavis-n-butthead newsgroup viewed the Harvard users as an Ivy League group of snobs because the Harvard students were using a higher level of written expression and grammar than what many Usenet members use. Lee (2016) tells of the story and how the Meow Brigade was born out of this Usenet conflict:

This article was posted directly to alt.tv.beavis-n-butthead. The regulars at that group, wondering what the world was coming to, scoffed at the notion of a couple of stuck-up geeks from Harvard calling them “ruffians”, and a few unpleasantries were exchanged. This crosspost-tossing attracted the attention of an unknown poster going by the name of Dontonio Wingfield. He/she discovered that one of the Harvard posters, Chuck Truesdell, placed “meow meow” (a reference to Henrietta Pussycat of Mr. Roger's Neighborhood fame) in many of his posts as a sort of calling card, as his initials spell “C.A.T.”. Matt Bruce picked up on this practice for one post (the quote at the top of this page), and someone, for some reason, took that article out of afk-mn, crossposting it to a dozen newsgroups as a
troll against the “Nosers” (as the Harvard students called themselves). Donto
Wingfield either instigated this troll, or was the first to reply to it...

Deflated by the trolling, the Harvard students left alt.fan.karl-malden.nose tired of the
ongoing war and abuse, but the Meowers did not stop trolling. A poster named Matt Bruce
was a target of the group only on the basis of a cross-posting of a message he did. When
Bruce tried to have it stopped by appealing in a message to the Meowers the trolling became
worse involving other newsgroups where the Meowers thought the Harvard students hung out
(Lee, 2016).

Lee (2016) explains again this trolling war, noting how many trolls in this Harvard/Meowers
war shared the same aim; to disrupt newsgroups because of grudge held against one group, the
Harvard students who were seen as being snobs and carried a superior attitude:

A person crossposting into 12 newsgroups, then claiming it a “joke”, when he
obviously had no sense of humor? This pissed off the Usenet Performance Artists
to no end. It was time to teach Matt Bruce - and the rest of his gang of snots - a
lesson. Suddenly, afk-mn, alt.college.college-bowl, and scores of other groups
were flooded to the gills and beyond with hundreds upon hundreds of huge meow
articles from all corners of Usenet. Cascades, ASCII cats, hundred-line “meow”
hello-world-type flood posts, and more were posted, reposted, munged, pureed,
and regurgitated all over the servers of the world. The Harvard kids’ protests were
quickly lost in the feline tidal wave. Every post by a Harvard snot would result in
fifty cascade follow-ups. alt.college.college-bowl, a known regular haunt of Matt
Bruce, was reduced to a smoldering crater, so inundated with meows that its
regulars could no longer use it. After a couple of weeks of this, Usenet in general
looked like Chernobyl, or the Marina district of San Francisco after the 1989
earthquake, or downtown Nagasaki the day after the fall of the Fat Man.

The Meowers’ trolling lasted over a year. Whenever they felt Harvard students may post they
would seek them out and post cat pictures and make insults at them in an effort to banish the
students. One other newsgroup, alt.college.college-bowl, was the one group that received the
most trolling abuse over a long period of time. Trolls do succeed in making people weary of
visiting sites. In this case they did not stop people using Usenet, but they did disrupt it to a
level where others would stop using the newsgroups.

Trolling during the Usenet period was created and grew there despite a more limited audience
then today. This selected history of trolling discussed in this section was primarily about the
media of the Bulletin Board System and Usenet newsgroups. During this time the World
Wide Web significantly improved and new sites such as Geocities increased the troll’s target
range as they explored new online environments to toll in. Chat programs like mIRC and
Yahoo became real time mediums where people would be online at the same time. Multi-
User Domains (MUD) and Multi-User Domain Object Orientated (MOO) were precursors to
more sophisticated gaming and interaction sites like Second Life.

**Trolling in Web 2.0 and More Sophisticated Internet Environments**

Web 2.0 brought new functionality to users allowing easier use of software to create and post
more content. It brought with it better, user-friendlier social media sites such as MySpace and
Facebook. Social media, with it now available on mobile devices, has become an ingrained
habit. It also brought about a comfort in disclosure of opinions and aspects of people’s lives that would usually not be shared. This challenges many aspects of freedom of speech and caused concerns about privacy. For example, Solove (2007) cautioned people to be careful of what they post online. Clark and Roberts (2010) have proved that employers will search out your details and hire someone, or not, based on what is posted online.

Trolling in Web 2.0 and the current Internet is supported by the ease of setting up an anonymous account and generally much easier to learn and use software. Facebook and Twitter are especially popular social media sites trolls use. Although trolls physical addresses can be found through a telecommunications company providing law enforcement with an Internet Service Provider addresses (ISP), trolls will still be brazen and not worry about being caught. There are Virtual Private Networks (VPN) and software to disguise your ISP addresses. Trolls are increasingly being found and prosecuted by law enforcement agencies worldwide creating fake profiles to find trolls especially on chat lines and other interactive media.

The following examples of Web and Internet sites demonstrate the historical development of the troll from the prankster type to the malicious type.

**Virtual Communities, Chat Lines and 4chan**

People seek to share information, have their opinions heard and validated and seek support and comfort from a community. It is no different on the Internet. Unlike physical communities, managing issues of abuse and violence have the barrier that cyberspace is not a physical face-to-face space. When combined with the belief that many value freedom of speech, the problem of managing trolls can be a large problem that may not be solvable. Trolling in virtual communities and on chat lines is common, yet by contrast it is tolerated in groups such as 4chan. Being able to interact on a wider scale appealed to trolls as they had more space to type messages, could do more file uploading, hyperlink to other websites and post higher quality photos. These three Internet sites are now discussed.

**Virtual Communities and Trolls**

The term virtual community has a technical and sociological meaning. They are usually created from propriety or free software, comprising graphical interfaces and multimedia capabilities so people can interact with each other (van Dijk, 1997). Rheingold (1993) describes the virtual community as social aggregations that emerge from the Internet when people continue discussions long enough and with enough emotion to form real human relationships within cyberspace. People receive socio-emotional support and exchange information through the sharing of experiences and opinion (Burnett, 2000).

Although the ties between people using them are not always strong, meaning people come and go from them, they are meaningful to many (Benkler, 2006). It is this idea that helps understand why trolling is discouraged in them as they are seen as spaces to share secret and private information with others. Virtual communities usually manage trolls much better than other Internet sites as many communities are moderated with rules and punishments for breaking them. Banning trolls is easy, although permanently banning them without knowing their ISP address is difficult. Figure 13 is an example of a virtual community which is a game community called Spacetrace:
Trolls have a more difficult time disrupting and destroying these communities. The interactions and allowable subject matter discussed in them depends on the type of behaviours the community's owners will allow. However, there are communities where abuse, flaming and trolling are encouraged or not dealt with. It further depends on how the other users of the community feel about the trolling. Some may not care and enjoy hitting back at trolls and engaging in arguments.

**Chat Lines**

A chat line, also known as chat rooms, is an Internet site where two or more people meet to talk with each other by text and in some cases by voice. The sophistication of these grew with more functionality such as posting hyperlinks, photos and web cameras (webcams). Trolls have different motivations for disrupting chat lines ranging from general disruption to shocking and annoying other chatters (the term for those who chat in what are called rooms) or may have a grudge with the owner of the room or someone in the room.

There are many chat lines still on the Internet though in 2016 the decrease in them and the move to phone apps to communicate has become dominant. A famous early chat line which still exists is My Internet Relay Chat or mIRC. Also since the mid 1990’s Paltalk has been a popular choice. Figure 14 shows the interface of a mIRC chat room while Figure 15 shows the interface of a Paltalk room, displaying the types of conversations that take place in them:
As this figure shows you can see who is in the room even if they are not typing, who enters and leaves the room and, in the case of chat member ReaPeR, that they changed their name to CHAMELEON. As with Paltalk and other chat lines, people can take their conversations into private rooms when the name is double clicked on and an invitation appears. People can also block others from contacting them and reading what the blocked person types in the room. By contrast, Paltalk’s interface has a different layout and allows music and video to be played in the room, as Figure 15 shows:

*Figure 14. mIRC chat line interactions in one room (Adair, 2014)*

As this figure shows you can see who is in the room even if they are not typing, who enters and leaves the room and, in the case of chat member ReaPeR, that they changed their name to CHAMELEON. As with Paltalk and other chat lines, people can take their conversations into private rooms when the name is double clicked on and an invitation appears. People can also block others from contacting them and reading what the blocked person types in the room. By contrast, Paltalk’s interface has a different layout and allows music and video to be played in the room, as Figure 15 shows:
Chat lines are synchronous, meaning being online, or in real time, in the chat room at the same time as others communicating with each other. It is the immediacy that appealed to trolls for it offered new ways of disrupting and seeing how much damage they can do. One strategy that annoys chat line users is when trolls take out multiple accounts and use them to troll several chat lines.

Disrupting chat rooms is a main strategy trolls do. Two examples of this are from Yahoo and a personal observation I witnessed while a member of Paltalk. Firstly, Yahoo removed its chat rooms, which were reported as being profitable for them, because of trolls and also people grooming younger users for sexual purposes. The constant disruption of conversations did make it difficult to continue reasonable onscreen discussions, but spammers, who would come into the room and post advertising links and product placements, also made the rooms difficult to use (Carpenter, n.d.). The second example is a personal story observing disruption on chat lines when trolls try to pit chatters against each other and creating fake profiles of chatters already in the rooms. This occurred on Paltalk. The administrators of the spiritual room came under attack from trolls from other spiritual rooms. Part of their strategy was to make fake profiles with offensive titles or the same name, and type rumours about other chatters.

These incidents were brought to the attention of researches seeking to find out why trolls act as they do. Suler (2004) was beneficial in trying to understand troll and other negative online behaviours. What was previously researched was trying to understand bullying behaviours. Relevant to these behaviours is the concept of relational aggression, which is important to discuss because it helps us understand why people may in the physical world behave well towards others, yet become mean and hateful online, even towards strangers.
A formal definition of relational aggression is stated by Crick and Grotpeeter (1995) in their studies of childhood development and the negative effects of bullying. They state that it is a behaviour undertaken that intends to harm, as trolls do, by damaging and either doing, or doing at the same time, manipulating relationships with others (Crick & Grotpeeter, 1995). It is covert behaviour and can be akin to gossip by spreading rumours to others in private that are then spread to others. This happened in Paltalk where even though most had not met each other, they took sides much like a schoolyard or group can to in order to disrupt the group and try to shut down chat lines.

The goal of a chat line is to bring together those with common interests to discuss them or socialise in a particular way. For example, one Paltalk chat room may be G rated allowing talk but no swear words, while another may be R rated and allows people to swear but in a limited way, such as not insulting others but in everyday chat conversation that is approved. Trolling aims to damage this goal, as Crick & Grotpeeter (1995, p. 710) illustrate in their theory of relational aggression:

> We propose that, when attempting to inflict harm on peers (i.e., aggressing), children do so in ways that best thwart or damage the goals that are valued by their respective gender peer groups.

Trolls may have grudges, but what will be seen in further discussions of troll history after the year 2000, and seen in Usenet, even jokes and spamming can inflict damage. With chat lines trolls can be organised and inflict damage on the room even if the owner of the room consistently bans them from entering. This is important in troll history because relational aggression became more powerful as a troll strategy. Ponsford (2007, p. 22) makes an excellent summary of this situation about electronic-based aggression such as cyberbullying and trolling:

> There are major differences between the communication used in face-to-face instances and electronic instances. In face-to-face communication, nonverbal codes are an important part of decoding messages. While all face-to-face communication involves intentional and unintentional nonverbal messages, relational aggression often relies heavily on NVC (non-verbal communication) and less so on verbal statements. This leaves messages more open to interpretation, yet can be very powerful indications of intent.

I agree that the relational aggression, and passive aggressive subtle behaviours, of people do disrupt and damage chat line relationships and other Internet sites by the power they have to be taken seriously. I do not agree that this is primarily female behaviour especially online. With nicknames we do not know the gender marker and I have seen users of the chat rooms with male nicknames behave in such ways. The chat line allowed the troll an immediate audience. For that it is significant and it continues today, but with more awareness of this type of trolling, chat line users can manage trolls better.

**4chan**

When Usenet and other newsgroups use declined and censorship and moderation of the Internet increased, users of these sites turned to alternative Internet sites to post more freely. One was founded by Christopher Poole in 2003 called 4chan. It is defined by the site itself as (4chan, 2016a):
4chan is a simple image-based bulletin board where anyone can post comments and share images. There are boards dedicated to a variety of topics, from Japanese animation and culture to videogames, music, and photography. Users do not need to register an account before participating in the community.

There are 66 image-boards to post in to ranging from Interests to Video Game Discussion and the Adult and Miscellaneous Not Safe for Work boards. Users of it do not need to register a username or give an email address to post. However, when starting a new thread the first person must post an image.

The history of 4chan is substantial dating back to 1995 with online Japanese Imageboards where users posted disturbing images in anime form, and were often pornographic. The history of 4chan is complex and beyond the scope of this book, yet is vital to understanding why trolling became a popular pastime. A recommended reference to read about its history is Bibliotheca Anonoma (2015)\textsuperscript{11}.

The trolling on 4chan became well-known as one that promotes a lack of accountability for content and is mostly free of moderation and censorship. Two of their rules for use prevent the types of inter-board conflicts that Usenet had and also set boundaries on acceptable behaviour if one wants to post in it (4chan, 2016b):

1. You will not post any of the following outside of /b/: Trolls, flames, racism, off-topic replies, uncalled for catchphrases, macro image replies, indecipherable text (example: “lol u tk him 2da bar?”), anthropomorphic (“furry”) or grotesque (“guro”) images, post number GETs (“dubs”), or loli/shota pornography.

2. You will not post or request personal information (“dox”) or calls to invasion (“raids”). Inciting or participating in cross-board (intra-4chan) raids is also not permitted

It attracted people who felt it allowed them to troll freely without consequences. The two main events in its history around trolling is the /b/ board which was criticised by the mass media for its extreme violent and pornographic content and the link with hacker group Anonymous where it was fostered by 4chan. The /b/ board was the first board created for 4chan and is the most popular board on it. Users post many controversial and offensive images, make fun of people, their appearance and situations the people are in, have posted racist and sexist comments and photos of violence and gore. It has minimal rules with the main thing banned being child exploitation images. You must be over 18 years of age to join but this is rarely enforced. (Know Your Meme, 2015b)

Feinberg (2014) reflected the feeling of many who were horrified at the /b/ board’s reputation:

4chan’s /b/ board in particular, being the spiritual successor to alt.tasteless, fostered this toxic mentality that if you don’t actually believe in the horrible things you’re saying that it magically becomes justified.

Users can be banned from using it as the administrators see fit, yet a glimpse on the board sees much that may warrant banning but no action is taken. The creation of the Internet meme
was attributed to this board; a meme is a virally-transmitted captured photo often ridiculing human behaviour that is used by trolls for sarcasm (Gil, 2016).

It is difficult to legally prosecute those who use 4chan; however, two cases where this has happened will be discussed. To see what trolling on 4chan looks like, three examples are presented covering themes of racism, sexism and homophobia, commonly used. The judgement of them as offensive is subjective, but they do illustrate the type of trolling that can disrupt and offend:

![Figure 16. Trolling about the Jewish Star (Meme Center, 2011)](image1)

![Figure 17. Pushing woman back into sea (Help Feed the Troll, n.d.a)](image2)
These examples typify troll content posting that appears in 4chan. The board is also a gathering place for organising trolling attacks on others as it removes the need to contact each other by email. Being anonymous can prevent legal prosecution. One case was of a lawyer, Parry Aftab, who specialised in cyberbullying cases. In 2010, Chen (2010) reported that Aftab experienced harassment in these forms: his websites were hacked and shut down, wiredsafety.org and aftab.com, they prank called her, vandalized her Wikipedia entry and Google-bombed with the words “Parry Aftab Arrested for Child Molestation” that appeared in Google searches first, damaging her reputation.

A second example was reported by Alfonso III (2013) where 4chan members actively trolled with comments and photos the memorial sites of Hannah Smith, a 14 year old bullying victim. On the /b/ board information was posted where to find Smith’s memorial sites. It became a competition to post offensive comments. It disrupted the genuine outpouring of grief. 4chan marks a substantial turning point in the history of trolling. It remains a highly visited site which is controversial and has proven itself to be a place of trolling.

**Blogs**

Blogs are web logs, much like personal online diaries that are accessible by the public and are created by individuals and companies that are said to reflect the personality of the author (Webopedia, 2016a). The author, also called the blogger, has control over content posted on it and can delete comments from those who post on it. As boyd (2006) states, the blogger, or speaker, controls the style and public access to the blog and has authority to allow comments; this sense of ownership is a sense of personal space the blogger displays to the world.

Blog trolls are usually anonymous. They troll by posting comments in the blog’s comments section. Figure 19 from the blog The Natural Haven Bloom (2014) shows a troll’s response to a comment the blogger made about castor oil that, although the blogger found amusing, is still a troll response in how it detracts from the blog’s discussion:
The advice given to bloggers to manage trolls includes (Faith, 2016; Cobb, 2015):

- Ignore them
- Use humour to diffuse the situation
- Respond to trolls with facts
- Report and block them

Blogs were frequently targeted by trolls and could often ruin them for reading and interaction.

**Social Media**

As the public embraced social media, trolling increased and trolls became viewed as negative malicious psychopaths. Social media has a broad understanding to many, but an appropriate definition of it is from Kaplan and Haenlein (2010):

Social media has been defined as “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, pg. 61). Web 2.0 describes the way that both programmers and users work collaboratively to use the World Wide Web as a platform to continually modify content and applications.

It is this exchange of information and interaction on social media sites that makes it social. Unless you set your account settings to private your social media can be viewed by anyone with access to the Internet. Google, and other search engines, can take your Facebook postings and tweets and index them so you can be found in a search engine. In Chapter One examples of Twitter and Facebook trolling were given. These will now be expanded upon with other social media examples.

Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have developed together, with MySpace created before the other three. It is important to differentiate between the three main social media sites to put in context how they work as sites of trolling. Morrissey and Yell (2016, p. 31) state the characteristics of these are:
1. Twitter is a microblogging site where people choose to follow other Twitter account holders.

2. Facebook is a networking site governed by chosen privacy settings where people choose to invite people into their lives.

3. YouTube is a video uploading site which functions as a repository for content created by organisations and individuals.

Trolls are often more anonymous on YouTube than other social media sites. How we judge them to be trolls is still being debated as the term is applied to many who are just posting one or two vitriolic comments. However, these do disrupt, offend and cause hurt; therefore they qualify as trolls. The major events showing the history of the evolution of trolling on social media are now discussed.

**MySpace**

Although Friendster and Live Journal were early incarnations of an online social network, MySpace (www.myspace.com) was the first popular social networking website. MySpace, though still exists, was extensively used during the years before its decline. It was used by musicians including famous ones for the promotion of their music. It marked the joining of people together in a chosen network, with people friending and follow each other in a more open online environment.

MySpace was attacked by trolls and spammers to the point where people abandoned the site, although Facebook was seen as responsible for less use of it. Spam may be automated, but it is still trolling as it disrupted interchanges between people. As Grzybowski (2014) stated, although corporate and a redesign of the MySpace site contributed, it was the use of fake accounts and less site security than exists on Facebook, resulting in paedophiles trolling it for victims (Minaya, 2006). Figure 20 shows a troll spam message on a user's page that became a common occurrence for users to endure:

*Figure 20. MySpace trolling by spam (Wallis, 2008)*
Trolls were said to have destroyed MySpace, though it still is in existence as at 2017. It also serves as an example of how people will abandon a site if trolling becomes unmanageable.

**Facebook**

Facebook (www.facebook.com) has become the social media platform of choice by millions of users worldwide. It is a social networking site (SNS) which connects users with friends, family, interests and others from any part of the world, posting photos, messages, sharing links and exchanging information (Beal, 2016b). It is also available as a phone app or tablet (mobile computing) app. Trolls do make fake accounts but have also comment under their public, real name.

The history of Facebook can be divided into several events beginning in October 23 2003. As a short background historical explanation, the site Social Media Today (Zeevi, 2013) reports these events occurred:

- Mark Zuckerberg is the official founder, although others became involved later, at Harvard University in the United States
- He launched a site called Facemash.com which rated female students as ‘hot’ or ‘not’ and hacked into Harvard’s student ID database to obtain the photos
- On January 11 2004 he registered Facebook as an internet domain name after the idea for the name was debated by him and others because it showed peoples’ faces
- Despite the outrage over the rating of student’s looks, people liked the idea of being connected around the university using one web-based system
- A movie called The Social Network was released in 2010 documenting Zuckerberg’s story although he has since stated it was inaccurate and hurtful (Batty & Johnston, 2014; Shontell, 2014)

Morrissey and Yell (2016) state, Facebook is a directed friendship model of interaction with settings adapted to the person’s choice with public pages meaning everyone can see them. These are used by a person, an organisation or a public figure.

Some statistics about Facebook as at July 2016 were reported by Zephoria Digital Marketing (2016) show the scale of it. These are:

- As at 2016 the estimated number of Facebook users is 950 million
- 500 million people log onto Facebook daily
- Those aged 25 to 34 make up 29.7% of users although older users over 50 are growing
- More females 53% than males 47% use Facebook
- 300 million photos a day are uploaded on Facebook
- Average time of visits per person is 20 minutes
- Thursdays and Fridays have the highest days of posting although it is unclear why
- Five new profiles are created every second of the day

Facebook also has the ability to stop trolls but it is subjective if this is working effectively or not.

A common form of trolling is the use of sarcasm and humorous replies to peoples’ posts. Trolls can pick one target and concentrate on that or visit many pages and troll. For example, trolls have targeted high profile singer Taylor Swift but it is likely she does not read such comments. However, it does disrupt because some members will fight with each other. News media sites can have trolls post across various pages especially on controversial issues such as marriage equality, left and right politics, abuse of animals and children and religion. Some pages, such as newspaper Facebook pages, do not delete troll comments even if they contravene Facebook’s community standards.

These three examples show the diverse nature of trolling on Facebook. They are considered trolling because they potentially disrupt, hurt and offend. The first shows a troll who consistently targets one Internet user called Brendan by a troll named Robert. Although the names have been blocked out by the website that reported this, it is clear that Brendan’s responses may be offensive but Brendan is reacting with annoyance with Robert’s sarcastic trolling:

*Figure 21. Interaction between a troll and a Facebook user (Gatollari, 2015)*
The second is an attempt by a troll to satirise a serious environmental issue by posting a joke on a Facebook page that advocates the banning of the clubbing of baby seals:

Figure 22. Troll joke comment (Help Feed the Troll, n.d.c)

The third example is pranking trolling and can be annoying to those customers seeking legitimate answers to their inquiries:

Figure 23. Fake customer service representative trolling (Nextshark, 2015)
Facebook has provided many opportunities for people to become trolls. In historical terms of troll behaviours, it has been the social media platform which fosters this through ease of use and the ability to be anonymous or not. However, it has much greater control over troll comments than Twitter, where trolling is more rife and vicious.

**Twitter**

As discussed previously, Twitter (www.twitter.com) is a microblogging service limited to 140 characters but as at 2017 has 280. It was created by Jack Dorsey, Biz Stone, Evan Williams and Noah Glass in 2006, launching in July that year. Trolls frequently launch attacks on people, although many politicians and celebrities, though they tend not to be overly concerned with such attacks. Nevertheless, trolling on Twitter has concerned many and putting a comment on Twitter can be seen by an unlimited audience number and be reproduced in the media.

Twitter trolling comes from one user tweeting something controversial. For example, Justine Sacco, a Public Relations Executive, tweeted in 2013 when she was flying to South Africa ‘Going to Africa. Hope I don’t get AIDS. Just kidding. I’m White!’ This caused an outrage and was reported in the media. As a result she was dismissed from her position and admonished by her father who was from Africa (Bates, 2013). Trolls created fake accounts to mock her, such as LOL Justine Sacco, calling her a ‘PR Disaster’ and ‘Racist Idiot’ (Bates, 2013).

The following Twitter posts qualify as trolling because they may cause offense and hurt as they are about sensitive issues. A difference is Patton Oswalt is not being anonymous, but CloudedByAgony is. It also highlights the willingness for trolls to be public and identifiable. If the tweets are public they can be seen by anyone and reproduced in the mass media. This is why many Twitter users get in legal and reputational problems because of such trolling. Figure 24 is a tweet by American comedian Patton Oswalt that was deemed to be trolling due to its comment about the sensitive issue of the Holocaust:

![Figure 24. Patton Oswalt troll tweet (Evans, 2013)](image-url)
Even if this was meant as a joke it is potentially disruptive and offensive. People retweeted the comments and responded with anger to it. In example two Sharna Bremner, from a South Australian university, tweeted a joke about LOL (Laugh Out Loud), and was at the time of writing setting up an organisation to end campus rape. Here is an interaction she had with a troll who tweeted that men were being ignored in her setting up of the anti-rape group:

![Sharna Bremner's interaction with a troll](image)

*Figure 25. Sharna Bremner’s interaction with a troll (Bremner, 2015)*

Twitter allows fast posting and a mass audience for tweets such as these. There are increasing court cases worldwide about tweets. However, in 2015 the CEO of Twitter, Dick Costolo, was reported as admitting Twitter was not being proactive in its rules to stop trolling (The Guardian, 2015):

In the memo, obtained on Thursday by The Verge, Costolo writes: “I’m frankly ashamed of how poorly we’ve dealt with this issue during my tenure as CEO. It’s absurd. There’s no excuse for it. I take full responsibility for not being more aggressive on this front. It’s nobody else’s fault but mine, and it’s embarrassing.”

“It’s no secret and the rest of the world talks about it every day”, Costolo continues. “We lose core user after core user by not addressing simple trolling issues that they face every day.”
However, as Perlow (2016) commented, with over 300 million users it is difficult to ban every troll even if sophisticated computer software tools were introduced to attempt to stop trolls.

Twitter is considered to have a serious troll issue that is almost insolvable. The advantage to using Twitter to troll is anonymity and having multiple accounts, but it is also its simplicity and the ability to post quickly to a much wider audience than other social media. Twitter trolls have the ability to not disrupt a few users or a global audience by the use of just 140 characters. It also exists as an example of the problems of free speech and what boundaries are needed to manage trolling.

**YouTube**

YouTube (www.youtube.com) is video sharing social media platform where people watch videos and upload videos. It was founded in 2005 by Steve Chen, Chad Hurley and Jawed Karim, though as at 2017 Search Engine Company Google owns it. YouTube has over a billion users, almost a third of all people on the Internet, and people spend on average 40 minutes on it (YouTube, 2016). It began as a video sharing site mostly loading personal videos from the public. Now music, movies, television shows, educational materials and many other videos exist, some in full violation of copyright law. As Burgess and Green (2009) state, it is a participatory culture because people can leave comments on videos and interact with each other over them.

Trolls need to make extra efforts to join YouTube as it requires a valid email address to set up an account to post comments. YouTube has community guidelines which do address preventing hate speech. In a study I did on YouTube flaming (Nycyk, 2016) I found that the comments trolls make are subjective in their intent to offend, but trolls are rarely banned and use frequent hate speech words such as faggot and many racist terms such as monkey and nigger. My study was verified by Marwick and Miller (2014) who found my assertions to be correct, and women who are represented as users or in YouTube videos are especially targeted by trolls.

YouTube can be controlled by the video uploader who can disable comments and remove offensive ones. High profile people, politicians, criminals, sexuality and gender, religion, online gaming and celebrity tend to have higher amounts of trolling. Trolls particularly disrupt discussions between people that appear civil and reasonable. They will also start arguments and join in on defaming and insulting other users and the subjects and persons who appear in the video. Some are for amusement, yet many are highly defamatory, offensive and are often hate speech against others.

Figure 25 displays trolling because the discussion in response to a YouTube video is being disrupted by a troll named FullyBiscuit that racially insults people in China and Japan:
Note that the person responding the troll swore and was flagged as spam even though they were just reacting to the troll’s comments. This demonstrates how far members of YouTube can be annoyed by troll comments and will engage with them.

Trolls can also incite people to respond to subjects and people in the videos by causing flames. Flame comments are computer-mediated comments that are impolite, aggressive, insensitive and often directed at groups more so than individuals (Kaufer, 2000). It is like ganging up on others in the YouTube comments section. For example, a video criticising feminist Germaine Greer’s comments about fathers and daughters on a television show begins with constructive criticisms until trolls begin an attack on Greer’s character (intmensorg, 2011) which these comments show:

This old boiler was a right old slag in the 60’s had more pricks than a second hand dart board, more cocks than a second hand fairground rifle, and now she’s a sad lonely old bag desperate to shock people to get attention will only get worse.

Figure 26. Trolling on YouTube disrupting a conversation (Help Feed the Troll, n.d.d)
Fatherless girls are statistically more likely to get a teen pregnancy. This old hag is a hateful bigot.

Just to clarify: Greer is NOT an old man?
The jury is still out.

This type of trolling is common on YouTube and can be hurtful, although it is unclear if the celebrity or other famous people do read them.

Another example is shown by Morrissey and Yell (2016) about Australian actress and comedian Magda Szubanski who in 2012 publically disclosed her homosexuality. Although it was well-known before that year, this was done on a public current affairs show called The Project. Morrissey and Yell (2016) claimed that trolls were not concerned about her confession but rather that she is a lesbian and that coming out as one is ‘concerning’. YouTube, unlike Twitter, allows longer comments. Therefore, it allows trolls to be more calculated in structuring their trolling responses. Morrissey and Yell (2016, p. 32) describe this trolling about Szubanski in this way suggesting that trolls are deliberate in their aim to cause distress about an issue:

The trolls were primarily concerned with the existence of any lesbians in their midst, which is evident in their utterances that predominantly took the grammatical form of descriptive third person statements – they were about Magda (or gays/lesbians in general) rather than being addressed directly to her. The only time the second person (‘you’) was used in a statement was to issue a generalised (future) threat to supporters of homosexuality (‘Magda is going to hell and so are all you fag enablers’), albeit one not to be carried out by the speaker but by an unnamed higher power. Some included the use of the first person to project the speaker’s opinion (‘Wow I’m shocked… NOT’, and ‘I notice lots of fat cake eaters are carpet munchers’).

Historically, YouTube is a supportive social media site for trolling as comments can be removed by marking them as spam or videos removed. However, as YouTube has grown into a site used by over a billion people this is increasingly difficult to manage. Yet it is unlikely if you uploaded a personal video that you would be the victim of a troll attack, though even harmless videos of cats and dogs have been trolled.

Reddit

Reddit (Reddit.com) is a social aggregation website or social news site where users share content in a community called a SubReddit, vote on the postings and discuss issues (Reddit Inc, 2016a). The SubReddits contain links specifically catering for a specific interest (LeClair, n.d). An example of one of thousands is r/politics. Users can post mostly any comments and links they want although it differs from Usenet and 4chan in that you must have an account and a nickname to use it. It is used frequently with almost 15 million people using the site in 216 (Reddit Inc, 2016b). Its logo is an alien named Snoo.

The site has many moderators in a system called Reddiquette which is a set of rules every Reddit user must obey with many codes of behaviour. Although there are global rules for the site each SubReddit will post further rules about what you can and cannot post. There are
controls placed on trolling, as this extract from Reddit (2016c) shows in the Reddiquette section, governing user behaviours on what cannot be done when posting:

- Ask people to Troll others on Reddit, in real life, or on other blogs/sites. We aren’t your personal army.

- Conduct personal attacks on other commenters. ‘Ad hominem’ (as the term is used on Reddit) and other distracting attacks do not add anything to the conversation

- Start a flame war. Just report and “walk away”. If you really feel you have to confront them, leave a polite message with a quote or link to the rules, and no more

- Insult others. Insults do not contribute to a rational discussion. Constructive Criticism, however, is appropriate and encouraged

- Troll. Trolling does not contribute to the conversation

The first rule in this list is interesting because it is the exact opposite of Usenet and 4chan’s anti-trolling policies. Trolling was organised in these Internet sites but Reddit will not allow it, banning users for doing this. This demonstrates that the site is committed to a code of conduct and civility.

In 2012 news site journalist Adrian Chen broke Reddit’s rule of doxxing a troll by publishing the real name and living location of a beloved user and extreme troll called Violentacrez, a beloved user and extreme troll (Milner, 2013). This user had been posting images of young girls on r/Jailbait and of women in public taken without consent on r/Creepshots. Someone had become so incensed at his offensive behaviours and reported him, which is usually not what Reddit users do.

Despite Reddit’s enforced Reddiquette policy, Sankin (2014) at the Daily Dot news site interviewed administrators who claim Reddit is as unmanageable as Usenet. Trolls attempt to mimic 4chan and continue to push boundaries of acceptable use of Reddit. This type of issue and the animosity and harassment on it, especially towards females, has long been a problem across the Internet. In 1993 Smith (1999) analysed the conflict she experienced on MicroMUSE, an early gaming site, showing how moderators went to great lengths to censure and punish those players who were trolling other members. To do this moderators must not only have access to site tools to ban and restrict access, but must have the same commitment to prevent trolling.

According to Sankin (2014) this did not happen on Reddit and still continues. The problem was illustrated by his interview with a female Reddit administrator. The SubReddit r/rapes is foremost to discuss surviving rape and sexual assault. However trolls would post highly inappropriate messages. Figure 26 importantly illustrate the seriousness of this issue and also that trolls cross a boundary by victim blaming those who were raped:
Figure 27. Troll comments on Reddit posted in r/rape SubReddit (Sankin, 2014)

Unlike Smith’s (1999) and Dibbell’s (1998) studies of moderators’ actions to manage this type of trolling, Sankin (2014) claims that Reddit did not do anything to stop these according to a Reddit user Waitwhatnow:

Waitwhatnow recently reached out to a Reddit administrator for help dealing with an anonymous user who was repeatedly sending rape and murder threats to a sexual assault survivor and member of the r/rape community.

“I got no reply. Nothing was done,” waitwhatnow recalls. “I had about four or five users since then reporting similar problems, with screenshots, and I just had to tell them to block the person and that I’d ban the perpetrator from r/rape, but that was the best I could do. ... Apparently, protecting the anonymous commenter’s ability to terrorize an innocent person is far more important to Reddit than user safety.”

Although this type of trolling may not cause users to go elsewhere, in this case many left Reddit. This example shows how the disruption of trolling can cause this to happen. Bad behaviours such as this are expected on 4chan but not Reddit. Therefore, although the intent of such messages is unclear, they show how these types of comments and content are detached and dissociated from one’s suffering (Milner, 2013).

The following three examples show the diversity of trolling on Reddit. They are both types of pranking for amusement and malevolence, displaying the disruptive and hurtful manner trolls operate on Reddit.

**Example 1: Reddit**

In this SubReddit users post a photo of anything and ask others to alter the photo using Adobe photo editor program Photoshop. Reddit does name this SubReddit r/PhotoshopTrolls. There are rules to what can be done such as no depiction of children, but the results can be made not safe for work and are forms of trolling as it is unclear if the human beings altered in the images gave permission or not to be photoshopped for ridicule.
In this publicly posted Photoshop troll example a young bearded man wearing a cap is photographed against a white wall giving thumbs up on both hands. The photo suggests the subject was just photographed in a casual manner somewhere indoors:

![Image](image-url)

Figure 28. Before image of a man (Reddit, 2016d)

This is posted in the SubReddit and other users are invited to alter it and repost, but some choose to not post it back into the SubReddit and find a link on an image hosting service such as Imgur. However, these links are public and can be seen by anyone even if they are not a member of Reddit.

Figure 28 show a result changing the context of the photo and in turn although many may find this trolling amusing, it can change someone’s perception of that person. The man has had photoshopped onto his t-shirt a slogan saying he is ok with being gay, with further inserted images of a photo of naked men behind him and a man at his crotch level giving oral sex.
Figure 29. Altered Photoshop image of a man (Reddit, 2016d)

This may cause distress to someone if they do not want such an image to appear on the Internet.

**Example 2: Good Girl Gina Meme**

In a study of the language of trolling on Reddit, Merritt (2012) analysed troll interactions especially what were considered sexist trolling. The meme here is of a young woman considered pretty. The caption suggests that women who are overweight behave differently to women who look like the one in the meme:

Figure 30. Merritt reproduction of a meme suggestions fat women want attention

Merritt (2012, p. 100) argues well why this is trolling:

The poster then goes on to make a series of outrageous accusations against all women, some of which are opinions and some of which are quantifiably untrue. The message claims that a majority of women are overweight, and in this context
it can be inferred that this means unattractive as well, and that all women are starved for attention. The user then makes a relatively illogical argument that attractive women have no hardships, which causes them to feel insecurity, and seek affirmation by pretending to feel unattractive.

While this comment may not appear to be a troll at first glance (a quality of a successful troll), it possesses certain attributes that indicate that it most likely is a troll. The first of these is the exaggeration of the claims made, past the point of being unrealistic. The second is that the troll is not targeted at a user, but rather at the content of a user’s previous post, whereas a flame would most likely contain attacks on users within the conversation. Another indication that this is a troll is the fact that, despite the opening flurry of belligerent language, the user BTK_Killer does not come back to post again, indicating that perhaps the outcome of the argument or the point being made were not the goal of the post, but rather the baiting of users into posting similarly combative comments.

Her analysis is accurate because the trolls try to bait others to react with outrage and try to encourage other trolls to post on Reddit in support and agreement. This displays the trolling nature of the site in that it disputes with content that clearly goes against the respectful content Reddit prefers be posted.

**Example 3: Trolling Trolls on Reddit**

Reddit has a SubReddit called r/Worstof where those that post on Reddit have their posts in any SubReddit copied and placed in it. The aim is to show other users, and the public, the trolling behaviours that Reddit tries to discourage. In essence, it is trolling trolls and although its effectiveness is unknown, it is interesting as a prevention and awareness strategy. Figure 30 shows an example of this type of trolling:

![Figure 31](image_url)

*Figure 31. Reddit trolling of trolls (Ahmed, 2013)*

Reddit represents a turning point in troll history in that trolling is both controlled and left unmoderated despite a wide range of rules for the site and for the SubReddits within them. As Shelton, Lo and Nardi (2015) state, Reddit being an anonymous site is like a carnival space where it is a site of political incorrectness, disinhibited humor, and while its inherent structure
as a content filter can be somewhat limiting, Reddit has a strong reputation for promoting free speech online. It shows a midpoint that people want free speech but will challenge troll behaviour, but also shows how entrenched disruptive and hurtful trolling exists on the Internet.

**Online Gaming, Virtual Worlds and Second Life**

The growth of online gaming has been significant as millions of users used a number of ways to online game in many types of game environments and virtual worlds. Gaming is defined as a digital game needing a live network connection, played on the Internet, mobile phones, peer-to-peer networks and phone apps (Pegi Online, 2007). Those who use it are called gamers who use Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs) that are online role-playing multiplayer games where thousands of gamers play games in a virtual world (Beal, 2016c). Digital games are often distinguished from other entertainment media through the notion of Interactivity (Apperley, 2010).

There are many opinions as to why gamers troll. Some examples of online games where this occurs include: Minecraft, World of Warcraft, Counter Strike and Xbox online games. Herring, Job-Sluder, Scheckler and Barab (2002) suggest a reason why it happens is that these are environments that create arenas for the enactment of power inequalities, with much sexism, racism and heterosexism. Reid (1999) argues that those owning and managing game sites have much power to stop trolling and control user behaviours, but often have failed to do so.

The web site Unranked Smurfs (2016) reflects the frustration at trolling, suggesting it does disrupt and annoy users:

> In game trolling does many things and ruins the game in many different ways. Not only does it make the game less fun and enjoyable for other players but it can also wind players up and make them angry. When people get angry they are much more likely to rage quit, go AFK or play bad. If you’re on the same team as them then this is obviously the last thing you want to happen as it decreases the chances of you winning the game. But then if you’re trolling did you really want to win the game in the first place?

> When people spam the in game chat or voice chat with insults and abusive language it can really distract other players in the game and take the focus away from the gameplay. Let’s face it, when you’re playing a game and two people are arguing you just want to just sit back and read the chat. But watch out the enemy jungler just dived you... aaannd you’re dead. As great as it may be to sit back and read the comments it can be very distracting.

These comments suggest the companies and individuals providing online gaming have an interest in keeping their gamers free from trolling. In practice this is not the case.

The terms ‘professional griefer’ and ‘griefing’ are associated with online gaming. Adrian (2010) defined them as disrupters who ruin the game experience, arguing it is a crime. Griefers do hack but it is not always regarded as game hacking. In the gaming community, griefing might include repeatedly killing the same player so that the person can’t move forward, reversing the play of newer gamers so they don’t learn the rules, or messing with
other people’s play by blocking their shots or covering oneself with distressing images (Hardy, 2016).

Conducting an extensive study of online gamers, Thacker and Griffiths (2012)\textsuperscript{12} identified these types of trolling and reasons for this trolling: griefing, sexism, racism, faking and intentional fallacy, and reasons for trolling including seeking amusement, seeking revenge and being bored. Apperley (2010, p82) defines another trolling feature called smack-talk that is composed of this:

\begin{quote}
Smack-talk describes the lively banter of game players (on- and off-line) that involves the use of deliberately insulting, threatening, or otherwise inflammatory language. While it may be used to bully, distract, intimidate, or otherwise interfere with others, it is also often consensual. Because of its negative connotations, it is often strongly regulated in online virtual worlds.
\end{quote}

The challenge to regulate trolling and such smack-talk is difficult because of the culture of acceptance and tolerance of it from gamers. Griffiths (2014) states that those who witness or participate in trolling tend to feed their self-esteem issues positively at the expense of others, whereas if they experienced trolling themselves it would negatively affect their gaming experience. Another practice encouraging trolling is when gamers produce videos on how to troll others in online games and post these to social media such as YouTube.

Two examples of game trolling illustrate why it is a concern. The first is an individual gamer example who trolled another gamer, the second is an example of mass grieving where both gang up on others or make distasteful commentary about an issue. Both cause disruption and upset. The first example is reported by Kiberd (2016) on the site Motherboard. This takes place over Minecraft and broadcast publically on YouTube, where one gamer is trolled by another:

It’s August 2013 and a boy called Nicholas is issuing death threats over Minecraft. His opponent is a YouTuber called Noobface37, who (unbeknown to Nicholas) is recording the whole thing on video.

Noobface37, who has invaded Nicholas’s server, dances among the buildings wreaking havoc. Nicholas is screaming now. You can hear his mother calling in the background, asking what’s going on. For a child, Nicholas really knows how to curse. He says that his friend’s dad is a top-level hacker who’ll track down where Noobface37 lives. ‘\textit{YOU LITTLE FUCKTARD I’M GOING TO BRING A GUN AND SHOOT YOU IN YOUR NUTSACK... DIE BIIIIIIITCH!’}’\textsuperscript{13}

Nicholas is not only trolling but making criminal threats. Clearly, Noobface37 is saying hurtful things. This happens frequently in game environments and suggests how seriously those who play these games take gaming seriously, taking revenge out on those they dislike.

A second example is considered distasteful trolling because it involves making fun of a high profile child abduction case. In 2007 three year old English girl Madeline McCann disappeared from an apartment in Praia da Luz, Portugal. In May 2016 it was reported that police had run out of leads to find her and there were concerns if she was alive she would not be recognisable (Foster, 2016). Pokemon Go is a free augmented reality online game based
on the Pokemon television series where millions of players try to catch Pokemon characters according to the player’s physical location.

The reported trolling was hurtful as a player took an image of Madeline and superimposed it over a screenshot of a Pokemon. A problem with this was not just the image but also the text posted with it as Figure 32 shows (Hamill, 2016):

![Image of a screenshot with Madeline's face superimposed on a Pokemon app]

A man using the name Scott Rennie, from Glasgow, published a highly offensive image in which Madeleine’s face was superimposed on a screenshot of the Pokemon app along with the message: “Doon dalmuir park doing pre season wae ma gowdie boys when a stumbled across the rarest of Pokemon.”

**Figure 32. Trolling on Pokemon Go**

Aside from being hurtful, in the United Kingdom this is potentially illegal trolling behaviour. It is common for trolls to do this; however, this trolling happens daily and it is unclear how much of this trolling is moderated and stopped. Gamers will go to other games if this happens to them or the trolling becomes so overt it is seen by them every time the gamer logs onto the game.

Gamers will also troll others by creating Smurf accounts to dispute games. These are effective in discouraging less experienced players from continuing to play. A Smurf account is a fake account usually taken out by a more experienced player. For example, in the game
League of Legends Smurf accounts, mostly tolerated and unpunished, trolls will create these accounts to (League of Legends Wiki, n.d.):

- Get an easy win or have fun because the stress of being in high level games is lessened
- Demoralise lower-level players or increase feelings of power or importance
- Create a backup account in case their main account were to get banned and/or compromised

Trolling on gaming sites is widespread. The trolling on them is often not only acceptable practice but encouraged. Many learn off other gamers how to troll.

**Second Life**

Second Life is a virtual interactive environment; an advanced online world platform far beyond that played by Julian Dibbell in the early 1990's. It was founded in 1999 by Philip Rosedale and developed by his company Linden Lab, with Second Life official launched in its current form in 2003. A description of Second Life, its appearance and functions, is reported by Kuntze, Crudele, Reynolds and Matulich (2013, p. 4):

Second Life is a place where residents live, explore, meet, socialize, work, participate in activities, and create, buy, and sell products and services to one another. In Second Life, purchase and consumption patterns are very similar to the real world. This fully integrated economy provides an ideal place to study market strategies and consumption behavior activities. Second Life even has its own currency called Linden Dollars (L$), which can be obtained with real world currency.

Users set up an account and choose an avatar from a group of already established ones, although the user can change it later. The user then chooses a room or destination to join. Many rooms have various restrictions on who can enter into them. Second Life can be used by anyone of any age although destinations are broken into those for adults (in most countries being 18 years of age and above, 21 years of age in some other countries) and those that are general. People also own estates that they buy, that are virtual homes and property brought for real cash so they can use it for whatever purposes they seek. They can rent space in these estates that people must pay for to live there.

Role playing lies at the core of interacting in second life. According to the official developer’s site, Linden Lab (2016a), upon its tenth anniversary the following key statistics were reported in 2013:

- 36 million accounts created
- 1 million users visit from around the world monthly
- $32 million United States dollars transacted between Second Life users
- 217 266 total years that users collectively have spent on Second Life
A Terms of Service document exists that is detailed and extensive. One section on termination, Section 5.3 (Linden Lab, 2016b) does not explicitly mention trolling but does serve as an example of how a Second Life account can be banned:

We may terminate your Account if we determine in our discretion that such action is necessary or advisable to comply with legal requirements or protect the rights or interests of Linden Lab, the Service community or any third party.

We may terminate your Account(s) if we learn, or in good faith believe, that you are a registered sex offender, that accessing the Service may violate a condition of parole or probation, that you have engaged in or attempted to engage in conduct with minors on the Service that violates this Agreement, or that you for any other reason may pose what we deem to be an unacceptable risk to the Service community.

Second Life is generally not harsh towards trolls though users have been banned usually by the moderator or owner of the destination. However, it does have a Community Standards page that explicitly states there are six standards that, if not followed, results in termination of your account. These are: intolerance, harassment, assault, disclosure (privacy of user information), adult region behaviour and disturbing the peace.

These can control trolls but often do not work. For example, with the six standards these rules apply that are frequently ignored by trolls in standards one and two (Second Life, 2016):

**Intolerance**

Combating intolerance is a cornerstone of Second Life's Community Standards. Actions that marginalize, belittle, or defame individuals or groups inhibit the satisfying exchange of ideas and diminish the Second Life community as a whole. The use of derogatory or demeaning language or images in reference to another Resident's race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or sexual orientation is never allowed in Second Life.

**Harassment**

Given the myriad capabilities of Second Life, harassment can take many forms. Communicating or behaving in a manner which is offensively coarse, intimidating or threatening, constitutes unwelcome sexual advances or requests for sexual favors, or is otherwise likely to cause annoyance or alarm is Harassment.

The policies to deal with trolling behaviours are based on the three strikes and out method of administering punishments. One section in the terms is clear what will happen (Second Life, 2016):

**Warning, Suspension, Banishment**

Second Life is a complex society, and it can take some time for new Residents to gain a full understanding of local customs and mores. Generally, violations of the Community Standards will first result in a Warning, followed by Suspension and
eventual Banishment from Second Life. In-World Representatives, called Liaisons, may occasionally address disciplinary problems with a temporary removal from Second Life.

However, particularly in adult destinations, this can be ignored or encouraged, though trolls also continue to make new accounts after being banned. Also, as Krappitz (2012) explains, the owners of virtual lands can decide what users can and cannot do, but do try to stop griefers from vandalising the land or building yet they will try other ways to disrupt the destination’s inhabitants from interaction.

Before showing examples of trolling on Second Life, to appreciate the size and scope of it some mention of types of destinations and their subjects is given. These examples display some of to the diversity of worlds on Second Life:

- Adults Only – Clubs, Entertainment, Sexual Fetishes
- Fashion
- Games
- Gay and Lesbian Friendly
- Media, Music and TV
- Music
- Nightclubs
- Nature and Parks
- Role Playing
- Romance
- Spiritually and Beliefs

Examples of the names of destinations for subjects using four examples from the destination list are:

- Adults Only - Asphyxiation Point Red Light District
- Media, Music and TV - Cinema City
- Role Playing - Eternal Conflict: Angels & Demons
- Romance - Heightened Passion and the L Lounge

As these examples show, much imagination in names and the design of these destinations takes place to mimic the physical world. They are attractive to trolls because users go into these environments expecting a code of conduct and set of standards, based on the nature of the room, to take place. Geser (2007, p. 8) sums up this attraction to Second Life as:

While certainly not substituting the flavour of Real Life meetings, there is much evidence such "virtual encounters" are found substantially rewarding by all participants, because they are taking place in the frame of a situated social environment: so that they have much more similarity to face-to-face contacts than simple chats or Email exchanges.

In one study a small sample of Second Life users were substantially interviewed, Kaplan and Haenlein (2009) found what user motivations to use it were: the search for diversion, the
desire to build personal relationships, the need to learn, and the wish to earn money. Despite these useful intentions, others prefer to cause disruption, harm and controversy.

Two examples of well-publicised troll behaviours that disrupted destinations display how trolling occurs in Second Life. First, a troll named Ralph Pootawn disrupted destinations especially those where avatars were engaging in sexual acts. He resembles the animated character Shriek in appearance often holding a can of beer and smoking a pipe. His reputation of going into private areas in adult destinations was enhanced by the screen shots he and others watching would take and post online, as well as placed on YouTube as a video. Figure 33 shows an example of performance trolling where Ralph is requested to stop watching two avatars engaged in a sex act but refuses:

![Figure 33. Ralph’s trolling in Second Life (Know Your Meme, 2016c)](image)

It could be questioned why it is trolling if the avatars are participating in sex acts in front of others? Ralph is asked to leave but refuses, hence it becomes trolling. The other avatars wanted privacy. This incident was placed on YouTube without the consent of others which is why this is referred to as trolling because it causes distress through invasion of privacy even if the avatars are engaging in an act that may offend others.

A second example of similar Second Life performance trolling is an avatar who trolled in family-friendly destinations by creating male genital shapes on their avatar and within the landscape. Although considered amusing, the trolling was seen by all rather than a restricted audience and captured on video as Figure 34 shows:
Figure 34. Trolling Second Life by creating shocking imagery (DaScatman, 2009)

If the destination or room forbids such imagery then it becomes tempting to troll it. In this case the images were posted all over the destination, hitting other avatars and being dumped from the sky. The troll further mocked those who were shocked by naming this trolling after the war movie Apocalypse Now calling it Cockpocalypse Now!

Second Life is inviting to troll and disrupt others enjoyment of it. Managing trolls in such virtual worlds is difficult to do so.

**Mobile Computing and Mobile Phone Apps**

The ability for trolls to post anything at anytime was further enhanced by the invention of the mobile computer and the mobile phone. Mobile computing is using mobile computer devices that are generally modern-day handheld devices that have the hardware and software required to execute typical desktop and Web applications (Technopedia, n.d.a). People being able to take their laptop and hand help devices meant they could troll anyone anywhere, including those in countries where Internet censorship is stricter.

Trolling takes place on SMS messaging, texts you send to others, and on phone apps. The activities on mobile phones are not always considered trolling. A phone app, found on a smart phone such as an Android Phone or Apple Iphone, is a mobile application which is software designed to run on a smartphone or tablet that are small with usually limited function (Technopedia, n.d.b). Examples of apps include: games, dating sites, calendars, travel help, social media such as Facebook and Twitter, torches, music sites, camera function, clock, email, web browsers, chat rooms, search engines and many other apps for varied uses.

What mobile computing does is allow the ability and ease of it to be undertaken by many more. Why this is significant is that trolling further morphs into being viewed as pranking as many younger people especially, interact on mobile computing devices to cause disruption, but also harm. Chat rooms, such as the Snapchat app, can be instruments of trolling as they can provide anonymity. On Omegle and Snapchat the user can select a stranger at random to talk to anywhere in the world. This is similar to the concept in the 1976 science fiction movie Logan’s Run where people used a teleporter to meet others in a pre-internet era version of Chat Roulette where the circuit offers a form of virtual cruising for sex and immediate
gratification (Critical Commons Manager, n.d.). However, trolls use phone apps to disrupt which can be frustrating to those who are genuinely looking for friends.

Figure 35 shows a brief encounter where the troll admits using Omegle for trolling:

Figure 35. Trolling interaction on the app chat program Omegle (n.d.)

This occurs on Snapchat and many other apps. Despite the ability to track users who do this, trolls are often just dismissed as pranksters even though this can cause offense to vulnerable people looking for friendship and romance.

At this point in trolling history in 2017 it has been suggested that companies that make phone applications and software have aided trolling although this is unclear if it is intentional. It is, however, an important point to consider because of the call for greater punishments for trolling. Phillips (2015) strongly suggests that trolls are now a part of mainstream culture, even being tolerated in society and a taken-for-granted part of Internet use. People seem less concerned with privacy and anonymity openly abusing and disrupting others. Trolls have moved from villains to pranksters depending on the nature of the trolling.

As an example, Kumar (2016) reports on a set of trolling apps created for the Android mobile phone. One trolling app is Fake Caller ID. As the app’s website states (apkplz.com, 2016):

Fake Caller ID gives you 2 FREE calls a day with any Fake Caller ID you want. We're the only app that gives you 100% FREE calls to fake caller id. You can also change your voice & record the call. Want to prank a friend? Fake Caller ID. Your significant other not calling you back? Fake Caller ID. Need to call someone from your office number? Fake Caller ID allows you to change your number to any number you want - for FREE. Call them on their bluff from any number you want.

Figure 36 shows the prank that appears on another’s phone:
Phone apps that encourage trolling will continue to grow. This brings into question its desirability and also what is the boundary between trolling and pranking. The recipient of the prank needs to make the decision if it is hurtful or disrupting and law makers may need to adjust or make new laws to manage such situations.

**Summary of Trolling History and Troll Environments**

This comprehensive section has shown how trolling has developed from a small audience of Internet users to a global one where how it is performed has changed. Using the examples of the many Internet sites in Web 1.0 to 2.0, trolling has increased in size and complexity since the Bulletin Board System that was purely text-based. The definition and understanding of trolling has also changed as trolls moved from a smaller, subculture to being seen in mainstream Internet sites especially social media. They pose problems for moderators and owners of such sites who at this time are under pressure to manage and punish trolls.

**Internet Troll Types**

Trolls are many types with differing intents and goals to disrupt and harm. Their classification and type has varied over time. Not every troll intends harm, but it is considered all trolls are nuisances and villains. In this section types of trolls are named and described. However, this list is not exhaustive, but an indication of how trolls have been named.

Thirty-Five troll types have been selected with brief explanations of their characteristics and behaviours. These were gained through searching the Internet and consulting the website Dark Psychology (2016) that collected troll types. Table 3 contains the sample by troll name and by their behaviours and characteristics, as well as attributing the source where the troll type was found:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Troll Name</th>
<th>Behaviours and Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Amazon Trolls</td>
<td>Also called literary trolls who pick at someone’s grammar to a fine degree (Brimson, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Baiter Troll</td>
<td>Baiters want discussions to turn their way hooking in others to respond but are also good at not stopping until the other user gives up (Criminal Justice Degrees Guide, 2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Big Man Troll</td>
<td>A Big Man troll does trolling by posting something pleasing to others in order to support their world view but are often persistently and relentlessly (Bishop, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Cannibal Troll</td>
<td>A troll that feeds upon other trolls baiting them to react (Luke_Dude, 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Chatroom ‘Bob’Troll</td>
<td>A chatroom bob takes part in trolling to gain the trust of others members in order to exploit them (Bishop, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Concern Troll</td>
<td>A person who posts on a blog thread, in the guise of &quot;concern,&quot; to disrupt dialogue or undermine morale by pointing out that posters and/or the site may be getting themselves in trouble, usually with an authority or power (thevineyard, 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Copyright Trolls</td>
<td>Those who experiment with using mass copyright litigation to extract settlements from individuals. These copyright trolls try to grow businesses out of suing Internet users (Electronic Frontier Foundation, n.d.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 E-Venger Troll</td>
<td>A vengeance troll, often dangerous to some sites, does trolling in order to trip someone up so that their ‘true colours’ are revealed (Bishop, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Elder Troll</td>
<td>An Elder is a member of the community who often engages in “trolling for newbies”, winding them up often with support from other members of the group (Bishop, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Flirt Troll</td>
<td>A Flirt takes part in trolling to help others be sociable, including through light ’teasing’ (Bishop, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flooder Troll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Griefer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Hate Monger Troll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Iconoclast Troll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>IRL Troll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Never-Give-Up, Never-Surrender Troll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>New Service Addict Troll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Playtime Trolls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Rent-A-Mob Troll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Retroactive Stalker Troll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Ripper Troll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Self-Feeding Troll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Troll Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Serial Leaver Troll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Snert Troll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Sock Puppetry Troll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Spambot Trolls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Special Interest Troll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>The Flamer Troll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>The Fraud Troll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>The Ghost Troll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>The Liar Troll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>The ‘Priggish’ Grammar Troll</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Sources:_
- Turner, 2013
- Bishop, 2012
- Lindsey, 2013
- Sarada (2016)
- Grande, 2010
- Grande, 2010
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Troll Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>The Spoiler Troll</td>
<td>A troll who deliberately posts the endings of books, movies and television stories to annoy others (Grande, 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>The Stalker Troll</td>
<td>Much like a retrospective stalker troll, they will find out anything about another user including doxxing details of where one lives or phone number (Grande, 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Wizard Troll</td>
<td>A Wizard does trolling through making up and sharing content that has humorous effect (Bishop, 2012)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From this sample of troll types two observations are noticeable:

1. Some types of trolls have overlapping characteristics in their behaviours, although there are subtle differences, such as the stalker troll may seek out present information not a user’s past and post only that information.

2. Reading some of the characteristics, particularly the scamming trolls, it is evident that Internet users must remain vigilant when transferring money to such trolls, and it is not advised to reply to such trolls to get back at them.

Over time more types of trolls will emerge. Some trolls listed in the table can be harmless, but many are malicious and cause much harm to Internet users.

**Conclusions and Summary**

This chapter extensively discussed trolling, its history and troll types to show where it takes place and what historical events shaped its development. What is drawn from this chapter is based on the same three ideas I discussed in my cyberbullying book (Nycyk, 2015):

1. We live in a networked world where use of the Internet in some form is unavoidable and will continue to be a necessary part of our lives.

2. Not every person is ‘thick-skinned’; comments can be hurtful.

3. We deserve to have a safe experience using the Internet and should be aware of trolling, with our responses in line with our values and ethics.

Examining the chapter’s trolling examples, it can be daunting to understand peoples’ motivations for doing it. People are not stopping using the Internet because of trolls. There is, however, much concern about troll behaviours. Internet uses still get a shock when they encounter a troll. Many troll comments or photos are unpleasant. As software becomes sophisticated and affordable, combined with many more countries continuing to access the Internet at cheaper rates or using free Wi-Fi, human nature will not change. Debates about trolling will, however, continue to try to understand why trolls exist and how we should manage them without imposing on our freedom of speech that we consider the Internet still fosters.
In the next chapter we will look at themes in trolling, especially why people troll, what are their motivations, and what has been found can work to stop or minimise these behaviours.
Notes


2 Image from Flickr user Josherhosen used by permission, found on Creative Commons Image Search.

3 Some definitions are appropriate here, although this book assumes its readers know Internet technology definitions.

The Internet is short for the Interconnected Network. It is important to note a common misconception that the Internet is not the World Wide Web, the application of the Internet mostly used. A simple, technical explanation is given by Tech Terms (2015):

The Internet is a global wide area network that connects computer systems across the world. It includes several high-bandwidth data lines that comprise the Internet “backbone.” These lines are connected to major Internet hubs that distribute data to other locations, such as web servers and ISPs.

When I talk about all the applications of the Internet I refer to the different types of software that can be accessed for different reasons, being, but not limited to, these: email, social media (it is seen as being accessed on the World Wide Web but is a different application), phone applications, newsgroups (rarely used as much), online gaming and the deep web.

The World Wide Web is divided into three stages, 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0. It is important to recognise their differences because 2.0, and 3.0, allow more functionality to using the Internet. The key concept is that Web 1.0 was generally text-based but Web. 2.0 allowed more content that people can post to it in an often easier manner. These included photos, music files and video files. This is important as it has changed the nature of trolling to more sophisticated content. Cormode and Krishnamurthy (2008) explain this difference as:

However, the essential difference between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 is that content creators were few in Web 1.0 with the vast majority of users simply acting as consumers of content, while any participant can be a content creator in Web 2.0 and numerous technological aids have been created to maximize the potential for content creation.

4 Jamie Bartlett’s book The Dark Net: Inside the Digital Underworld, published in 2014, is a good and concise reference for showing how trolling developed and spread. Jamie does this through explanations of the history of the social technical features that gave rise to trolling.

5 Some websites suggest there are more hierarchies with author Harley Hahn (2016) providing a comprehensive annotation of as many groups as possible at http://www.harley.com/usenet/master-list/
6 It is important to note that Burkhalter uses the term race in his studies. Using it instead of culture or ethnicity may offend some who see the term as discriminatory. I agree, though having to use academic and other sources if they use this word then it will be reproduced in this book. Race is considered a social construct and can refer to a classification of groups who have similar and distinct physical traits and characteristics (Anemone, 2011; Cartmill, 1998). This is contentious, understandably so, but for the book the terms used by researchers and other sources are used.

7 Lee’s gender is reported in this exchange as male, Lee can be a male or female name.

8 A killfile was important in Usenet to manage trolling behaviours. The following definition from the Internet Connection (2004) site explains what it technically is:

[Usenet; very common] (alt.: KILL file) Per-user file(s) used by some Usenet reading programs (originally Larry Wall's rn(1)) to discard summarily (without presenting for reading) articles matching some particularly uninteresting (or unwanted) patterns of subject, author, or other header lines. Thus to add a person (or subject) to one's kill file is to arrange for that person to be ignored by one's newsreader in future. By extension, it may be used for a decision to ignore the person or subject in other media.

9 Guy Macon’s full uncensored speech, and the insult that caused it, are officially available in two places: Guy Macon’s personal site (Macon, n.d.) http://www.guymacon.com/flame.html and at Encyclopeida Dramatica (2011).

10 A more detailed account of this story is in my previous book pages 68-69, found at https://adulttoadultcyberbullying.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/nycyk-m-adult-to-adult-cyberbullying.pdf

11 The full essay on 4chan’s history and the trolling and Anonymous hacker is available at the time of writing at Bibliotheca Anonoma, a site that documents Internet histories and can be found at https://github.com/bibanon/4chan.doc/releases/tag/1.4.3

12 Dr Mark Griffiths has commented on his blog that the study had a number of flaws. However, it provided information on trolling activities where there was little research up to 2012. Reading the study, the general findings can be criticised for being a very small sample (n=125), but nevertheless captured the types of trolling and its conduct, concluding it is harmful to others playing the game (Griffiths, 2013).

13 See the Second Life Wiki http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Making_money on how money is made in it (Second Life Wiki, 2016).

14 The Dark Psychology site claims it updates troll types regularly; the site is very good for the details it provides. The specific page is at https://darkpsychology.co/troll/
CHAPTER THREE
UNDERSTANDING TROLLS AND TROLLING

All the internet is a game. Unjustified and unfair would only be if the targets can’t just walk away, which is where the difference between trolling and bullying/harassment and where the legal difference is or should be. Saying mean things is often justified and necessary, and expectations of decorum online are ridiculous. – Whitney Phillips Interviewing a Troll

Trolling is an online phenomenon that people may witness without necessarily knowing what it is. Clearly more representative research is needed as adolescents may be a vulnerable group in being both the victims and perpetrators of such behaviour. – Dr Mark Griffiths Trent University

As we know, the Internet and technology-based interactions no longer constitute occasional adjuncts to off-line existence, but have become dominant-and integrated parts of contemporary existence itself. E-bile can therefore be seen as threatening the realization of broad ideals such as civil discourse, social inclusivity, and democratic engagement. Thus the case for more-and radically different- scholarly research is underpinned by a pressing ethical imperative. – Dr Emma Jane

Trolls and trolling research has grown over twenty years as the interest in uncovering their motivations for their behaviours continued. The spread of the Internet has challenged governments and law makers to form policies to manage trolling. Those owning Internet sites are also placed under pressure to do something about it. Research informs policy practically, giving insights into human behaviours and reasons for them. As technology changes as does trolling. Having research to understand it assists in making decisions about what to do about it.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the research on trolls and trolling to obtain a better understanding of why it is an important societal issues. It will draw on a wide range of academic literature supported by secondary sources. An underlying theme is that trolling research has been shaped by changing technical and social factors. This is represented by the functionality improvements of the Internet and Web, which I have stated previously, and marked by the (unofficial but accepted) change from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 where the origins of social media began.

I argue that trolling was once confined to a ‘bounded’ system; that is, it occurred in limited space on the Internet in the pre-web and Web 1.0 eras. As examined in Chapter Two, Usenet was a major place of trolling, but the spread outside it was limited to chat lines and some web sites. This concurrently occurred with the changing levels of civility where it is claimed the (mostly) anonymous world of the Internet encouraged rudeness. I also argue that trolling has become a mainstream activity as it is regarded now as a normal part using the Internet.

The chapter begins with a brief but important discussion of the concept of civility and the Internet. This is followed by an examination of the main troll weapon; the use of language to convey disruption and offence. I then build on the discussion in Chapter Two where I listed the types of environments trolling occurs, discussing the research that has been published
about trolls and trolling from pre-web, Web 1.0/2.0, social media and the gaming and phone apps. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of four questions asked of the research listed in the next section, to see if the research has proved beneficial to our understanding of trolls and trolling.

Researching Trolling

In 2017 trolling research is still relatively scarce and underfunded in academia. Fichman and Sanfilippo (2016) claim that more attention is paid to cyberbullying and hacking, with trolling attracting less scholarly attention than other negative online behaviours. I partially agree, but it is still a young and growing field with a good growing body of literature that attempts to find out these points, which will be reflected on at the end of this chapter:

1. How is trolling defined?
2. What are motivations for trolling?
3. What behaviours and situations characterise trolling?
4. What are the consequences of trolling and suggestions for managing it?

These questions underpin this chapter. The first discussion is said to be a cause of trolling; that our societies are become less civil and that trolling reflects the growth in incivility.

Civility, Incivility and the Internet

Internet users expect being treated well by others online and to have freedom of speech to say what they wish. This balancing act is difficult. A concept that describes the way society members should ideally act towards each is called civility. Although we are not physically present online, societal rules about how to behave towards each other determine our behaviour. The Internet has allowed people to post what they want, but often the content is hateful, abusive and offensive. As such, the Internet is now viewed as a place of incivility.

A definition of civility from Spath and Dahnke (2017) illustrates why it is a good human practice:

Civility is claiming and caring for one’s identity, needs and beliefs without degrading someone else’s in the process.

The interpretation of this definition for online interactions is that you are able to state your views but allowing the other person to do the same without harshly criticising each other. Rational debate may not always be possible with many issues, but this definition applied to the Internet suggests you can post what you wish (within the boundaries, if any, of where you are posting on the Internet) but you must allow others the same courtesy. Clearly, trolling often does not do this.

Another dimension to civility is practicing politeness. Trolls lack this as being polite means having empathy for another and realising what is posted can be harmful. Papacharissi (2004, p. 260) defines a common factor in civility, politeness and courtesy, and comments on how societies have always valued it as a human trait:
Defined frequently as general politeness and courtesy, civility is valued as an indicator of a functional democratic society. Conversations on the meaning of citizenship, democracy, and public discourse highlight civility as a virtue, the lack of which carries detrimental implications for a democratic society.

Civility is also seen as preserving social norms where treating others with dignity and acting with regard to others’ feelings is virtuous (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Carter, 1998). It is a moral issue that does concern people, hence the reason why trolling is seen as eroding civility through its disruptive and hurtful nature.

Additionally, civility places limitations on human behaviours, as will be seen in the discussion of Web 1.0 and 2.0 trolling, and cannot grow in environments of indulgence, narcissism, license, and immodesty (Wallace, 2011). Trolls operate in these online environments Wallace is describing. Antoci, Delfino, Paglieri, Panebianco and Sabatini (2016) state a common finding in incivility and trolling research; it affects those using the Internet because the troll offences feel as if they were perpetrated in real life. The perception of offence is subjective and dependent on the reaction of the person being tolled. However, Internet incivility clearly does have detrimental effects on individuals and groups.

Incivility is not limited to the Internet as it occurs in our daily lives in many situations. Guinness (2008) argues that civility is not just about being nice and observing etiquette, but being civil shapes the future of co-operative societies in a positive way. Lee (2011) of Troy University Alabama sums up the problem of incivility and states that to be civil is to be co-operative which is a desired state for any society to be:

Public discourse in our early 21st Century is ruled by polar opposition, a frequent use of ridicule, streams of ad hominem assaults, and, perhaps more than anything else, a simple refusal to apprehend the middle ground between opposing viewpoints and the absence of any notion of a common good. Recognition of our shared perplexity in the face of the great questions that compose the human condition is productive of humility and compassion and engenders a desire to work cooperatively to bring into existence a shared world that strives to express the beautiful itself.

The Internet has presented humanity with the dilemma of divisive trolling. Lane and McCourt (2013) argue that as it is a newer human invention, we may mistakenly perceive that another person’s behavior is deliberately and strategically meant to be offensive. Uncivil communication may be part of changing expectations of how we treat each other. Yet people have condemned trolling for they perceive such behaviours as harmful. It is also taken seriously by corporations. For example, Microsoft in 2017 launched a yearly Safer Internet Day based on their research of the perceptions of civility and safety online that were thought of by their participants as being lacking and further degenerating into incivility (Beauchere, 2017).

**Language Use: The Cornerstone of Trolling**

Photos, videos and audio are used by trolls to cause harm, but words are the main way they disrupt and offend Internet users. They use discriminatory and derogatory words, often using sarcasm as put downs of others. In Chapters One and Two, many examples were given which showed the types of language they use to do so.
Troll language use is discriminatory, with individuals and groups targeted based on their sexuality, race, physical appearance, age, religious beliefs, gender and group memberships. Individuals are targeted on a personal level but also intergroup discrimination occurs where many are targeted. Wright and Bougie (2007, p. 159) describe how discriminatory language operates in society, which in turn operates also on the Internet:

Like other forms of discrimination, however, language discrimination comes in many forms...These can be classified as intergroup discrimination because they involve institutional practices and policies that undermine the opportunities, status, or well-being of the target language as a whole. Discrimination, however, can also be perpetrated and experienced as primarily interpersonal. In these cases, discrimination involves the actions of individuals (alone or in small groups) directed toward a particular individual because of his or her membership in a particular language group.

Interpersonal discrimination online is a common trolling strategy. Trolls attack someone for membership of a group though language that encompasses: racism, sexism, homophobia, body shaming and those with physical and mental health challenges.

Figure 37 shows, at worst, an example of a trolling post. It is taken from a blog that discusses the Bible’s view on morality issues. The language is highly discriminatory as the poster agrees with the blog post which discusses if gay people should be killed (Supported by the Bible, 2010):

![Figure 37. Example of discriminatory language on a blog](image)

This post uses highly discriminatory and stereotypical language, especially the use of the worlds ‘homo’ and ‘faggot’. However, in a different context those words may be acceptable to use. There is an alternative argument that some words can be acceptably used in certain contexts that do not constituting trolling. This is a reason why trolling is sometimes considered harmless. For example, a YouTube video reviewing an online game has posts in the comments section from gamers that shows them calling each other, the game and other images on the video ‘fags’ and ‘faggot’ as Figure 38 illustrates:
Figure 38. Trolling language used in a possible acceptable environment on YouTube (Machinima, 2011)

We may view olloman10’s and Benjamin Cook’s comments as offensive and discriminatory against homosexuals, but the language used is seen as acceptable in this context. It does contravene YouTube’s community guidelines for not using discriminatory language, but the baiting trolling comments using fag have not been removed. Therefore, we may view this language according to our own personal standards as offensive or not, but it highlights the idea that viewing such language as trolling can be subjective.

In another example where negative language use and incivility intersect on YouTube, a viewer may be puzzled as to why a trolling comment is posted on a video about cats. The video is called 29 Cute Kitten Videos Compilation 2016, featuring videos of cats and kittens getting into humorous situations. As Figure 39 shows, the video is unlikely to be offensive to most viewers:
The responses to the video are mostly polite, complementary and civil. Figure 40 shows an example of a civil response to the video, with Marry Le responding with a compliment to it and showing sympathy to Thai Hoc Nguyen whose cat ran away. The exchange is civil and no trolling is present in the language. It could be argued this is an ideal online exchange that should always take place:

By contrast, on the same video one poster comments that those who disliked the video are ‘retards’, which is often seen as a derogatory comment towards those living with a disability:
Figure 41. An uncivil language exchange in the comments section of The Pet Collective’s video

It is unclear if the original poster is a troll but Figure 41 displays a strategy troll’s use called flaming. A flame is type of posting that causes others to engage with the troll in argument and where it is perceived that there is intent to offend someone (Kaufer, 2000). Madame Jelly has taken offense to the comment, though they are defending dogs not actually being offended by the term ‘retard’. However, it is reasonable to assert that many would take offense to the language used here as it is using a word many consider is exclusionary (retard) in the way it demeans someone with a physical or mental disability.

Much research has shown that language used has great power to shape peoples’ views on issues. It can also reproduce inequalities, such as prejudice and stereotyping, which have been worked on for decades for their eradication. The work of language scholar Norman Fairclough has been influential in researchers adopting the idea that power lies in the type of language used and such language reproduces and maintains power relations between people. He argues that mass media messages have hidden relations of power (Fairclough, 1989) meaning the intent of a message can be deliberate to persuade people to believe something that may not be true. This can ruin reputations and cause people and organisations harm.

Determining offense, hurt or disruption is an individual’s decision depending on factors such as context, location of trolling language, the relationship between the troll and target and the language used (Jay, 2009; Jay & Janschewitz, 2008). It does matter when these things occur such as in online memorial vandalism or it results in someone’s suicide. An interesting view of the problem of language and civility was written by French diplomat Antoine de Courtin who lived in the 1600’s and wrote the work New Treatise on Civility. Harcourt (2012, p. 347) writes in support of de Courtin about how language and civility have consequences if manners and empathy are not followed:
But precisely for that reason, de Courtin thought it was important to observe certain rules of honesty; pleasantries among equals, especially when spirited and jocular, demand special attention so as not to offend. In his treatise, de Courtin sketched out a few guidelines. First, never take aim at a person of one’s equal or anyone recently deceased. Second, be careful to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary defects. “It is a very mean quip indeed to mock someone because they are one-eyed or lame, since it is not their fault,” de Courtin advised. Third, be sure to distinguish between the interior and exterior of the person. “A man (sic) will not take offense if you tell him that he is not looking well, but he will get very angry if you tell him that he does not have much wit.”

Although de Courtin wrote about why the general public, should be acting in a civil way in public life, his view can be applied to trolls who ‘do not have much wit’. Although there is no face-to-face physical presence, mocking others or disrupting others’ Internet experiences means trolling is uncivil and undesirable, and is not something of amusement as it can have consequences for its victims.

**Trolling Contexts and Environments: Web 1.0 to Web 2.0**

Trolls spread incivility by discriminatory language aided by the growth of the Internet. However, the technological computer hardware and software improvements, such as mobile computing devices like mobile phones and social media platforms, have facilitated greater trolling activity. The context of trolling, meaning the environments where they occurred, has been influence by the shift from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0. This is important to discuss to appreciate the magnitude of how trolling has become a mainstream activity anyone can do.

**Web 1.0 and 2.0: A Brief Technical Historical Account**

The concept of the World Wide Web was suggested in 1989 by Sir Tim Berners-Lee in Geneva, Switzerland. He described it in his proposal paper as an online document collection, identified by a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) using hypertext which has links in text to other texts in the document (Berners-Lee, 1989). Without hypertext, trolls would have been unable to post links in their messages. Web 1.0 was called the ‘read-only web’. It had limited user interactions, often email, live chat rooms and messaging, was cumbersome to create content and was mostly only used for information finding (Aghaei, Nematbakhsh & Farsani, 2012). Cormode and Krishnamurthy (2008) describe Web 1.0 as those who used it acting as consumers of content.

This significantly changed with Web 2.0 and the invention of content creation for all in what was termed an online participatory culture. The current Internet and its applications (software) are part of a larger culture where interactions between people and collaboration and sharing of content between users, is viewed differently to Web 1.0, that was a few-to-many broadcasting service (Burgess & Green, 2009). Stern (n.d.) offers a concise definition of it:

> Although the term suggests a new version of the World Wide Web, it does not refer to any actual change in technical specifications, but rather to changes in the ways software developers and end-users utilize the Web. Web 2.0 is a catch-all term used to describe a variety of developments on the Web and a perceived shift
in the way it is used. This shift can be characterized as the evolution of Web use from passive consumption of content to more active participation, creation and sharing.

The concept of it being the ‘Read-Write Web” is important to appreciate because it meant the opportunity to post a greater amount of content, such as photos and videos in more sophisticated and clearer formats. Another description of this term is that it enables members of the general public to actively contribute and shape content (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007). This ability accounted for the growing trolling that was occurring during the early 2000’s.

Table 4 shows the technical differences between the two web versions showing how more efficient the technologies became which fosters the posting of more content online:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Web 1.0</th>
<th>Web 2.0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read Only (Mostly)</td>
<td>Read/Write Easy to Post Content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual HTML Home Pages</td>
<td>Blogs, Twitter, Facebook, MySpace and Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Software Developer as Main Author</td>
<td>Internet User as Main Author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Software Applications</td>
<td>Web as Software Platform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Static Web</td>
<td>Dynamic Web</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restricted Collaboration</td>
<td>Wide Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text-Based</td>
<td>Multimodal and Multimedia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owning Content</td>
<td>Sharing Content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web Forms Like Guestbooks</td>
<td>Web Applications Offering Flexibility to Post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directories of Files to Share</td>
<td>Tagging Others to Find Files</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note, this table uses examples from images obtained on the web7 as well as Cormode & Krishnamurthy (2008)

As seen in Table 4 there is a sharp divide between the restricted technical features of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0. There are also newer versions, Web 3.0, 4.0 and 5.0, that now exist. This brief technical account demonstrates how technology moved from difficult to use less functional Internet and World Wide Web sites to the ease of using current sites such as social media platform.

**Cultural Impacts of New Internet and Web Technologies**

Many researchers use the term ‘troll culture’ to describe trolling. This term has been applied because of the shift from the previous bounded or controlled places on the Internet where trolls operated, to the mainstream large-scale trolling occurring now. Culture is defined by Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) as patterns of beliefs people hold that have intrinsic values which influences their behaviours. Anthropologists such as Taylor (1871) and Mead (1937) add that culture is a combination of human laws, morals and customs that combine in a complex whole of behaviours that can determine how a group will act. As Harris (1964, 1968) states, culture as a concept is down to behaviour patterns associated with a particular group of peoples. Those people have leaders and followers who decide what standards to follow and how to go about doing something to achieve them (Goodenough, 1961).
Like all human cultures, it changes over time according to many factors. In the case of trolls change has been supported by the growth in Internet technologies. Cultural change is about a society changing its use of something to fit new ideas and values. Values are symbolic interpretations of reality which provide meanings for social action, but as Allaire and Firsirotu (1984) add, determine the standards for social behaviour. The technological realm directly ties to a culture as this realm is where adaptive changes begin (Keesing, 1974). To clarify these ideas, if a development occurs, such as the advent of social media, people will abandon previous Internet sites and begin to use the new ones. When this occurs trolls will follow the populace to these new sites and adapt their trolling to fit into them.

To illustrate the shift of trolling change, represented by but not limited to the World Wide Web, Figures 42 and 43 are diagrams showing the move from bounded systems to the mainstream:

*Figure 42. Web 1.0 and Internet environment of trolling beginning in the early 1990’s*

Figure 42 represents how trolling looked from the early 1990’s to approximately 2004. The pictures represent that trolls were mostly individuals, but grew to instances of organised group trolling, as the Usenet story illustrated. They fed into bounded systems; that is, the sites in the shape such as Usenet and Email were mostly contained environments where trolls operated. The blue shape represents the public and the Internet users who were mostly protected because trolling was generally contained. It was common to have gatekeepers to protect people from trolls on most sites. These were known as moderators, administrators or gatekeepers. Their values were to maintain safe spaces for interactions between people without suppressing the freedom of speech that Internet users’ value. Contrast this bounded system with Figure 43 which shows a cultural shift towards a higher incidence of trolling:
In this diagram millions of potential trolls can easily join web sites or phone apps. Despite efforts to contain them, such as increased laws on trolling and having to use email accounts to join sites, it is difficult to control this volume of trolling. Trolls become publically known to many and trolling mainstream, just becoming accepted as part of the Internet culture.

Society’s values have changed towards trolling. It is condemned, yet simultaneously participated in. Changing cultural conditions across the world, combined with a change in human values, contribute to new norms of behaviours emerging. This is true with trolling as it became a mainstream phenomenon as seen with the emerging participatory Internet meme culture that millions of Internet users began using (Philips, 2015). With Web 2.0 platforms, and a greater global audience, people from many cultures become involved in trolling. This is seen with the contemporary arguments about world terrorism and the blame attributed to those of the Muslim faith that is frequently used by trolls to inflame arguments online.

Researchers have debated this growing culture of Internet trolling assessing trolling as being an echo chamber. Lovink and Rossiter (2009) offer a view that Web 2.0 is just an online echo chamber of the same opinions and cultural patterns, where a chamber is content that is shown to Internet users that reinforces their current political or social views without ever challenging the user to think differently about issues (Journalism in the Digital Age, n.d). Trolls negatively reproduce stereotypes online like echo chambers to continue the behaviours of disrupting peoples’ Internet experiences.
The Internet Meets the Trolls: Pre-Web and Web 1.0

To assist in describing troll culture researchers quickly recognised the worth of researching the growing incivility and increased negative behaviours. There is now a ‘history’ of trolling documented through research and anecdotes illustrating the development of it being a sub-culture to becoming a mainstream activity. Trolls operated in Web 1.0 within the confines of static webpages, virtual forums and communities, real-time chat lines such as Yahoo chat IRC, text-based gaming such as MUD and MOO, email and newsgroups, significantly Usenet. By the early 1990’s significant research to explain the trolling phenomena had emerged and understanding the effect Computer-Mediated Communication (CMS) was having on society through publishing research was widely debated (Walther, 1996)9.

The Computerized Bulletin Board System

Web 1.0 was where the Internet officially met the trolls and users began noticing their disruptive presence. The first instance of trolling was found on the pre-web Computerized Bulletin Board System (CBBS). This was developed in 1978 in Chicago by Ward Christensen and Randy Seuss, comprising of expensive hardware called modems connecting computers to the bulletin boards so users could post messages to others in threads. As Snyder (2002) comments, the terms ‘troll’ and ‘flames’ began to be used to describe the negative and disruptive behaviours people were seeing on it. Figure 44 shows, the board’s channel was primarily meant for listing the buying and selling of goods and posting information of any description in what were called rooms. In this figure, two members on the board are arguing over a personal matter that distracts from the room’s purpose, as BlackNNGold is annoyed at the interaction:

Figure 44. Disruptive argument on Electronic Bulletin Board (Fictitious)

This can be viewed as two users arguing, but it also is a form of trolling. This is because of the comment by BlackNNGold who feels the room is being disrupted by the others’ argument. Trolls could also use American Standard Code for Information Interchange (ASCII) characters to compose obscene signs and pictures that were the first types of visual trolling that emerged on the CBBS.

Krappitz (2012) argues that it was in Usenet where the first appearance of the word ‘troll’ occurred. Researchers found the CBBS to be effective in connecting people and eventually creating public communities. It was a perfect way of marrying mass communication
(exchanges of information among many) and interpersonal communication (one-to-one exchanges of information) by the mediation of the computer screen (Rafaeli & LaRose, 1993; Rafaeli, 1988). Researchers also became aware that these boards were lacking in face-to-face contact which meant non-verbal cues were absent, in turn making misunderstandings more common (Tidwell & Walther, 2002). This had some contribution to trolling behaviour as an ‘innocent’ story could be seized on by a troll and exploited. The CBBS was the starting point of where disruptive trolls began to take advantage of the mostly anonymous environment to troll.

**Electronic Mail: Boundaries Widening**

Sending messages through electronic mail (email) was considered a major revolutionary development. Information was exchanged at a faster rate than sending a letter and it allowed people to send electronic files to each other. Email is the transmission of messages over electronic networks, either through web-based systems like Gmail or through mail reader software like Microsoft Outlook (Webopedia, 2017b). Email addresses are also necessary for gaining access into bounded electronic Internet sites such as Usenet and Facebook.

Trolls liked email because of the potential it has to transmit annoying and hurtful information, as well as disrupting individuals’ and groups’ online interactions. Researchers have argued that email decentralises institutional power and is a democratising medium because it weakens spatial, temporal and status barriers by providing access to information that could not otherwise be obtained (Skovholt & Svennevig, 2006; Garton & Wellman, 1995). Yet despite these benefits, email has been used effectively to distress online users by:

**Email Spam:**

This is junk or unsolicited email that wastes network bandwidth and can flood a user’s account with unreasonable amounts of unwanted mail (Webopedia, 2017c).

**Email Flaming:**

Flaming is negative behaviours, using profane text and also attaching offensive web links, photos or videos, which are aggressive, hostile, insulting, offensive, sarcastic or intimidating (Turnage, 2007; Baruch, 2005; O’Sullivan & Flanagin, 2003; Landry, 2000; Markus, 1994), although deciding if it is a troll’s flame email is the decision of the person who receives the email.

**Identity Deception:**

Being careful to check the person’s email especially if it is an email received that you did not want. Often professional emails will have signatures and corporate logos to prove it is not a troll’s email. Email addresses that are unprofessional could be a sign that the person’s identity is not who it really is, such as rockstar983@gmail.com or ru4me@yahoo.com.
Harvesting Email Addresses, Scams, Phishing and False Corporate Emails:

These are usually the domain of hackers and scammers; however, trolls have taken Internet users’ email addresses and used them for unsolicited and illegal purposes.

With the limited functionality of Web 1.0 email, trolls could add impact to their email messages by using emoticons, graphic representations of facial expressions that follow, or are placed in, sentences (Skovholt, Grønning & Kankaanranta, 2014). Email broke the boundary between the private and public in Web 2.0 because of the requirement to use them on Usenet and other sites. However, it did not stop trolls as millions of fake email addresses began to appear and spam and troll email messages became a standard practice, with billions of dollars spent over decades on software to stop these practices.

Usenet: Trolls Become Visible

Trolling got the attention of the Internet when the stories of what was occurring on Usenet began to be reported. Usenet trolling represented the erosion of boundaries between genuine Internet users and trolls. Research on Usenet and is trolling was quickly taken up to find out why it was of such importance.

An influential study of the workings of Usenet was published by Smith called Invisible Crowds in Cyberspace: Mapping the Social Structure of the Usenet (Smith, 1999). He mapped the number of users and where they were located, their interactions and behaviours and the ethical conduct of doing studies where data are public but still subject to privacy concerns. Smith (1999) called Usenet a form of social anarchy, even though many newsgroups within it were about discussions of mundane everyday topics such as gardening.

Most Usenet newsgroups though public preferred to keep their messages private within the group. Trolls knew this so, as Smith (1999) identified as a disruptive strategy, they would crosspost messages from other groups flooding the newsgroups with irrelevant information. Crossposting was placing a message from another newsgroup into another newsgroup. This practice was later recognised as an early form of spam mail where the messages received were unwanted. This practice is what started the Harvard Student Meow Brigade conflict. Those using Usenet had, what is termed in sociological research, a set of ‘norms’, that were violated.

Norms are abstract ideas of behaviours that the members of a group have that set limits for what is acceptable behaviour in a particular context (Johnson, 1960). These operate on the Internet hence why moderators of sites are appointed to control behaviours that are outside the group’s norms. Burnett and Bonnici (2003) conducting a study on Usenet groups stated the norms for the groups exist in the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ). They concluded from their observations of Usenet newsgroups that FAQ’s that clearly state rules and behaviours of the site, and are communicated to newcomers who join the newsgroups, maximise a harmonious safe environment to participate. However, as observed with Web 2.0 platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, community rules and FAQ’s are often ignored and therefore trolling flourishes (Nycyk, 2012).

Researchers also studied reasons for trolling and the motivations for it. van Reenen (2013) observed that being successful at Usenet trolling required the troll to have a kind of ‘verbal dexterity’, an ability to employ sarcasm and other language to create reactions. This is
concerning because Internet users expect support not criticism and abuse, especially if they have joined Usenet groups to share their experiences of stigma, which is a part of their identity they may keep secret in their ‘real’ daily lives (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Gollwitzer, 1986). Bounded systems should foster this support and acceptance, but troll infiltrating the newsgroups made sure this was not always done.

Usenet was significant in raising awareness of trolling and began the formal identification of defining and understanding trolling. Hauben and Hauben (1998) found many users were aware of those abusing the nature of Usenet and would let the offender know through e-mails and public messages. Yet trolls are resilient and persistent with their goals and targets. Bartlett (2014) comments that they are there to rile up the stupid; in a troll’s eyes you are the ‘stupid’ target. Usenet trolls cracked open those boundaries to start making trolling a mainstream activity on the Internet.

**Virtual Communities, Chat Lines and Early Gaming Sites**

As there were no formal social media platforms in the 1990’s, three areas were significant for people interacting with each other. These were: virtual communities, chat lines and early gaming sites, especially Multi-User Domain worlds. Although controls over trolling were in place through administrators and moderators checking their sites and the ability to discover ISP addresses to ban people, trolls were a significant problem on these three types of Internet sites. Trolls could easily have their comments removed and be banned from communities but they could reappear by simply changing email addresses and user names. Virtual communities in Web 1.0 were susceptible to such trolling consistently, but moderators were swift in dealing out punishments.

Extensive research on why people use virtual communities demonstrates the value placed on them as spaces of safety and trust. The ability to expose one’s thoughts and build friendships based on trust are highly valued, but are fragile as trolls can violate the members’ boundaries. This erodes trust and makes the members feel like they have to censor their comments. It is especially problematic if the community is a support community for issues such as rape, sexuality or health issues. Examples from the research of the high value placed on these communities by its members that trolls can seek to disrupt are11:

1. Jones (1997) describes a virtual community as a ‘virtual settlement’ suggesting that although people will only use it for their needs for a set time period, people do settle in them over a long time period, hence they need to be kept free of people who violate the rules of the community to continue this settlement.

2. Figallo (1998) suggested members of a virtual community feel a part of it, forming relationships and bonds of trust with other members, which lead to exchanges and interactions that bring value to members’ lives.

3. Hummel & Lechner (2002, p.8) state:

   The *loyalty* of a group can be defined in terms of the social relations within a group and to the place. Such social relations increase the interaction within a group as well as the bonding of a community to the platform or its community organizer. Increasing the bonding
increases the quantity and often also the quality of interactions and the social relations and bonding to a place draws the interaction of a community to a place.

4. Carter (2005), in her study of a virtual community, concluded that the community was valued by members because it removes any preconceived ideas regarding judgements about age, race, gender etc., allowing a pure relationship to develop initially. In addition, it makes people feel safe in their acts of disclosure, removing the embarrassment of confession.

According to such research, discretion and loyalty are highly valued as a priority by those who join virtual communities.

A common strategy employed by trolls that violates the community’s trust is the concern troll. These trolls frequently appear on chat lines being a form of a ‘con artist’. Shaw (2013, p. 102) describes this troll:

Some trolls couch their comments in civility while simultaneously de-railing discussion. For example, a concern troll couches his or her attempts to derail discussion in terms of concern, thereby maintaining ‘civility’ while also engaging in trolling behaviour.

It is easier to do this behaviour on chat lines as responses can be instant and the user will take the bait and may feel trust has been violated. In virtual communities the victim may reach out to other members to ask this be stopped. Lawson (2008) in her study of chat lines found that protecting the turf of a chat channel from trolls was achieved when humour and sarcasm were employed to out troll the troll. She gave an example where a troll came into a chat room reserved for socialising not seeking sexual contact. The members banding together to try to eject the troll through making fun of the troll (Lawson, 2008, p. 151):

<JT> Hi. I’m a 20-something guy, toned and tanned. Any sexy redhead femails wanna chat...message me

<SM> *da rolls her eyes...real slick JT. If you’re gonna troll, at least learn to spell...it’s FEMALE...geeze

<mj>...”And here in the wilds of #xxxxxxx we see <JT> giving the notorious mating call of the species homos-wankerus, commonly known as trolling.

This example illustrates the value people place on using virtual communities. People will fight the trolls to restore the group’s norms and bring civility back to the community.

A final example of trolling within a bounded system was the early text-based online gaming and virtual environments. As previously mentioned Dibbell’s (1998) rich description of his observing in his LambdaMOO of trolling was influential. It highlighted the problem of dealing with trolls and the power relations between those who ran Internet sites and its members. Balancing freedoms to post what one wants against maintaining civil web sites continues today.
Online gaming is an exception as often rules are relaxed regarding what can be posted and often trolling is accepted as part of the community’s practices. Apperley (2010, p. 139) comments:

Rude and aggressive demeanors are contrary to the sociality of game play, while scammers are deliberately predatory on new members of the community; such actives are often forbidden by the terms of service of the game, but continue to exist due to the difficulty of effectively policing them.

Keeping a bounded system within gaming and virtual worlds became difficult in Web 1.0 and continues today. An extensive Web 1.0 study was conducted by Reid (1999) that highlighted the dilemma and complexity of controlling trolls. By studying the workings of four Multi-User Domains (MUDS), she was able to document the workings of maintaining order in often challenging virtual environments. As commonly found in such research, people in computer-mediated groups, particularly games, are usually more aggressive, impulsive and assertive, less bound by the precedents of societal norms of group behaviours (Antoci et al., 2016). Reid (1999) suggests, stopping such out-of-control behaviours rules to maintain civility must be adhered to, with such administrators called ‘Gods’ or ‘Wizards’.

As she studied the various MUDS, she documented how even in strictly controlled bounded systems in virtual environments, trolls could not be dealt with quickly. Often the gaming continues when administrators are not logged in creating a problem of what to do when the trolls start causing problems. Sometimes players were afforded temporary privileges by the administrators to ban people, but this was often ineffective as the virtual environments needed constant attention.

In Reid’s previous work, she described a common problem researchers found with the growing Web 1.0 environments. In this extract, Reid (1998, p. 115) describes a problem which is a common disruptive behaviour trolls did when administrators left the environment:

Nevertheless, official support cannot ensure safety from the less positive aspects of the virtual environment. A single user of JennyMUSH was able to subvert the delicate social balance of the system by using both technical and social means to enact anonymously what amounted to virtual rape. Two weeks after being assigned a character, a user of the system used the MUD's commands to transform him or herself into a virtual manifestation of every other user's fears. This user changed 'her' initial virtual gender to male, 'his' virtual name to 'Daddy', and then used the special 'shout' command to send messages to every other user connected to the MUD. He described virtual assaults in graphic and violent terms. At the time at which this began, none of the MUD's administrators, or Wizards, were connected to the system, a fact that may well have been taken into account by the user. For almost half an hour, the user continued to send obscene messages to others. During that time, some of his victims logged out of the system, taking the simplest course to nullify the attack. Those who remained transported their virtual personas to the same locale as that of their attacker. Many pleaded with him to stop, many threatened him, but they were powerless to prevent his attacks.

This view takes on new meaning considering that the MUD was specifically for female sexual abuse survivors. Such incidents cause mistrust and also people abandoning a site. Yet despite fights with trolls, Reid (1999) concluded MUD’s are not sites of anarchy and rampant
free speech, but highly controlled bounded spaces where law and order exist. As we will see with Web 2.0, this actually became difficult to police and has become a major problem; trolls began to break out of these bounded spaces as new software and platforms emerged.

**Web 2.0 Trolling: Becoming a Mainstream Practice**

Web 2.0 research has advanced our understanding of trolls and trolling and is recognised as a growing field. It covers many disciplines with computer science, psychology, sociology and anthropology scholars doing substantive works in this area. The idea of trolling becoming mainstream underpins this section. When something moves into the mainstream it means the attitudes towards it become accepted as normal or conventional. Despite much attention given to trolling as abhorrent, criminal and disruptive, Internet uses have come to accept it as something to tolerate.

Curran (2012) offers an explanation for mainstream trolling taking the view that over time the Internet has fostered a shift from the collective good of a community and its groups to a place that gives priority to the satisfaction of the needs, desires and aspirations of the individual. Yet this view has not been uncommon to describe changes in human behaviour and effects on society. French socialist Gustave Le Bon’s (1896) book *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* articulated well the observations of crowd and mob behaviour that we see occurring on Web 2.0 platforms. These observations mirror the behaviours of Internet users and trolls as seen particularly on social media. Summarising Le Bon (1896) and these reflections, his observations are:

1. Crowds take on a sort of collective mind making them feel, think and act differently from when they act as if they were isolated from a crowd.

2. Certain ideas and feelings only come into being when people form a crowd.

3. Many acts done in crowds are impulsive, lack balanced judgements and are often disruptive and dangerous in action.

4. They lack morality and are a form of interior human evolution development.

5. Crowds afford individuals anonymity and a loss of accountability in behaviours.

6. Crowds succumb to instincts which individuals would normally keep restrained.

A causal explanation for the crowd-like troll activity is the simpler to use software and platforms Web 2.0 offers as Harrison and Barthel (2009, p. 157) explain:

> Web 2.0 services and applications make possible more dynamic interactions between clients and servers, more engaging webpage displays and applications and ultimately more direct, interactive and participative user-to-user interactions than heretofore experienced on the web. Such interactions are possible because Web 2.0 applications enable users with little technical knowledge to construct and share their own media and information products, as they do, for example, on social networking websites.
Researchers became aware of these types of changes and how they were used by trolls. Psychology researchers became interested in measuring and describing trolling.

Although much work across academic disciplines concluded being anonymous greatly aided trolls in their power to harm and disrupt, Suler’s (2004) Online Disinhibition Effect research was highly influential in explaining negative behaviours people do online. One reason he found was the concept of dissociation. It suggested people act usually reasonably offline, but online they express a darker, aggressive and hateful side of their personality without regard for others’ feelings (Suler, 2004, p. 323):

Consciously or unconsciously, people may feel that the imaginary characters they “created” exist in a different space, that one’s online persona along with the online others live in an make-believe dimension, separate and apart from the demands and responsibilities of the real world. They split or dissociate online fiction from offline fact. Emily Finch, an author and criminal lawyer who studies identity theft in cyberspace, has suggested that some people see their online life as a kind of game with rules and norms that don’t apply to everyday living (E. Finch, unpublished observations, 2002). Once they turn off the computer and return to their daily routine, they believe they can leave behind that game and their game identity. They relinquish their responsible for what happens in a make-believe play world that has nothing to do with reality.

Suler’s (2004) work is influential and is frequently used to explain why people become trolls. A criticism has been stated by Buckels, Trapnell and Paulhus (2014) who have argued troll research needs to diversify. They argue trolls are far more insidious than just pranksters; traits such as sadism, narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathic factors exist and trolls enjoy causing harm. Their analysis correlates with the view that trolling is a harmful practice (Buckels, Trapnell & Paulhus, 2014, p. 102):

In the final analysis of Study 2, we found clear evidence that sadists tend to troll because they enjoy it. When controlling for enjoyment, sadism’s impact on trolling was cut nearly in half; and the indirect effect of sadism through enjoyment was substantial, significant, and remained significant when controlling for overlap with the Dark Triad scores. These findings provide a preliminary glimpse into the mechanism by which sadism fosters trolling behavior. Both trolls and sadists feel sadistic glee at the distress of others. Sadists just want to have fun . . . and the Internet is their playground!

As van Reenen (2013) illustrates, the history of trolling in CMC has transformed from a specific practice with a defined purpose to a blanket colloquial term describing many types of mischievous behaviours. Leaver (2013) argues the line between those being trolled, and the trolls, is now blurred as it becomes a mainstream behavioural practice. Fichman and Sanfilippo (2016) argue that the term ‘troll’ is no longer clear as what constitutes it. This is exacerbated by the mass media’s misappropriation of the term as trolling is now applied to many instances of bad language or argument.
Memes: The Troll’s Calling Card

Memes became an important symbolic image to use on the Internet, being used by anyone wanting to make a point about an issue they felt strongly about. Memes are also used for amusement to display sarcasm, humour or shock with ghoulish and offensive text and images (Rintel, 2013). The formal origin of the term is attributed to evolutionary biologist Clinton Richard Dawkins who said they are a unit of cultural meaning representing an idea or a value, passed generationally (Dawkins, 1976). Milner (2013) describes them as digital artefacts used as responses to events that occur in popular culture for the public to comment on and use. Burgess (2008) considers them creative, but mundane. Steele (2013) takes a more sinister position on memes, stating they bait people to make negative responses and lure Internet users into engagement with trolls that is argumentative and disruptive.

Coleman’s (2014) view is that although they are enjoyed by many, they have a history of cruelty and troll-like features that cause harm. An extensive study of cat memes by Miltner (2014) found such memes are harmless and represent solidarity of people enjoying a digital medium. Memes are a calling card for trolls and have become a highly valued form of what is termed ‘remix culture’ (Shifman, 2013), where the context of photos is interspersed with offensive text can cause disruption and hurt. They can also be used against trolls as Figure 45 shows, where users created an anti-troll meme to post against trolls as a calling card to warn others a troll is present in their particular Internet space:

![Figure 45. Anti troll meme (Photobucket, n.d)](image)

The ability for millions of Internet users to easily create troll memes with online meme generation software shows how mainstream trolling has become.
Online Memorial Vandals: Moral and Legal Backlashes Against Trolls

The troll act that brings widespread attention and outrage is when a person or animal has a memorial page placed on any part of the Internet, especially Facebook. Although controls exist to limit postings on all sites, trolls and hackers have caused much harm by posting text and photos with horrific insults. The moral backlash against these trolls has resulted in legal action across many countries and increased naming and shaming of these trolls.

Phillips (2011) reported in her research an attack on an online memorial site was done in 2010 in response to an attack on a female trainer at Seaworld in the United States. She reported troll comments such as “Killed the bitch cos she didn’t bring fishes” appeared. This brought attention from the media and public who abhorred this practice, with demands for harsh punishments for the trolls. The disrespect given towards the trainer was considered inappropriate to laugh at such a tragedy. To trolls it was an opportunity to make fun of it.

Trolls did get caught posting comments on memorial websites, such as Sean Duffy in the United Kingdom who wrote comments on two memorial websites such as ‘Help me mummy it’s hot in hell’ (Camber & Neville, 2011). Pornographic images are also posted on memorial sites. What is found is that cruelty and sadism in intent to harm is present. The outrage over this practice has resulted in amendments to laws allowing easier prosecution of trolls that commit these acts. Finding them is not always easy and the costs associated with prosecution in courts of law can be prohibitive.

Trolling Knowledge Spaces

People like to share information with, and offer advice to, others on many subjects. The concept of a knowledge space is much like an encyclopaedia; a place to go to so one can find the needed knowledge on a subject. Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page), an online encyclopaedia, has become one of the world’s most used reference websites despite the questioning of the quality and accuracy of the information on it.

An influential study was published in the Journal of Information Science in 2010 by Shachaf and Hara called Beyond Vandalism: Wikipedia Trolls. The study was unique because it contained surveys and interviews with those who committed trolling acts on Wikipedia. A previous study by Herring, Job-Sluder, Scheckler and Barab (2002) where trolling behaviours were identified in an online forum was built upon by Shachaf and Hara, using data collected over a longer period. This study of Wikipedia trolls was significant because it demonstrated trolls over time would consistently be altering Wikipedia pages undeterred by any threats of prosecution and banning. It marked the fact that large-scale global sites like this one, Facebook and others would have much difficulty controlling troll behaviour.

The study effectively showed why trolls attacked Wikipedia, as described by Shachaf and Hara (2010, p. 357):

This study reports that boredom, attention seeking, and revenge motivate trolls; they regard Wikipedia as an entertainment venue, and find pleasure from causing damage to the community and other people. Findings also suggest that trolls’ behaviours are characterized as repetitive, intentional, and harmful actions that are undertaken in isolation and under hidden virtual identities, involving
violations of Wikipedia policies, and consisting of destructive participation in the community.

This is a reasonably accurate description of troll behaviours that applies across much of the Internet. Such trolling can undermine the trust people place in knowledge spaces. Trolls just did not change needed information, but also disrupted the credibility of Wikipedia. The site has taken steps to prevent trolling and continues as a site of choice for those seeking knowledge on many subjects.

The Social Media Troll Arena

Social media’s role in society has been elevated to great importance as it has become the principle way to communicate, share ideas and opinions, organise action and obtain information from a mass audience. It has become indispensable for many who want to stay in contact with others scattered all over the world and to follow interests through joining groups. But it is also represents the dilution of the term trolling (Leaver, 2013). What this means is, trolling is a mainstream, seen as normal, activity on social media. boyd and Ellison (2008) argue social media is about connection within bounded systems and just with lists of people. While this is accurate, as they are bounded systems as you need to join using a password, trolling is rife on social media as are fake accounts. This has become a serious issue for social media companies under pressure to address trolling and cyber bullying.

Social media trolling research has built upon the work of Suler (2004) and others to explain motivations and reasons for trolling. What has changed the definitions of trolling is the association with the growth in social media platforms and more liberal attitudes towards bad behaviours. Bishop (2012), for example, argues that we need to split trolls into groups to make clear differences, such as he says the ‘flame trollers’ who cause harm and the ‘kudos trollers’ who constructively help others but still troll.

Usenet groups were contained spaces, so despite the trolling outrage that occurred within them, the boundary into the mainstream was contained. People tended not to use Usenet as much as they do with social media now. Social media has crossed that boundary. With any community what is acceptable to say changes over time as norms change. Kirman, Linehan and Lawson (2012) argue that boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable social behaviour are not always clearly defined. This is a problem with social media; some groups may allow content that is abusive or obscene, so the user must decide for themselves if joining social media and seeing such images are acceptable to them.

Social Media sites walk a fine balance between allowing freedoms to post what users want to and containing trolling. Powers (2003, p. 196) illustrates the problem of trying to determine if someone is actually trolling:

Anyone who has spent much time online in discussion boards, chat rooms, and such cyberplaces has no doubt witnessed flaming and off topic posts. For whatever reasons, some participants effectively burden the commons by misusing shared IT resources. It is doubtful, however, that these behaviors are anything more than breaches of netiquette. First, though they involve intentional speech acts, it is not always clear in context that they violate community norms established by a practice. Some discussion and chat forums are simply more
anarchistic than others and whatever rules there may be are up to the moderators to enforce.

The problem then becomes the determination of trolling. If it is disrupting and the intent is clear it is malicious than it is easier to remove the troll. However, arguing and name calling, which are a part of trolling strategies, is not always trolling. Consider the Australian Facebook news sites such as The Courier Mail or The Sydney Morning Herald. If someone has committed an horrific act and gets abusive comments, does this mean those stating the abuse are trolls? This is especially so if the person is convicted or suspected of crimes towards animals, children and the elderly, political corruption, indiscretions and behaviours from sports people, terrorism and theft. Rational discussions of issues, such as reintroducing the death penalty for example that occur after crimes are reported, are often not possible as the medium of Facebook does not lend itself to debates. All postings are virtually impossible for Facebook to control and complaints to can be ignored because of the sheer volume of reports against trolls.

The nature of, and definition of, friendship has also been changed by social media use, as seen on Facebook. A friend in a Facebook context is not a traditional close personal relationship but collections of people; acquaintances, friends of friends, family, celebrities, politicians and those in common interest groups (Mackay & Jacobson, 2014). The shift to this has meant people are disposable, can be defriended and blocked from being contacted. This is not necessarily undesirable, but it has shifted the focus of friendships to not mean the same as an offline friendship. Facebook friends can also inadvertently troll your own posts which causes conflict between people.

Trolls can be shamed by other Facebook users and be publically named. This has advantages in stopping trolling, but can have consequences for the person who posts these comments. Two examples were reported that involved comments about race. One was published in The Voice Online, where Geris Hilton had a photograph take of him with a young black child in the background. Hilton, the news report said, proceed to post racist remarks about the child. The friends also joined in posting comments, which were reported on the Voice’s website with their full names published. This extract with the names removed showed the comments (Hudson, 2015):

Friend 1: I didn’t know you were a slave owner
Friend 2: “Help feed this pour child today”
Friend 3: “But Massuh, I dindu nuffin:
Friend 4: Send him back dude those f*** are expensive
Like 25 cents a day

His Facebook friends may not have intended to be racist, but because social media posts can be easily copied they were publically shamed and labelled as trolls.

A second example of mainstream trolling is the case of Justine Sacco who in December 2013 was at London Heathrow Airport boarding a flight to Johannesburg. She posted on Twitter this message:
Demonstrating the speed at which social media has to quickly spread information globally, before her flight reached Africa she was getting abuse on Twitter from trolls and the public. Ronson (2015a, 2015b) documented what occurred to her:

The joke was intended to mock her own bubble of privilege, but while she slept on the plane Twitter took control of her life and dismantled it. She became the worldwide number one trending topic that night: “We are about to watch this Justine Sacco bitch get fired, in real time, before she even knows she’s being fired”, and “Everyone go report this c*** @justinesacco”, and so on, for a total of 100,000 tweets. Justine was fired, her reputation mangled.

Sacco’s tweet may have been taken out of context and not intended to flame other users of Twitter. Yet her case demonstrates that content can be seized upon and used by others to troll the person who posts what they think are harmless jokes.

A controversial British journalist named Milo Yiannopoulos has been accused of being a troll for his support for Donald Trump in the 2016 United States Presidential Election and for criticising African-American actress Leslie Jones. Yiannopoulos used Twitter to post trolling comments. He is open about his trolling and does not fit the stereotypical image of the troll as hiding behind the screen lashing out at people. His tweets were deemed trolling and he was banned from using Twitter. Roy (2017) commented how Yiannopoulos brand of hate trolling is not only mainstream but is influential hooking into the mood of the (mostly) American people who galvanised against the left side of politics. He spoke for them but received much criticism for his actions. Yet he represents the open, mainstream nature of trolling that now exists were trolls do not hide their names.

Social media trolls if caught are not always regretful of their actions. They often do not see any consequences for their actions. An example comes from the social news aggregation and discussion platform Reddit. Chen (2012) describes the case of Michael Brutsch, who was a celebrated troll on Reddit. He called himself Violentacrez, and was considered ‘creepy’ due to his posting photos of underage girls and creating inflammatory disruptive Sub Reddit sections within Reddit such as ‘Niggerjailbait’ and ‘Chokeabitch’. Yet he was well-liked by other Reddit users. This example shows a shift to tolerance of trolling and its openness that has alarmed Internet users who wish to continue to use social media, but do not want to see content such as Brutsch posted.

An alternative view is that social media trolls have been seen as positive role models for change and for being attention differing points-of-view to societal debates. Even 4chan and
Anonymous have put forward reasonable debates about issues bringing them to the public’s attention despite some disdain for their trolling actions. Fichman and Sanfilippo (2016, p. 175) state an alternative view of trolling:

It is important, however, that we recognize that not all online trolling is bad. Trolling also often has socially positive impacts beyond the light tone, satire, and humor that many instances of trolling bring to computer-mediated communication. Positive outcomes and benefits of trolling, both generally and in specific instances, are numerous. For example, online trolls help to bring about social change. They often express and support minority opinions, drawing attention to particular social and political issues.

Trolls have also participated in positive social and political action by raising debates into the public realm that news organisations would not do. The Arab Springs uprisings in 2011 held in the Middle East and North Africa had demonstrations organised by using social media. Researchers found in their analyses of Twitter used during the uprising that spreading information that was suppressed, such as where protests were going to be safely held, was beneficial to a population with increased access to social media to find out such information (Bruns, Highfield & Burgess, 2013; Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011). Trolls also created fake Twitter accounts against the government propaganda that was reported in the mass media. They portrayed the then Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak as incompetent, inept and dangerous to the Egyptians, resulting in part to his being overthrown as leader in January 2011 (Schroeder & Everton, 2012).

Social media has become the new domain of the troll, though several questions have arisen as trolling of this nature has become a mainstream cultural occurrence. The new social media platforms have allowed ease of use and for a greater number of people to participate in online trolling. It has also shown how the terms ‘troll’ and ‘trolling’ have changed in perception from the public encouraged by the changing meaning of its use by the mass media.

There are two final areas which have their own contributions to the changing nature, spread and ease of trolling, aided by the invention of mobile computing: gaming and virtual worlds, and phone apps.

**Gaming, Phone Apps and Virtual Worlds Trolling**

Online gaming and virtual worlds have evolved into graphically sophisticated competitive arenas. Many are played over the Internet with competitors playing from anywhere in the world. Examples include: Counterstrike, World of Warcraft (WoW), Warhammer and Skyforge. These game sites are recognised as communities with often player bases of millions. Players create large communities that are close knit and respectful despite the competitive nature of playing these games. Factions forming in some games are called clans or guilds that replicate the social structure of a family (Salarimatin, 2017; Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006). In WoW for example, players grow to know each other by character name, so relationships form in such increasingly complex networks as this, making it a form of community (Ruch, 2009).

Much research is critical of the harmful effects paying games has on individuals, particularly adolescents, with trolling and gaming addiction being seen as causing individual distress which is acted out negatively by gamers on others. Researchers have called this ‘Internet
gaming disorder’ (Snodgrass, Dengah, Lacy, Bagwall, Van Oostenburg & Lende, 2016; Pontes & Griffiths, 2014). The identified disruptive gaming behaviours causing this are: trolling, spamming and griefing, although a lesser known but significant group of disruptive gaming aggressors are called HUEs (Fragoso, 2015). This trolling takes place in gaming environments or virtual worlds such as: simulation games, virtual reality, virtual fantasies and fantasy games (Schultze & Rennecker, 2007) each with normally involving high levels of conflict, violence, discrimination and role-playing.

Apperley (2010) describes the banter between game players as smack play, which is insulting and threatening language used by trolls but often tolerated as part of the game. Another strategy used is called griefing as Maher (2016, p. 568) describes:

> Online gamers have a reputation for hostility. In a largely consequence-free environment inhabited mostly by anonymous and competitive young men (sic), the antics can be downright nasty. Players harass one another for not performing well and can cheat, sabotage games and do any number of things to intentionally ruin the experience for others - a practice that gamers refer to as griefing.

An assertion researchers, which Fichman and Sanfilippo (2014) and Chartrand and Bargh (1999) have stated, is that gaming environments establish patterns of normative behaviour. Fichman and Sanfilippo (2014) also suggest the context of community standards makes certain aspects of behaviours socially acceptable. This is an explanation as to why trolling is heavily controlled in other parts of the Internet yet gaming somehow remain places where trolling is accepted. Game trolling will have different effects on its victims as Scott and Porter-Armstrong (2013) state, where it may not result in harm but cumulative, long-term negative effects are possible. These include depression, social isolation and health concerns such as obesity.

The trolling on games also has an unfortunate consequence to female gamers, gay and lesbians and ethnic people who are frequent troll targets. Consalvo (2012) claims in regards to women’s marginalisation in gaming that threatened individuals and groups have beliefs about the abilities and proper place of female players, and fears about the changing nature of the game industry. This is not surprising when many cited studies, such as Thacker and Griffiths (2012) consistently show that trolls play longer gaming sessions and are significantly younger, white and male.

Sexism, racism and homophobia trolling are considered serious by the gaming industry. Maher (2016) reports the gaming industry and academia is actually actively studying ways to manage and eliminate game trolling. Getting the views of those affected by trolling is crucial to understand its effects. For example, in a study by Graso (2016) of women playing the online game Minecraft, they were subjected to constant trolling. Although upset by it, they felt the online effects of misogyny but tended not to worry about their physical safety. Remaining anonymous helped but they still experienced harsh trolling (Graso, 2015, p. 51):

> With regards to misogyny in Minecraft, the women inherently referred back to their gender and described that their mere existence (as a woman) was a predisposition for verbal threats. On another note, feelings of anger and frustration prevailed among the women and they were active to discuss and share insight into the problem that is misogyny online. There was a significant fear of backlash from the community in both instances. Those “empowered” still felt a
foreboding threat of verbal attack, yet distanced themselves from feeling that there might be physical implications of this. None of the women reported being credibly threatened with physical attacks, but all reported online harassment in different strengths of severity ranging from persistent direct messaging on Twitter and Reddit comments including derogatory verbs and rape threats, as well as suggestive photographs sent, to a self-described “mild” harassment of mocking and deliberate and obstinate disagreement in comments regarding particularly topics of women in gaming and the GamerGate scandal.

This is an accurate view as trolls can make the gaming environment unnecessarily unpleasant for women and continue with stereotyping and discrimination against them.

Like Maher (2016), researchers have suggested ways to eliminate and manage gaming trolling. In a study by Friedberg (2015, p. 53) it was urged that gamer developers take into account more diverse representations of race and gender as Friedberg states:

Rather than continuing to marginalize women, set impossible physical standards, and retell the same violent male power fantasy, game developers should consider experimenting more with games that defy these staples of the industry. Game narratives that feature more female protagonists (or, at least, a different perspective from the white male protagonist) and that rely on more than violence to interact with the story may reach wider, more diverse audiences. The video game industry, as an agent of socialization, should consider the gender inequalities they are promoting and upholding, and ponder a more inclusive, even-handed approach

Ong (2016) who wrote in Newsweek supported these views:

To tackle this diversity problem, some experts have suggested taking a look at who’s creating these games—or more important, who isn’t. The International Game Developers Association suggests that only 3 percent of game developers are African-American, a figure that has risen by only 0.5 percent in the past decade. In comparison, 76 percent of developers are white. “The industry has an even bigger problem with race than it does with gender,” says Avonelle Wing, a gaming convention organizer with the company Double Exposure. “The people who speak out against race will likely be a single voice against a torrent of apathy. It’s something people have a hard time looking straight at.”

Online games are bounded systems like Web 1.0 that require passwords and membership, as well as a high degree of skill. However, gaming trolls can make their victim’s anguish public, such as posting their activities on social media. YouTube has many videos where trolls record their activities and post them, adding to the victim’s humiliation. As Chamorro (2014) states, trolling has a social status and is a status-enhancing activity, with trolls gaining approval from others when posting their trolling activity. This can be celebrated by other troll gamers. Perhaps it is true that by doing so the gamer troll is receiving more attention than they do in their offline life.
Trolling on the Run: Mobile/Cell Phones and Phone Apps

Computing has become accessible at any time from any location where there the Internet can be accessed. Laptops, tablets and mobile (cell) phones have made it possible for trolls to access Internet spaces unbounded by distance. Mobile computing is application software designed to run on smaller devices (Techopedia, 2017a) supported by infrastructure that allows the transmission of voice, data and video across the world (Tutorials Point, 2017). For trolls, even with the ability to trace trolling activity, it offers new opportunities to do so. Smartphone and tablet users have moved away from web browsers as gateways to Internet services resulting in a diversity of apps being created for the users who now number in the millions (Xu, Erman, Gerber, Mao, Pang & Venkataraman, 2001).

The benefits of phone apps are their convenience. The surge in use of them has caused hackers and trolls to quickly exploit the apps uses to steal, harm and disrupt. Figure 47, taken from a personal phone, shows what phone apps look like, where trolling can occur. These are social media apps on the Apple Iphone:

![Figure 47. Examples of common popular phone apps used for trolling](image)

Apps have made trolling fast and easy, though not always legal, by becoming a common mainstream activity. This has meant that the bounded systems that kept trolls away from others, such as moderators, have failed to contain them. This has also changed the meaning of trolling and again supports the idea that it has become a mainstream activity. For example, people who play jokes or pranks on others are called trolls, but may only be disrupting, not harming, their victims. Companies such as Android have created phone apps specifically for trolling.

As an example, one app allows phone users to prank another caller by bombarding them with constant messages about cats, but the caller never asked to receive these messages. The trolling comes from the inability of the caller to stop the messages despite following instructions to do so. On the surface it can be viewed as amusing, but to the constant texts do not stop and it can disrupt their use of their phone. Figure 48 shows how this form of trolling occurs:
A second example of more harmless trolling is from actor Cole Sprouse who, growing tired of fans taking his photo, set up an Instagram account to post photos of them before they tried to take photos of him. Posting them on Instagram, he would put an amusing comment about the fan’s photo attempt. On a website and app called *The Chive*, famous for its celebrity hoaxes, a member of the site posted a story about Sprouse. What is interesting about this is the writer’s use of the word ‘troll’. It is not clear if Sprouse is intending to troll, but he is posting peoples’ photos on Instagram without consent. Therefore, the writer saying Cole Sprouse ‘created Camera Duels solely dedicated to trolling fans that try to take pictures of him in public’ (*The Chive, 2017*) falls into the mainstream prankster troll category rather than the malicious ones who vandalise online memorials.
A newer area of app trolling research gaining attention is romantic and sexual contact dating apps. The significant use in using apps to find partners is illustrated by a reported study by Aaron Smith (2016) of the Pew Research Center. Though the study collected data from the United States, the conclusions from the sampled population state dating apps are increasing used by 18 to 24 year olds, but also increasingly by those over 55 years of age (Smith, 2016). There has also been an increased acceptability of apps to meet people representing a significant cultural change in attitudes brought about by increased Internet use (Clemens, Atkin & Krishnan, 2015). The main benefits of dating apps are: helping the socially anxious to engage in social interactions online first before meeting (Aretz, Demuth, Schmidt & Vierlein, 2010) and the ability to find a partner from a wider network not constrained by geographic distance (Finkel, Eastwick, Karney, Reis, & Sprecher, 2012).

Trolls can be cruel to those seeking love and friends on apps. People may be vulnerable having gone through breakups and losses, be swindled out of money by a fake profile or suffer offline physical violence. Yet their popularity means they are willing to take risks. Examples of apps catering to heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual and fetishes include: Tinder, OKCupid, Grindr, RSVP.com, ManHunt, Zoosk, Cougar Dating, eHarmony and Bumble. These apps are termed Location-Based Real-Time Dating (LBRTD). There is documented success of people meeting through the medium of apps, yet negative stories around them are frequently reported.

An Australian study of trolling on the dating app Tinder was conducted by March, Grieve, Marrington and Jonason (2017). Their aim was to find out if there was a relationship between the sex of the person using the app and trolling personality traits of narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, sadism, and impulsivity in predicting perpetration of trolling behaviours on LBRTD (March et al., 2017). As is usual in research and in cultural observations of trolling, men usually troll more than women. An earlier study suggested this was the case (Xia, Zhai, Liu, Sun & Chen, 2016). Although these statistical studies have limitations and questions about their results, in March et al’s case a sample size of 357 is small compared to the millions of dating app users their study suggests trolling in such a vulnerable environment as dating apps is a problem. People need to be cautious when using these apps.

Despite some disclosed limitations in the study, the main expected finding was that women’s trolling scores have significantly increased while men’s scores remained the same (March et al., 2017). The study does support the idea that trolling is now a mainstream practice. Tinder does require membership but is not a bounded system. Users may share their results with others and make fun of those who match the person’s profile but may be considered ugly, creepy or the person may deliberately troll the other with obscene or hateful messages. Commenting on March et al., Brenner (2017) gives his opinion of why, perhaps, trolls find dating apps irresistible to troll on:

The addictive feeling was more compelling than desktop online dating. Immediate gratification, swipe swipe swipe, one photo after the next, a bit of autobiographical information, evocative photos of often vague significance...the quintessential overwhelming too-muchness of excessive choice. Each momentary scan of the other's profile becomes a micro relationship all in itself, a rollercoaster of emotions and thoughts. A feeding frenzy for internet trolls, perhaps.
The researchers drew out of the participants’ admissions that they receive some form of pleasure from giving out cruel comments to many who, in looking for partners, are vulnerable emotionally and risk public humiliation and possibly consequences if the person is having an extra-marital affair. As Feinstein, Bhatia and Davila (2013) found in their study, harassing and trolling others does result in provable depressive symptoms and other negative mental health issues that trolls can inflame.

Chapter Conclusions

Trolling research offers understandings of the motivations of troll behaviours. This chapter substantially explored trolling research and showed how examining studies and stories of trolling assist with this understanding. The underlying point of this chapter was to show how trolling took place in mostly bounded spaces away from the public but moved to a mainstream practice. With this the meanings and understandings of trolling changed. Therefore, saying trolling is mainstream means it is practiced by many more people in many more ways. I argue that this mainstream trolling is a form of incivility that has grown, but is taken-for-granted and expected.

We can view some trolls as simply pranksters, but clearly with the ability to troll more widely that exists with mobile computing, the disruption and the offense caused is worrying Internet users. People do suffer negative mental health effects from experiencing trolling. The findings of this research are mostly negative. Their value though is in teaching us how trolling operates and despite their alarming nature, we can make decisions about how we manage using the Internet and avoid troll activity.

At this chapter’s commencement I asked four questions that formed the basis of this exploration of the literature. Looking again at these questions, the conclusions I draw from the sample trolling research are:

1. How is trolling defined?
A person who commits a hostile, offensive or hurtful act towards another or a group with intent to disrupt online communication between people or stop someone obtaining a goal by ridiculing them.

2. What are motivations for trolling?
The traits of personality traits of psychopathy, sadism and Machiavellianism are formal labels applied to trolling behaviours, but motivations of intention to harm, harass and obtain pleasure from these behaviours are likely explanations for its existence.

3. What behaviours and situations characterise trolling?
The behaviour of using types of language that offends or disrupts while the situations that characterise trolling are the opportunities afforded to trolls including the type of software they use and the willingness of the Internet site they use to tolerate it.

4. What are the consequences of trolling and suggestions for managing it?
This was not answered in this chapter but will be explored in Chapter Six.
In undertaking a comprehensive examination of sample of trolling literature chosen here, this chapter has presented the argument that trolls long ago broke out of the bounded systems and into the public’s consciousness. By doing so it has become clear that despite the problems they cause, being aware of how they troll can be minimise or stopped it. The knowledge in research also helps us prepare for managing new types of trolling.

Chapter Four will examine three cases of extreme trolling and examine trolls and trolling further to show how insidious trolls can be.
Notes

1 Quote taken from researcher Whitney Phillips (2012) from her personal blog called Billions and Billions https://billions-and-billions.com/2012/05/28/interview-with-a-troll/

2 Quote from Dr Mark Griffiths (2014).

3 Quote from Dr Emma Jane (2014).

4 It should be noted that the YouTube comments and video screen capture shown in figures 37 to 40 are in the public domain and viewable by anyone; therefore, they are acceptable to be shown as examples even though the user names are present.

5 For this book the work a lengthy discussion of Fairclough’s extensive work is not possible. However, although now dated since it was written before the mass use of the Internet and increased use of Computer-Mediated Communication. His book, Language and Power is worth reading despite some of the complexities of his arguments about power relationships that can take several readings. Nevertheless, his work has merit in explaining how language use can cause dominant people or institutions to maintain power over people. I argue that trolls that operate on 4chan and Russian Hackers have proven there is power in the way language is presented because it does influence how readers think and feel about issues and people.

6 Berners-Lee’s proposal paper has technical explanations of what formed the basis of the World Wide Web. It is reasonably easy to read and can be viewed, as at 2017, at the web address https://www.w3.org/History/1989/proposal.html

7 Images tables used came from https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/736x/3b/7b/22/3b7b22e371a7332da04f40096913b10a.jpg and https://www.calvin.edu/~dsc8/images/Web-1-2-3.gif

8 A fuller, extensive discussion of cultural change is outside the scope of this book. However, many researchers have applied traditional, long-standing theories from Karl Marx onwards to explain why cultures change and evolve. Regarding trolling, it is reiterated that the change from a bounded, contained system of trolls that was a major part of Web 1.0 to the mainstream Web 2.0’s ability to troll more easily was primarily caused by the technological advancement and society’s shift in values that encouraged a less civil Internet environment.

9 Walther’s 1996 article, published in high-ranking journal Communication Research, is an easy to read account of online research up to that point in time. Although it does not address trolling communication, Walther’s account of the types of research undertaken by scholars and the findings as at that time are comprehensive and can still be seen operating today despite the more advanced technologies now in existence.
10 Researcher Lange (2006) wrote substantially in the Internet research journal *First Monday* that, for research purposes, flames are subjective and rely on the context they are sent and the reaction of the receiver of the email. For example, an email that is considered a flame in a workplace context may be reported but if received in the person’s private email account they may ignore it.

11 There is a large body of sociological literature that those who study aspects of the Internet draw upon to explain the bonding of people into relationships. Although this is beyond the scope of this book, it should be noted that the use of such literature has successfully supported claims that online relationship, even for those who do not meet each other in person, are subject to the same rules and cycles as offline relationships. These weak ties work; for example, a group of workers or students come together for a short period of time to work on a project and bind to each other weakly as in their relationships are fragile, disposable and for a common purpose and set period of time. Nevertheless they are power. A frequently cited reference in Internet research work that explains this is called ‘The Strength of Weak Ties’ published in the 1973 edition of the *American Journal of Sociology*. In it Granovetter (1973) shows how doing network analysis of ties between people and the relationship between people who know others are powerful because the weak tie may turn out to be the start of a strong tie. For example, on a chat line a member may introduce a new member to the group and that new member forms a romantic relationship with one of the new members. A weak tie, not knowing someone, becomes an opportunity for a stronger tie. Granovetter’s paper is highly influential in understanding Internet networks and behaviours.

12 Psychological research has used the term Machiavellianism to describe a set of behaviours that have their origins in Italian history. Taylor (2016) describes the trait in psychological research as:

Machiavellianism is a personality trait involving manipulativeness and deceit, cynical views toward human nature, and a cold, calculating attitude towards others. The trait was conceptualized in 1970 by Christie and Geiss, and describes the extent to which individuals adhere to the political philosophy of Italian writer Niccolò Machiavelli, who advocated views involving cunning, deceit, and the notion that “means justify the ends”.

13 In the article the full first and surnames of the copy of the Facebook post appear but have been left out in this chapter.

14 Yiannopoulos’s Twitter account was permanently banned in 2016 because of his reported racist abuse targeting African American Leslie Jones over her role in the remake of the film *Ghostbusters*.

15 Scott and Armstrong’s (2013) article in the 2013 edition of *Psychiatry Journal* acknowledges that harm is subjective. One person may troll or be trolled but will not suffer any mental health issues. This may be true for all trolling, but games are a different trolling environment. The acceptance of culturally unacceptable practices such as incivility and language use leading to discrimination is clearly more frequent in gaming environments. This is not a judgement of the practice but an observation
based on reading the literature and some exposure to gaming environments. Scott and Armstrong in reviewing the body of literature up to 2013 interestingly state an area of research that is little researched; is the type of game the problem. Perhaps one game does more harm if a player gets trolled and experiences mental health issues. This suggests trolling effects are far more complex to identify in gaming than the cut and dried clear approach of stopping harmful trolling in other places on the Internet such as social media.
CHAPTER FOUR
TROLLING EXTREMES: THREE CASE STUDIES

Consider, for another thing, that many of the biologically female participants in the Bungle debate had been around long enough to grow lethally weary of the gag-and-get-over-it school of virtual-rape counseling, with its fine line between empowering victims and holding them responsible for their own suffering, and its shrugging indifference to the window of pain... – Julian Dibbell

“If you're going to express those points of view, you should do it with a face and a name so you can be accountable,” a defiant Dawson said. – Report in The Telegraph Newspaper

At an early stage I was attached to a mailing list through which pro-Russia propaganda and conspiracy theories were spread, but smears about me and others who were commenting Russia or the refugee crisis in public. The emails are still today sent to ministers, government officials, leaders of the Finnish media AND even the president of Finland. As a bonus, disinformation about me and my troll-investigations were emailed to about 200 of my Yle colleagues. – Jessikka Aro

In the previous chapters I defined trolls and trolling, gave examples of them and argued that the research suggests trolling has moved from bounded spaces on the Internet to being a mainstream cultural practice. This chapter looks in-depth at the problem of trolling by discussing three extreme cases of it. These cases are extreme because they raise questions about Internet Freedom of Speech and had devastating effects on peoples’ lives and reputations.

The three cases are: Julian Dibbell’s A Rape in Cyberspace: or TINYSOCIETY, and how to make one, the story of model and personality Charlotte Dawson’s crusade against trolls and her subsequent suicide and Russian hackers and trolls harassment of investigative journalist Jessikka Aro. The cases discussed in this chapter are based on a case study approach from Yin (2003). A case study is a systematic inquiry into an event that describes and explains a phenomenon (Bromley, 1990). The method and design for this is in the notes at the end of the chapter.

Overview of Cases

The Usenet flame war the Harvard students experienced demonstrated the relentless organised nature of trolling. There are differences between a prankster troll, a malicious troll and an organised troll. These trolls all aim to disrupt the user’s Internet experience. The trolls in this chapter are more relentless, vicious and vindictive. The significant factor that sets these cases apart for extremity are the severe consequences they had on peoples’ lives.

The first case is of Mr. Bungle that occurred in a LambdaMOO. This case is notable for Julian Dibbell’s rich description of an act of a virtual rape and how the MOO’s users banded together to try to eliminate the troll. The case also questions if online rape and violence is as valid and serious as that done offline.
The second is fashion model Charlotte Dawson’s battle against trolls especially on Twitter. They attacked her reputation with threats and sexist comments. It has been questioned why Dawson took on trolls, but the extreme outcome, though perhaps not all attributed to the trolling was her suicide.

The third case discusses Finnish journalist Jessikka Aro decided to investigate growing reports of Russian hackers (also referred to as trolls) who may or may not have been financed by the Russian Government in a propaganda war against the west. These trolls are highly organised spreading fake news and posting across social media misleading and disruptive messages. They are concerning because it was suggested that they interfered in other countries democratic elections especially the 2016 United States Presidential Election. Aro’s resulting online treatment from the trolls is of concern because it suggests that trolls can disrupt world affairs and determine not just the fate of people but of countries and economic systems.

The significance is how Mr. Bungle, Dawson’s trolls and Aro’s Russian hacker trolls took trolling to levels where the media, law and governments became involved. When such trolling occurs, it makes us question why they would use such behaviours to destroy peoples’ confidence in using the Internet. Trolls have influenced public opinion through spreading false information that can now potentially change the course of history. People go to the Internet for information about others; they can be persuaded by trolls to accept wrong information and dilate reasonable debate about issues, as well as shape the reputation and identity of people in negative ways (Nycyk, 2015).

Table 5 outlines the discussion of the chapter in terms of what occurred and the results and consequences of these three extreme trolling cases. George Orwell’s (1949) quote from *1984* is useful here as he wrote that ‘Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing’. Perhaps this is true of extreme trolling.
Table 5  
*Summary and stories of the three extreme trolling cases*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>What Occurred?</th>
<th>Results and Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dibbell</strong></td>
<td>A troll named Mr. Bungle logged into the LambdaMOO Dibbell was a member of and virtually raped two members and forced others to engage in sex acts with each other.</td>
<td>The members wanted Mr. Bungle punished having felt violated by his actions yet had no self-governance to manage such actions. The outcome was a group meeting to get rid of (toading) Mr. Bungle but he returned and was toaded again. It affected the LambdaMOO to the point where it was not the same friendly environment, showing how one person’s actions can affect a whole online community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dawson</strong></td>
<td>Charlotte Dawson was a model and presenter who gained a reputation as being a mean judge on an Australian television show called <em>Australia’s Next Top Model</em>. The incident that provoked extreme troll abuse at her was Dawson discovering the identity of one of the trolls, getting the troll suspended from their job and publically named. Although she received support for raising awareness of trolls, the attacks on social media, mostly Twitter, were relentless with a harsh tag #diecharlotte causing the trolling to spread worldwide.</td>
<td>Dawson confronted and publicly outing several real names of trolls. This took a toll on her mental health and she was admitted to hospital in August 2012 after taking an overdose of prescription medication. She tweeted on Twitter that they ‘had won’. Yet she refused to stop using Twitter. In February 2014 she committed suicide in Sydney, Australia. The case has been widely debated in public and academic spheres showing how difficult it is to control trolls but also raises a debate that at what point personal responsibility becomes necessary to walk away from trolling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aro</strong></td>
<td>Journalist Jessica Aro in 2014 investigated the activities of pro-Russian Internet trolls who spread fake news and used fake social media accounts to do so. Aro was targeted by the trolls for her publication of the activities they were doing.</td>
<td>Her investigation brought to public attention the sophistication of organised trolling. The Russian trolls showed that information warfare is real concern and not the fiction of spy novels. The public was made aware of how it is now possible to interfere in other countries’ economies and political structures. Such activities have displaced the need for battle-type warfare, but cause just as devastating results such as social unrest and mistrust.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Case One: Julian Dibbell, Mr. Bungle, Virtual Rape and Trolling

Julian Dibbell wrote an essay in 1993 about his experiences as a member of a role-playing, text-based LambdaMOO called The Living Room that he described as a ‘rustic mansion built entirely of words’. Julian’s onscreen name was Dr Bombay, a character from the television show Bewitched. He had affection for the room, as other players in the room did, and despite his busy schedule he made time to interact in the MOO.

Virtual communities, asynchronous chat lines and social media groups zealously guard their spaces from trolls as they become tight knit communities. They develop trust and confidence to post intimate details and personal views. They regarded their membership as being part of a community. Cutler (1995) provides an excellent comment that illustrates why a community or online game environment like Dibbell’s LambdaMOO is important to them, and why those who disrupt it, even by lurking⁶, represent a threat to the site:

The range and relative newness of affiliations means that they have little or no time bound histories. Commitment to relationships and community therefore does not come out of previous relationships but out of the temporal mutuality of interests. Commitment, though, spans the range from fleeting to deep involvement. Each discussion forum has many "lurkers" who simply read or observe the actions of others. There are usually many more lurkers than active participants. Lurkers seem drawn to the activities of the group but feel most secure by remaining anonymous. Anonymity is a feature of CMC that bedevils system communicators and sets back discussion. From the sidelines will suddenly shoot an ill-considered barb that results in emotional responses. In contrast, for the committed few who discuss, perhaps as representatives of the lurkers, there is heavy emotional involvement. As builders of histories, files, MUD (multi-user Dungeons) worlds, the creators take a very proprietary interest in sustaining the community.

In Dibbell’s LambdaMOO Mr. Bungle’s actions surprised the room as it was assumed that he (assumed to be male) was lurking for a long time before trolling. The room was in a state of harmony and homogeneity (Martin, 1992) in that Martin’s description of organisations had the characteristics of an almost utopian community, with co-operation and friendliness, being the main social norms operating in it. Rules of the room and moderators to enforce them were present, but Dibbell suggests there were cultural assumptions from the members that the room would be safe and moderators only there to advise action and remedy in the event of trolling.

Dibbell vividly describes the extreme trolling event well and, drawing on descriptions from his essay, assists in seeing why it is such a shocking event for him to experience. One point needs clarification; what is a voodoo doll and how it had a role in the virtual rape act. The Future of Identity in the Information Society (2008, p. 13) clarify that it is computer code and describe how it operated in the MOO:

And after a few weeks' residence there he finds himself, like a good many of the other inhabitants, in possession of an object known as a voodoo doll. And when I say ‘object’ what I mean is a program, a piece of code, for when you left out the players who interacted in LambdaMOO what you were left with, essentially, was a collection of programs, all designed to enable the players to manipulate the text
of which LambdaMOO was constructed in various more and less interesting ways. And more specifically, what the voodoo doll enabled its owner to do was to spoof other players. Spoofing is, of course, a netwide term denoting the appropriation of a user's identity by other users; and in the context of the MOO this meant that by typing actions into the voodoo doll, its owner could make it appear as if another player were performing those actions. This was something of a violation of the social conventions of virtual reality, a kind of flouting of the sanctity of a player's control over his or her virtual body, but on the other hand it was an easily detected violation, it could amuse both victim and perpetrator...

The extreme trolling in the MOO was done by Mr. Bungle using the code of the voodoo doll on the morphs. Dibbell describes the doll’s use as an act of rape violating the MOO’s community standards.

Dibbell portrays in graphic Mr. Bungle as a scary figure, an invader and a villain. The beginning of the story is reproduced because it shows how the co-operative harmonious room environment suddenly changed due to his trolling (Dibbell, 1998):

The facts begin (as they often do) with a time and a place. The time was a Monday night in March, and the place, as I’ve said, was the living room — which, due largely to the centrality of its location and to a certain warmth of decor, is so invariably packed with chitchatters as to be roughly synonymous among LambdaMOOers with a party. So strong, indeed, is the sense of convivial common ground invested in the living room that a cruel mind could hardly imagine a better place in which to stage a violation of LambdaMOO’s communal spirit. And there was cruelty enough lurking in the appearance Mr. Bungle presented to the virtual world - he was at the time a fat, oleaginous, Bisquick-faced clown dressed in cum-stained harlequin garb and girdled with a mistletoe-and-hemlock belt whose buckle bore the quaint inscription KISS ME UNDER THIS, BITCH! But whether cruelty motivated his choice of crime scene is not among the established facts of the case. It is a fact only that he did choose the living room.

The descriptions of the disruptive acts are graphic with the main morphs targeted for sex acts such as eating their pubic hair and committing sexual acts on Mr. Bungle. Two morphs named exu, who was identified as an indefinable gender, and Moondreamer, a female, were targeted with other morphs also becoming involved in forced sex acts. Although Mr. Bungle was ejected once, Dibbell states he was lurking in another part of the room. A moderator named Iggy ‘brought with him a gun of near wizardly powers, a gun that didn’t kill but enveloped its targets in a cage impermeable even to a voodoo doll’s powers’. ‘That Iggy fired this gun at Mr. Bungle, thwarting the doll at last and silencing the evil, distant laughter’ (Dibbell, 1998).

Dibbell identified that Mr. Bungle was a young man using a computer at New York University. The next description from the incident Dibbell (1998) uses further graphic description to show the trolling:

Instead, he entered sadistic fantasies into the “voodoo doll,” a subprogram that served the not-exactly kosher purpose of attributing actions to other characters that their users did not actually write. And thus a woman in Haverford,
Pennsylvania, whose account on the MOO attached her to a character she called Moondreamer, was given the unasked-for opportunity to read the words As if against her will, Moondreamer jabs a steak knife up her ass, causing immense joy. You hear Mr._Bungle laughing evilly in the distance.

This type of trolling that is vicious and is sexually degrading in nature is common on social media where women are often targeted. Dibbell (1998) in describing the acts also describes the outrage it caused with his description of the feelings of male and female morphs in the room:

And small wonder indeed that the sexual nature of Mr. Bungle’s crime provoked such powerful feelings, and not just in exu (who, be it noted, was in real life a theory-savvy doctoral candidate and a longtime MOOer, but just as baffled and overwhelmed by the force of her own reaction, she later would attest, as any panting undergrad might have been). Even players who had never experienced MUD rape (the vast majority of male-presenting characters, but not as large a majority of the female-presenting as might be hoped) immediately appreciated its gravity and were moved to condemnation of the perp. exu’s missive to *social-issues* followed a strongly worded one from Iggy (“Well, well,” it began, “no matter what else happens on Lambda, I can always be sure that some jerk is going to reinforce my low opinion of humanity”) and was itself followed by others from Zakariah, Werewasel, Crawdaddy, and emmeline.

Dibbell and the MOO’s members were horrified as the trolling disrupted their previously co-operative community. Members expressed they were unhappy with what happened and the room as not the same. However, to solve this problem raised a dilemma that now confronts social media; how do you get rid of a troll and make stricter rules for conduct without violating others’ freedoms to post what they want?

**Managing Mr. Bungle: The Problem of Consensus**

Internet sites make their own rules to manage trolls, but there are beliefs that trolls should just be ignored. Nevertheless, those using the sites often want trolls removed from them. Researchers DuVal (1999) and Reid (1999) studied the issues of managing conflict in a virtual community, demonstrating the complexities of conflict management. Users will demand the person be punished which is usually satisfied by the removal of the troll’s account. It is possible to log a trolls Internet Service Provider and block it, but trolls can still return. Reid (1999) found her participants in the MUD’s she studied had unspoken rules that when violated by trolls in the MUD demanded punishment. These were necessary Reid found to keep order and civility. DuVal (1999) concurred with this but acknowledged that implementing a diversity of punishments is difficult when there is no consensus on what the punishment should be.

Dibbell experienced this dilemma of how to manage Mr. Bungle and future trolls after the victims contacted him. Bungle did later return as Dr. Jest and gave clues that Jest was once Bungle. Yet despite this troll’s behaviour, the morphs were divided over punishments though they did like that he was toaded (removed) from the room. Dibbell stated to the administrators of The Living Room that the morphs did contact him saying how upset they were at Bungle’s behaviours. Dibbell (1998) describes how exu wanted punishment:
A sense was brewing that something needed to be done - done soon and in something like an organized fashion - about Mr. Bungle, in particular, and about MUD rape, in general. Regarding the general problem, emmeline, who identified herself as a survivor of both virtual rape (“many times over”) and real-life sexual assault, floated a cautious proposal for a MOO-wide powwow on the subject of virtual sex offenses and what mechanisms if any might be put in place to deal with their future occurrence. As for the specific problem, the answer no doubt seemed obvious to many. But it wasn’t until the evening of the second day after the incident that exu, finally and rather solemnly, gave it voice:

“I am requesting that Mr. Bungle be toaded for raping Moondreamer and I. I have never done this before, and have thought about it for days. He hurt us both.”

As this implies the troll succeeded on two levels. First, Mr. Bungle disrupted the room by breaking its unspoken cultural rules of civility. Second, although he was removed and new rules to deal with trolls were put in place, some morphs did not really see the need for the removal. This highlighted the difficulty faced by those managing Internet sites against extreme trolling. It is as if the community had undergone a social change where there was a loss of trust. Dibbell (1998) described this problem:

Faced with the task of inventing its own self-governance from scratch, the LambdaMOO population had so far done what any other loose, amorphous agglomeration of individuals would have done: they’d let it slide. But now the task took on new urgency. Since getting the wizards to toad Mr. Bungle (or to toad the likes of him in the future) required a convincing case that the cry for his head came from the community at large, then the community itself would have to be defined; and if the community was to be convincingly defined, then some form of social organization, no matter how rudimentary, would have to be settled on. And thus, as against its will, the question of what to do about Mr. Bungle began to shape itself into a sort of referendum on the political future of the MOO.

Dr. Jest did return later and was again toaded, but the morphs resigned themselves to the room not having the same levels of trust and co-operation after Bungle’s activities. This drew a parallel to my own observations in a chat room I used as I noticed the same result around the troll named Tammy (Nycyk, 2015). Although Tammy stopped after 4 years of trolling, Tammy’s relentless trolling and fake profiles did affect the room’s relationships. In Dibbell’s case, he continued using the LambdaMOO but stated that although he was not worried about trolls nor sort them out; their ghosts were still there (Dibbell, 1998). His description of this incident was published twice and became a focus of contestation about virtual violence and how to punish trolls.

**Debates from Dibbell’s Essay**

Dibbell’s essay published at such an early stage of Internet history highlighted the problem of gender and trolling. The Usenet groups were practising sexism, but containing it within the bounds of Usenet that kept it away from mainstream Internet users. Dibbell made the public aware that trolling such as he experienced did have a devastating effect on using Internet sites. It does not stop people as such, but even with a high usage rate people will stop using Facebook and Twitter if they grow tired of seeing trolling. That is what happened to
MySpace as trolls spammed and harassed other users resulting in users of it abandoning the site.

The controversy of Dibbell’s work is the use of the word ‘rape’ to describe what was done to the morphs in his LambdaMOO. Rape is assumed to be a physical act where sexual acts are forced without consent, which is also in many legal definitions of it (Eileraas, 2011). Women receive much abuse and sexual harassment through online means (Barak, 2005). Dibbell insists that it was a brutal rape act, a violation of civility through the use of offensive and threatening language, and represents extreme trolling personified.

Yet legally and intellectually, stating something committed on an Internet site is rape is problematic. Even Dibbell (1998) admits that ‘no bodies touched’ leading to a questioning of the Mr. Bungle incident. As McKinnon (1997), giving a critique of Dibbell’s story, suggests:

Nowhere did Mr. Bungle inject the word “rape” into the narrative. Only by interpretation can one infer from the acts committed that a rape had occurred. Further, even if Mr. Bungle had explicitly raped legba and the others, one wonders if the concept of rape lacks meaning in the context of virtual reality. If Mr. Bungle had directed the computer to narrate legba's fatal burst into flames, one presumes that legba and the witnesses would have rejected that perversion of reality as fraudulent.

Schaengold (2013) argues from a legal perspective that rape and physical assault in virtual worlds is not requisite to bring rape charges against another person, though he states it would be possible to do so. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect some form of punishment for trolls who post words and images that depict forms of rape and sexual assault. A compelling argument from Huff, Johnson and Miller (2003, p. 13) who commented on Dibbell’s essay, shows the dilemma that Dibbell’s work presents to those who want to keep trolling out of their Internet site and who come across what are considered rape and sexual violence from the troll:

Because of the highly symbolic meaning of the act of rape, one can react to the “rape in cyberspace” with contradictory thoughts. On one hand, it seems incorrect to equate the horror of a physical rape to the experiences of LambdaMOO participants who witnessed a representational rape. On the other hand, it does seem appropriate to say both that Bungle did something wrong (bad) and that the person controlling Bungle did something wrong (bad). Both, it would seem, engaged in a form of violent sexual behavior. So, the case is worth exploring if only to find appropriate language for talking about virtual behavior in moral/ethical terms.

Dibbell’s essay also highlights the difficulty moderators have if the trolling is done by many people. He states that perhaps Bungle was just an account used by many students at New York State University. Tompkins (2003) argues this is an important factor that may have been overlooked by the morphs who assumed Mr. Bungle was just one person. Perhaps others were crowded around the computer urging the user to post the abuse (Dibbell, 1998).
Conclusion of Case One

Julian Dibbell’s essay still has much to contribute to discussions of extreme trolling and how to manage and eliminate it. The distress Mr. Bungle caused may not be viewed as an act of rape, but the Living Room became a changed community, not for the better, through his trolling acts. It showed that trolls could cause personal harm to peaceful, tight-knit online communities. The story make us consider that it although it may not fit the criteria of the crime of rape, it does show the serious effects trolls can have on any part of the Internet that continue to this time.

Case Two: Charlotte Dawson Taking on the Twitter Trolls

The second case of extreme trolling was experienced by fashion model and media personality Charlotte Dawson. Originally from New Zealand, Dawson started work in Australia on fashion and lifestyle magazines and television. There were also four significant events in her career that shaped events in her life. These were: in 2008 becoming a judge on *Australia’s Next Top Model* and host on a follow up Runway to L.A., being a celebrity contestant on *The Celebrity Apprentice Australia*, joining an anti-cyberbullying cause called Community Brave and writing her autobiography.

Dawson’s experience is extreme because the outcome was tragic. Many have attempted suicide or succeeded in taking their own lives because of the actions of trolls and cyberbullies. Before exploring her story, based on a combination of media reports, opinions and academic literature, two points are important to establish. First, it is not totally clear that it was just the trolls that influenced the suicide. Secondly, much as been written about Dawson’s behaviours that is critical to consider. Some saw it as hypocritical that she would be anti-bullying and trolling after it was said she abused people on her television shows and interviews as well as social media. In October 2012 on Melbourne radio station’s 3AW’s blog entertainment, entertainment reporter Peter Ford stated (Franklin, 2012):

“The problem of Charlotte taking on this cause is her act’s about abusing people and putting them down so it becomes a bit murky as to why she's become a champion of this particular cause.”

What happened to Dawson is, however, an act of extreme trolling and although we may question her approaches to shaming trolls, her case shows how trolling can impact on someone’s life. This is so when the case and outcomes are from someone with a high profile, and when a suicide attributed to trolling happens how it draws out debates on how to manage it.

*What Happened when Dawson Confronted her Trolls?*

Dawson was criticised for her lifestyle, her decision to confront her trolls and her media persona where she would judge future models harshly. Although it was reported that she had mental health issues, this section does not infer that her taking a drug for multiple sclerosis, alcoholism, the trolling itself or other factors are the exact cause. There was no inquest into her suicide. Rather, this section discusses the events that lead up to the event that are significant because they represent the outcomes of extreme trolling.
Community Brave was set up as an initiative for reducing cyberbullying. A representative of the organisation named an employee of Monash University in Melbourne as someone who posted a troll comment. Her behaviour was then reported to their employer. The Age newspaper in Melbourne reported the incident (Lee, 2012):

The conversation reportedly began when New Zealand-born Ms Dawson re-tweeted a message from Ms Heti: "excuse me @MsCharlotteD on behalf of NZ we would like you to please GO HANG YOURSELF!!" to her more-than 23,000 followers. Ms Dawson, who works for anti-online bullying foundation Community Brave, often re-posts abusive comments she receives from Twitter users to publicise their remarks.

Ms Casey, one of Ms Dawson's followers, responded: “My fiance hanged himself HOW DARE YOU SAY THAT TO ANOTHER HUMAN BEING.”

Ms Heti replied: “If I was your fiance I'd hang myself too #gohangyourself.”

It was reported several weeks later that the employee was found not guilty of misconduct at the place of employment and reinstated (Ainsworth, 2012). Her trolling messages were recorded on a Tumblr social media site called Twitter Hall of Shame as a permanent reminder of the incident (Glover, 2012).

Dawson decided to find out more trolls’ names and confront them on two programs on the Australian Channel 7 network: Seven News and the morning Sunrise program. On the Sunrise program an example of a Twitter troll tweet was shown (SunriseOn7, 2012):

![Figure 49. Twitter troll message with hashtag show on Sunrise television show](image)

Watching her account, Dawson makes a compelling case against her trolls as she seeks them out. One of the trolls was remorseful, the other understanding but made a comment that suggested they did not view the comments as cyberbullying or trolling (SunriseOn7, 2012):

“I apologise to anyone who has taken offence to my tweets but that is not my interpretation”.

Figure 50 is a screen capture of Dawson talking to a young man accused of trolling. Dawson screams in his face but only as an example of how it feels to be bullied online. She is effective in imparting the message although his reaction appears to be of no intimidation:
Figure 50. Dawson confronts one of her alleged cyberbullies

Dawson does praise another young man accused of trolling her who accepts that he had done something wrong. The segment portrays Dawson as a crusader in the Stop the Trolls campaign being brave in confronting trolls. Some examples from it are presented to illustrate the emotive appeal Dawson and the show use to show how this became extreme trolling:

“A lot of people want me to shut myself in my apartment and rot”.

“Disturbingly one of them was someone who had threatened violence against me, to punch me in the face and to dismember a friend of mine. And he had a little child”.

“People have an idea of what a troll is like, and where they live and what they do but I’m sorry to say that’s what it was”.

One of the trolls shown in the segment allegedly trolled an Australian singer Dawson states:

“He posted a picture of an Aboriginal man pushing a pram full of beer to Jessica Mauboy with a comment about her and her father. So he said I’m not racist I think that’s really funny. So there is that generation of kids who think that behaviour is fine”.

Dawson clashed with the trolls and, although we do not see the full interviews on Sunrise, it is inferred an idea that these trolls were persistent in their abusive comments.

In the 2013 edition of the Australian academic journal *Fibreculture*, academic Andrew Whelan analysed Dawson’s Sunrise segment. His views support the idea that extreme trolling had taken place but also articulates well two issues. The overall analysis he gives of the segment is valuable because it illustrates a common problem seen in managing troll behaviours. If we agree with his comments or not is reasonable, but it needs to be emphasised that trolling may be a moral panic that is justified. Whelan’s (2013, p. 38) analysis of the individual and societal troll issue is articulated well:

Aside from its poignancy, the segment is instructive and cautionary as regards the heated discussion of trolling in Australian mass media and how that has been conducted in recent years. The segment can be analysed for the definitions of trolling it mobilises, why trolling is (framed as) a problem and why it comes to be
such, what its effects are, and what should or could be done about it. Specifically, we could begin to understand trolling as presented in the Seven News segment in the following ways:

as a threat to the public sphere, specifically, the public sphere as a space of deliberative democratic dialogue;

as the grounds for a moral panic: more precisely and interestingly, a moral panic the media has about itself; and

as a risk to (be managed by) those who engage in online media (and indeed, any media).

Therefore, the segment does set up a villain/hero premise where Dawson is shown as strong and determined to take on the trolls who have bullied her. We also must be reminded that Dawson had been admitted to hospital in Sydney for depression and a suicide attempt. We may not view the trolls as being only at fault, but clearly it is extreme to take trolling and bullying comments personally and take action such as suicide. This does not mean it is to be condemned, but is indicative of the actions people may take when being trolled and bullied to such extremes.

In 2013 Dawson continued to be involved in anti-bullying campaigns and organisations such as the National Rugby League (NRL) and continued working in the media and using social media, though she later changed her Twitter account to being private. As mentioned previously, several media outlets reported her double standards (Franklin, 2012) such as her criticisms of her home country (New Zealand), the fashion standards of the partners of football players at the Brownlow Medal ceremony in Melbourne and contestants on Australia’s Top Model. Social media trolls continued to write about her in extreme trolling though Dawson seemed focused on other things, yet still gave time to calling them out.

It was on the 22nd of February 2014 that Dawson was found at her apartment in Sydney having committed suicide. The media coverage and follow up debates continue to this day. Was the trolling that extreme that it would push someone to take their life? It is reasonable to speculate that other factors were involved in Dawson’s decision as her private life was written about before and after her suicide.

**Debates about Dawson’s Actions**

The debates about Dawson’s actions received much media coverage. While expressing outrage over her suicide, the media did not always portray her as a reasonable and rational individual. For example they reported many of her previous problems and consistently published Dawson’s tweet which showed her holding a bottle of pills with the text “You win x” and “Hope this ends the misery’. Her trolls did encourage her to commit suicide including the infamous comment to ‘put her head in a toaster’. Her life was publicly reported including her abortion when married to swimmer Scott Miller and her alleged clashes with media owners over her television shows.

Not everyone agreed with the premise that trolling should have an effect on someone like Dawson. A well-meaning post was written by a Sydney Morning Herald commentator after Dawson’s suicide stating that she should have turned away from the trolls (McLeod, 2014):
Charlotte Dawson should have known that you can't challenge bullies and succeed; that's a myth. Bullies are like shooting range targets at fun fairs: You think you've shot them down, but they bounce right back up again. You can't change their nature, or your own, so self-protection is the best course.

For others the suicide was triggering to them, bringing up thoughts of others’ experiences with trolling and bullying. An anonymous poster wrote on the Mamamia web site soon after Dawson’s suicide was announced this (Anonymous, 2014):

> Ever since the news broke on Saturday morning that the 47-year-old celebrity had died by suicide, media and social media have been saturated with tributes from those who knew her and those who didn’t.

> The shock and sorrow are very probably genuine but the celebrity statements and tweets, the eulogising, the hashtags….I get that sharing thoughts and memories is a natural way for some people to process a tragedy.

> But suicide is not the same as other kinds of tragedy and to treat it the same way is incredibly dangerous.

It is unclear if the writer is admonishing Dawson directly, but Dawson’s experiences did affect many who expressed on social media how sorry they were this happened.

After her suicide tabloid media reported more of her ‘scandals’ often downplaying the roll of the Twitter trolls. For example, The Chronicle, based in Toowoomba, Queensland, reproduced an article in its lifestyle section from the Weekend Herald detailing comments from Dawson’s friends. Some did not want to be identified. Those that spoke suggested to the reader that it was not just the extreme trolling that played a part in her suicide. Leask (2014) reported comments that show the possible other issues Dawson faced in her life:

Alcohol Issues:

> Mr Herkt was also of the opinion that Dawson’s drinking led her down a path of self-destruction. “She was fun, but she drank too much. She had a very good head for booze but she drank too much. She could sit down and knock it off . . . those bloody chards,” he said. “She made impulsive decisions when she was pissed ... It was an unhealthy space.”

> Mr Herkt said Dawson’s prolific use of Twitter was also damaging. But no one could stop her. “She opened herself up in a way that was really unhealthy”.

> “She would sit at home and it would be late at night and she would engage with people”.
Career Issues:

Her contract included “business travel, drivers and all the baubles of celebrity you'd expect”, one said.

“When the retainer was gone, that meant she didn't have weekly money coming in. That was her bread and butter,” her friend said.

“She was devastated at the time. The relationship between her and Foxtel was tense.”

Foxtel executive director of television Brian Walsh said he and Dawson “mutually agreed not to continue with the fixed arrangement” in September because she indicated she had other interests she wanted to pursue outside of her Foxtel work.

But her friends said leaving Foxtel was not a move Dawson really wanted to make, and it was a massive blow.

“Why would a woman with no money choose to leave a job?” one mate said. “Work stuff was drying up and people were finding the brand a little bit too crazy. What she was facing at the time she died was no work, no money”.

Alleged Mental Health Issues:

But for those in her inner circle, her death had been ‘just a matter of time’.

Sure, they were devastated and grief stricken - but they were also acutely aware that Dawson was severely troubled and did little to seek real help.

Dawson’s real best mates agree - she was fabulous, talented and generous. But they also agree that the 47-year-old simply struggled with life.

Flatmate Tony Sheahan staged an intervention five months ago.

“At times, her dark side shone through. She would try to put on a persona in which she was coping OK. But at other times, her moods were really pretty dark and that came through in her spoken words and her behaviour,” he said.

“I was worried about her, of course. At various stages I talked to her about it. Once I got three of her girlfriends over. It was a Sunday afternoon about four or five months ago and we sat her down and voiced our concerns about her behaviour, which she didn't take too kindly”.

It is important to be critical of such reporting as it is unclear if any issues or others’ views have been left out. One issue that was left out in that article was later reported in the Women’s Weekly suggested medications were involved (Now To Love, 2014):
In a 5000-word investigation into Charlotte's death, *The Weekly* reports that the popular and beautiful TV presenter was taking a black market drug designed to treat the symptoms of multiple sclerosis.

The drug, Baclofen, has been linked to at least one other high profile suicide, in Britain.

Baclofen is easy to get online, but it has never been approved for the treatment of alcoholism. It is supposed to get the spasms of multiple sclerosis under control.

Some of the reporting that followed her suicide seemed to disregard the extreme trolling.

Academic researchers who analysed the Dawson troll conflict reached conclusions that seem balanced and richer in assessment about the trolls’ role. The Sunrise program she appeared on inflamed some of the trolls further but did succeed in bringing trolling to public attention. Whelan (2013, p. 54) assesses this in the following way:

Charlotte Dawson is an individual. The troll is a representative of a larger group. ‘Trollness’ is articulated through the predicate ‘sending abusive messages’, where the recipient being predicated as ‘recovering from a suicide attempt’ compounds the abuse. That trolling should be held to be morally repugnant is evidenced not only in this framing, or by the offending tweets, but also in predication of Dawson’s response, which is to ‘expose’. Predicate and category are then conflated: ‘It’s just exposing the nasty. It’s not bullying you, it’s exposing you for what you are’ (01:58).

Dawson most likely had an agenda to expose the trolls and shame them. To an extent it succeeded despite further attacks on her. Other academics saw her self-destructive behaviour as causal, such as Jane’s (2015) view that Dawson’s online behaviours were intimately bound up with her self-destructive behaviour. Yet despite criticisms of these some researchers stated the power of the trolls words did have a large effect on the outcomes through the lack of civility and the language used. In one study, Morrissey and Yell (2016, p. 36) by examining the nature and tone of the troll message, suggested the statements were very harmful as they went beyond insult:

If we look at the structure of the utterances in Dawson’s case, it becomes very hard to believe that these attacks could have been anything other than serious. The vast majority of the statements made to Dawson were clearly perlocutionary performative utterances; they were commands to take action. As the crescendo built, and the mantra ‘hang yourself’ was repeated, the commands gathered an urgency demanding immediate response. This command is hardly subtle, and requires no inference from the reader. It cannot be argued that this injunction is merely acting as an insult, desiring nothing more than that the reader leaves the writer alone. The addition of images of corpses, making visually evident the expected and required outcome, put paid to that. Dawson is told what to do, and preferably, how to do it.
Dawson was encouraged by the trolls to suicide and told how to do it. Consistently researchers find people who have depression or anxiety will not stop using the Internet and social media. This can play a part in an individual’s decision to suicide. In one study of children and youth the results called for cyberbullying to be recognised as a significant public health and mental issue needing more research. The study’s results significantly showed those being cyberbullied had major mental health issues directly attributed to social media bullying (Xantus, Saltz & Shaw, 2015). Dawson’s extreme trolling may not have been the absolute or primary cause; yet it is now enshrined in public memory as a contributing factor to the outcome of her life.

**Conclusion of Case Two**

Charlotte Dawson’s extreme trolling experience challenges to try to see differing points of view about the effect it can have on an individual. It is a good strategy to make trolls accountable for their actions. Confronting them can work, but a person needs to be prepared for a backlash as troll attacks can get deeply personal. Perhaps our view of Dawson’s trolling experiences is shaped by the reporting of her life’s issues prior to her suicide. This extreme trolling case showed us that the effect on the individual can be so deep and hurtful.

**Case Three: Jessica Aro and Unmasking Russian Hacker Trolls**

The third extreme trolling case is of Finnish journalist Jessikka Aro and her investigation of pro-Russian Internet trolls. Her investigation of their activities in former Soviet Union countries, especially the Ukraine which has become a centre of trolling and hacking activity, caused a backlash similar to that Dawson experienced. It is extreme trolling because of the persistence prankster and malicious trolls she encountered and the way they spread misinformation on the Internet.

An important part of this case is the information battle or information warfare that took place. Referencing Orwell’s novel *1984*, he described a Ministry of Truth that could structure information to persuade people that certain distorted facts were truth. Russia and its surrounding countries has long been the subject of being the enemy to the West. The Cold War has long been over but Russia is said to be able to still wage warfare on the West through the Internet. Trolling has grown to such a sophisticated organised level that mass disruption and harm through Internet platforms is no longer fiction. What occurred to Aro proves this is true.

Aro as an investigative journalist became interested in the concept of an information battle encouraged by trolls and hackers operating in Russia and surrounding countries. This also occurs in other countries such as China. The Foreign Policy Centre (Hug, 2017a, p. 3) describes the problem that the trolls and hackers have caused by waging war as an information battle:

> The information battle examines the ways in which the governments of former Soviet Union (FSU) look to shape international narratives about themselves by using media, social media, advertising and supportive organisations to promote their worldview and challenge the people, institutions and ideas that oppose them.
The key strategy of such trolling is to distract and to keep populations and governments paranoid and suspicious of other nations, especially the United States. Kivimäki (2017, p. 2) identifies 4 major areas of concern for the West:

1. Cyber operations related to recent elections are symptomatic of the ongoing ‘information struggle’ with the West that Russia sees itself as being engaged in.

2. To the Russian way of thinking, the information space ties the technical and psychological domains together, both of which are utilized to achieve the desired effects. Cyberspace is not restricted to the technical domain, but can also be used to achieve effects in the psychological domain.

3. Individuals are currently insufficiently protected against nation-state actors in cyberspace, creating vulnerabilities in democratic societies. Governments need to find ways to counter and deter attacks against their citizens in cyberspace as well.

4. Attributing cyber attacks is an effort in interpreting the technical breadcrumb trail left behind after attacks, but when dealing with nation-state actors, the political cost of attribution becomes a factor in determining responses.

The interpretation of these points is that the means to do this is through acts of trolling and hacking. Disruption, a key troll strategy, is managed through distracting people in this information warfare battle. Spreading disinformation like this is by posting fake news and information about someone to a mass of people. On a smaller scale this is what the Usenet groups did; spreading information about one group into others’ newsgroup. It is effective because people often in a rush do not always evaluate the information that is on screen. It is an opportunity to distract from a real and sometimes hidden agenda.

Two explanations for these Russian trolls are given from reports into their activities. The first is an overall explanation Lucas and Pomeranzev (2016, p. 2) offering reasons for Russia’s policy:

Unlike Soviet propaganda, Russia’s contemporary methods of information warfare do not crudely promote the Kremlin’s agenda. Instead, they are calibrated to confuse, befuddle and distract. Russia aims to erode public support for Euro-Atlantic values in order to increase its own relative power. It exploits ethnic, linguistic, regional, social and historical tensions, and promotes anti-systemic causes, extending their reach and giving them a spurious appearance of legitimacy. Consequently, information warfare intensifies geopolitical, economic and ideological competition in areas that are crucial to U.S. interests such as the Baltic north and Black Sea south.

The interesting assertion here is the theme of deception and distraction, namely, promoting an ‘anti-systemic’ cause with the information being seen as a legitimate source. Fake news⁹ is no longer a product of secret covert operations, but is present on the creation of many websites, postings in forums and on social media and fake Twitter messages. Hug (2017b, p. 12) supports an assertion argued by Melissa Hooper claiming disinformation (also called misinformation) is a form of propaganda much like Hitler’s Germany was towards the Jews:
Melissa Hooper argues that the Russian government’s use of various media and messaging tools to disrupt the application of universal human rights norms in the EU and US, and declare democracy a failed experiment, includes a new front. This is the use of seemingly-independent think tanks and foundations to put forth xenophobic ideas that target migrant, Muslim, LGBTQ and other minority communities as threats to those who ‘belong’. These think tanks and foundations are not independent, however, they are funded by the Russian government either directly, or by Russian-government-partnered oligarchs who act as agents to spread the Kremlin’s ideologies. Organisations such as the Institute for Democracy and Cooperation or the World Public Forum produce messaging that sacrifices the rights of minorities as they aim to demonstrate that the current EU and US democracies are failing and unsafe, and in need of replacement - which Russia can offer.

What is alarming with these views is the targeting of people perceived to be minorities in any society. They have fought for many rights and are vulnerable to the ideologies of a totalitarian state. Also of interest is the claim that Russian officials view their country as being under external and internal threats that challenge their information security. The Internet is seen as a threat and a challenge to power, yet they employ the Internet networks to carry out hacking and trolling (Connell & Vogler, 2016). Initial targets were the surrounding countries of Estonia, Georgia and the Ukraine, although trolls in the Ukraine work for the Russian authorities.

The example of disrupting a country’s economic, social and political life, and creating mistrust, was seen in the 2016 United States Presidential election. Cordy (2017) in a public NATO report, supported by Coalson (2016) of Radio Free Europe, stated that Russia had an information objective; for those in power in Russia to monopolise the information space (Internet) to neutralise external activities, especially young Russians’ moral and spiritual values, and to project Russia’s interests abroad using those technologies. It is debatable if this was Russia’s true intent.

Illustrating harmful trolling, a newsletter produced by the Center for Cyber and Homeland Security at The George Washington University called War on the Rocks highlights the information warfare issue. It gave an account of how trolling and creating fake news. Although it describes well the process of how the trolls created fake information, the first two sentences are alarming not in the creation of a fake petition, but rather the tens of thousands of signatures that appeared which were either fake or from those who though the petition was genuine. War on the Rocks (2016, p. 1-2) describes what was to become a reoccurring scenario in the production of fake news:

In spring 2014, a funny story crossed our social media feeds. A petition on whitehouse.gov called for “sending Alaska back to Russia,” and it quickly amassed tens of thousands of signatures. The media ran a number of amused stories on the event, and it was quickly forgotten.

The petition seemed odd to us, and so we looked at which accounts were promoting it on social media. We discovered that thousands of Russian-language bots had been repetitively tweeting links to the petition for weeks before it caught journalists’ attention.
Those were the days. Now, instead of pranking petitions, Russian influence networks online are interfering with the 2016 U.S. election. Many people, especially Hillary Clinton supporters, believe that Russia is actively trying to put Donald Trump in the White House.

And the evidence is compelling. A range of activities speaks to a Russian connection: the theft of emails from the Democratic National Committee and Clinton campaign officials, hacks surrounding voter rolls and possibly election machines, Putin’s overt praise for Trump, and the curious Kremlin connections of Trump campaign operatives Paul Manafort and Carter Page. But most observers are missing the point. Russia is helping Trump’s campaign, yes, but it is not doing so solely or even necessarily with the goal of placing him in the Oval Office. Rather, these efforts seek to produce a divided electorate and a president with no clear mandate to govern. The ultimate objective is to diminish and tarnish American democracy.

The claim is that Russia was employing trolls to help Trump’s election campaign by creating fake news about his opposition parties. Evidence for this included: fake stories about Trump’s and Clinton’s alleged illicit and criminal activities including sexual impropriety from Trump’s and Clinton’s husband Bill, the Pizzagate incident and inappropriate involvement in other countries conflicts and political systems by past Democratic Party governments.

From this background discussion it is evident that the Russian backed trolls are far more organised and sophisticated to cause disruption and extreme trolling than trolls in previous times. This is because of the potential for distraction to real issues the trolls can do. War on the Rocks (2016, p. 7) suggest how the public is distracted through misinformation to distrust certain political leaders:

One of us directly experienced how social media direct messages from hackers or influencers seek to compromise or sway a target by using social engineering to build a rapport. Operators may engage the target’s friends or acquaintances, drawing them into conversations to encourage trust. Once conversations are started, an agent of influence will be introduced into the group and will subsequently post on Russian themes from grey outlets or introduce malicious links.

When targets click on malicious links, Fancy Bear and Cozy Bear extract personal information from public officials, media personalities, and American experts and selectively dump the content obtained at opportune times. The goal is to increase popular mistrust of political leaders and people with expertise or influence in specific circles of interest to Russia, such as national security. In some cases, experts criticizing Russia have had their computers mysteriously compromised by destructive malware and their research destroyed.

Online hecklers, commonly referred to as trolls, energize Russia’s active measures. Ringleader accounts designed to look like real people push organized harassment -including threats of violence - designed to discredit or silence people who wield influence in targeted realms, such as foreign policy or the Syrian civil war. Once the organized hecklers select a target, a variety of volunteers will join in, often out of simple antisocial tendencies.
Sometimes, they join in as a result of the target’s gender, religion, or ethnic background, with anti-Semitic and misogynistic trolling particularly prevalent at the moment. Our family members and colleagues have been targeted and trolled in this manner via Facebook and other social media.

This has been occurring since Russia’s conflict with Georgia, a country near Russia, where the reporting was that Russia had created places to carry out online activities. These were called by the media troll farms, web brigades or the Russian troll army (Baezner & Robin, 2017). The Kremlin it is suggested pays trolls to erode the integrity of traditional media’s investigative and political journalism. This produces a lack of faith in traditional media and grows distrust in information among populations who consume media, this making it a weapon (Pomerantsev & Weiss, n.d.).

This accounts for the troll attacks on Aro; being an investigative journalist she uncovered locations and names of people involved in the trolling. The move from trolling attacks and disinformation spreading moved from the former Russian states to the United States during the Clinton/Trump presidential race. Before discussing Aro’s story three points related to this extreme trolling case are:

1. The information sourced for this case came from media but also from research reports that are publicly available on the Internet. These were written by researchers and others in the United States, United Kingdom and Europe. It is recommended to be critical of such results as Russia is portrayed as a villain, which may be true as the troll activity is provable, but there was little from Russian authorities countering these accusations.

2. The background to Aro’s experience is not complete but captures events leading up to her trolling. I recommend reading more about this because only a sample of events and opinions could be written as to do more would go beyond the scope of this chapter.

3. Regardless of provable facts, at the time of writing there are still investigations worldwide of the interference of Russian trolls in fake news production. For example, Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) conducted a large study of fake news sources to find out if it influenced the 2016 Presidential Election. Their conclusion was it is difficult to determine if the fake news did play a role in Donald Trump’s win.

Aro’s trolling experience is now discussed.

**Aro versus the Russian Troll Army**

Jessikka Aro’s is an investigative reporter in Finland working for the Finnish Broadcasting Company Yle. Finland shares a border with Russia. She noticed misinformation on Finnish public debates especially through social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Finland is a democratic country and there exist diplomatic tensions between it and Russia. It was becoming noticeable that Russian trolls were bullying and threatening Finnish citizens and media commentators online when Russian issues were posted on social media by Finnish media or citizens. Activities such as making false criminal complaints to Finnish police and
publishing defamatory material such as books was used to silence Finnish people who criticised Russia (Aro, 2017).

Aro began the investigation in September 2014 by interviewing people who had clashed with Russian trolls online through uncivil exchanges and being abused, threatened and ridiculed. Russia did have media outlets reporting in opposition to the Kremlin’s policy of media information control. Aro, seeing these reports of information warfare and troll factories, travelled to St. Petersburg to investigate a factory where trolls constructed fake news, comments and misinformation on websites, blogs and social media. At that time the trolls concentrated on spreading misinformation about the Ukraine and the conflicts Russia had with that country.

She claims that the Kremlin and others with various allegiances to it found out quickly about her investigation and visit to the troll factory. A direct account written by Aro (2016, p. 2) published in *European Review* gives an overview from her view of the extreme trolling:

> As soon as I opened my investigation, I became the target of an info-war. The Finnish pro-Kremlin propagandists’ activities against me - disinformation campaigns and open-source surveillance - are a text-book example of a Russian information - psychological operation. The goal is to discredit me, make my work seem unreliable and ultimately stop me from disclosing facts about social media propagandists. Similar operations are used in Russia to oppress political dissidents, journalists and others publishing facts that show Russia’s authoritarian regime in an unfavourable light. Over the past 18 months, my character and my journalism have been smeared in ways that no journalist in Finland has ever experienced before. The systematic attacks on my work continue today.

This view correlates with much of the literature this case has examined. Trolls are malicious but we can only speculate on their reasons. Some of them are paid, some not, some have different political reviews and support the Kremlin’s views and some trolls may just be following the crowd as happens with trolling where people just join in for LULZ (Laugh Out Loud) or fun.

The trolls, and most likely but not totally proven the Russian or other government agencies, heard of Aro’s investigation and began an orchestrated campaign to discredit her. For example, propagandist Johan Bäckman claimed Aro worked for the United States Foreign Intelligence. She claimed that Bäckman had a goal to lure trolls and harassers to attack her, but also to frame her as unreliable before the publication of her upcoming articles. (Aro, 2015). Her emails were also flooded with Russian language such as “Putin is the best, west sucks” and the creation of fake Twitter profiles portraying her as a bully, as well as her and a colleague being labelled ‘media prostitutes’ (Aro, 2015). There was extensive enquiry into her past including disclosing her drug conviction and finding out her father had long passed away sending an SMS on her phone that it was him, as well as someone playing a shot gun sound to her over the phone.

The effect on Aro was taking a toll on her but she continued the investigations (Aro, 2016, p. 2):

> Facebook and Twitter trolls (and actual people following their example) questioned my investigations and mental health, and started conducting their own
‘investigations’ into my social media postings and other information about me. As my contact information was disclosed alongside the disinformation about me, my phone’s messaging and email inboxes were filled with messages from people angry at me for ‘persecuting Russians’. I received a phone call in which someone fired a gun.

Aro (2015) tried to negotiate with the trolls:

In the beginning I messaged the establisher of the RT & Sputnik link flooding group and suggested we meet in person. I wanted to discuss and ask why he is spreading false information and administrating a group bullying me and other people researching or commenting Russia. The group had special interest in me but also targeted journalist Laura Halminen from the newspaper Helsingin Sanomat, bloggers and anyone who dared to shed light on Russian activities publicly.

The founder of the group didn’t agree to meet me in person. Instead he offered to play down the hate speech targeted at me, if I apologize for my story and stop writing further stories about trolls. I considered his proposal as trying to blackmail a journalist, stopped discussing with him and continued working on my project.

Aro’s bullying is concerning because of its relentlessness and it became more so when further bullying and trolling was posted online.

The first example of this trolling was posted by Aro on her professional LinkedIn profile Aro (n.d.) which portrays her as being ‘for hire’ for sexual purposes:

![Aro’s troll mock up photo ‘for hire’](Figure 51)

This act correlates with Jane’s (2012) assertion that females are hypersexual sluts inviting sexual attention, which combined with the aim to shame Aro and damage credibility and shape views about her character. The photos were taken at a dance festival many years ago and incorporated into this image suggesting she is a female escort. Further attacks on her character came from a song and video that was uploaded to YouTube under a fake account with her name. The song is called ‘Jessikka Aron Trollijahti’ and mocks her investigation
with a parody. Figures 52 and 53 show an actress dressed as Aro with lyrics below the screen both mocking her investigation and calling her a troll Venäjän trolliarmeijan (VTA) laulu- ja soitinyhtye (2016):

**Figure 52.** Video screen shot 1

**Figure 53.** Video screen shot 2

Aro is wearing a Captain America designed outfit and is superimposed in Figure 53 as standing near the Kremlin walls. The trolls used the song to discredit her mental state and her journalistic credibility. It was also her past drug conviction that was seized upon by trolls and exploited. In Figure 54 an organisation called Mv-lehti created a web page defaming Aro for her drug use (Mv-lehti, 2016):
This type of trolling is extreme because of the effort trolls have undertaken to discredit and harm Aro. There was truth in the drug conviction, but in the web page are untruths such as her being a daily drug user. However, it can be concluded that trolls will continue attacks on people if not caught and use the Internet to harass their victims over a long period.

**Conclusion of Case Three**

Aro’s experience of extreme trolling is alarming in that it shows the lengths to which trolls will go to in harassing people and disrupting Internet sites. In this case the trolling has international consequences. Aro and the other authors mentioned in this case have persuasively argued that Russia has the means to spread misinformation through troll farms that can convince those who read the information that something is true. In the case of Russia, trolls spreading misinformation to say things did not happen as a propaganda strategy while not new, has the potential to damage international relations. Although not conclusive, the possibility that the trolls interfered in the 2016 United States Presidential Election suggests for the future that trolls have the means to disrupt large-scale events as much as hackers possess the power to hack infrastructure such as electricity through by the Internet.

**Extreme Trolling: Reflections and Conclusions**

The purpose of this chapter was to present three well-known examples of extreme trolling that raised many questions society has yet to fully answer. The question of how to punish trolls without interfering with the freedom of speech Internet users expect is still a vexed issue. Countries which have made laws, such as keeping users’ metadata and tracking where people go on the Internet, are invasive. Trolls are uncontrollable but it is possible to deflect them with agreed punishments. As seen in Dibbell’s case, it is also a matter feeling justice has been done and the troll has been punished. It is the effect on peoples’ lives and reputations that is of most concern.
Reflecting on the cases again raises more questions about what to do about those that troll others. Mr. Bungle’s extreme trolling debated issues about what is virtual harm, in this case rape. Not everyone agrees with punishing others for their troll comments or even to what degree they should be punished. In Charlotte Dawson’s case it is reasonable to question if it was not just the trolls that caused her to take her own life. Relentless name-calling can have an effect over time yet people may question why continue a crusade against trolls.

This chapter showed what extreme trolling is and how it operates. It is through the words used, the spreading of disinformation, and perpetuation of sexism, racism and homophobia, and the relentless pursuit of someone even if the troll is caught. They mark a lack of civility and a lack of empathy for victims. They are high profile trolling examples which are happening daily to people using the Internet.
Notes

1 Extract from Julian Dibbell (1998) A rape in cyberspace: or TINYSOCIETY, and how to make one.

2 Jessikka Aro comment taken from online Finnish site Yle (n.d.).

3 Reported comment from Charlotte Dawson in 2012 quoted from the technology section in the Daily Telegraph (McLeod & Reines, 2012).

4 A technical explanation for case study research comes from Yin who pioneered work in this area. Over the years, case study research has struggled to become accepted as a rigorous research method. For this book it is appropriate as the interest is in specific instances of trolls and trolling. A technical definition from Yin (1984, p. 23) that reflects this chapter is:

...the case study research method “as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.”

5 This chapter uses Yin’s case study method in a casual way. The data is drawn from many types of articles, mostly academia and government reports, supplemented by web sites. These were all found through Google, Google Scholar and various academic databases like EBSCO and JSTOR.

The three case studies were chosen after considering many ‘extreme’ trolling cases. By extreme, this means they reach a high degree of trolling behaviour with serious and wide consequences. They are also high profile cases that many have commented on. All references and information that appear in this chapter are the data that builds up a story about these cases. However, they are secondary sources, as it would not be possible to interview anyone involved in the three cases. As Yin (2003) advises that was followed in writing this chapter, boundaries of information finding were placed on the data including dates and time frames, although with Dibbell’s work the sources date back to the time of the trolling incident which was written by him in 1993.

The analysis of the articles was done with a beginning descriptive idea of discovering what made these trolling cases extreme. That they had negative outcomes but also spurred on the public to face trolling issues and debate the issues of free speech and how to eliminate trolling was the main description ideas I looked for. The questions that guided the writing up were:

1. What characterises an extreme trolling case?

2. Who is involved and what do they do?

3. What are the consequences of the trolling?

4. What is the effect on the individual or groups, and society as a whole?
Therefore, these questions support description of the phenomenon of extreme trolling assisting with rigour of the case study in giving an account of three examples of it from a secondary view (Zainal, 2007). However, this chapter still follows Yin’s ways of undertaking a case study, albeit on a smaller scale.

6 From Technopedia (2017d) a definition of lurking on the Internet:

Lurking is a slang term for when an individual reads a message board without posting or engaging with the community. Lurking is sometimes encouraged by forum moderators as a way for new members to get a sense of the community and etiquette before participating. Lurking also may occur if a user simply wants to get some information without adding to the discussion.

A person lurking on a message board or other online community is referred to as a lurker.

7 Dibbell also referred to the members of the LambdaMOO as morphs.

8 Schaengold’s comment comes from a United States law journal but can be universally applied to many legal systems where virtual rape may not be a basis for a rape charge, increasing laws governing online sexual assault worldwide can still address any online violence or trolling that harms another.

9 As a clarification, fake news is defined by this definition from Webopedia (2017d):

Fake news, or hoax news, refers to false information or propaganda published under the guise of being authentic news. Fake news websites and channels push their fake news content in an attempt to mislead consumers of the content and spread misinformation via social networks and word-of-mouth.

10 LGBTQ is an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer.

11 The Pizzagate fake news incident that is complex and involves many on and offline organisations and Internet sites, especially 4chan and Reddit. Two simple descriptions of it are from first, Know Your Meme (2017):

Pizzagate is a conspiracy theory regarding a series of emails hacked from former Hillary Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta’s account, which some supporters of Donald Trump claimed were coded messages discussing an underground pedophile ring operated at the Comet Ping Pong Pizza restaurant in Washington, D.C.

The second is from Esquire (Sebastian, 2016):
It all started in early November, when Clinton campaign manager John Podesta's email was hacked and the messages were published by Wikileaks. One of the emails, according to The New York Times, was between Podesta and James Alefantis, the owner of D.C.'s Comet Ping Pong. The message discussed Alefantis hosting a possible fundraiser for Clinton.

Users of the website 4Chan began speculating about the links between Comet Ping Pong and the Democratic Party, according to the BBC, with one particularly vile connection burbling to the surface: the pizzeria is the headquarters of a child trafficking ring led by Clinton and Podesta.
CHAPTER FIVE
FIGHTING SEXISM ON TWITTER: AN EXAMPLE OF RESEARCHING TROLLING

The tyranny of silence associated with e-bile has parallels with that associated with off-line sexual abuse. Many female commentators report feeling reluctant to speak openly about receiving sexually explicit on-line vitriol, and hesitant to admit to finding such discourse unsettling. – Emma Jane

#IAmAFeminist precisely because of all the lame unfunny trolling this hashtag is attracting. – Jean Burgess

“It’s tedious and exhausting to deal with a daily onslaught of abuse and paranoia from angry men and their terrified cohorts. It’s impossible to have logical conversations with them because they don’t care about facts, only about how they feel about those facts.” – Clementine Ford quoted in The Guardian

The first four chapters introduced trolls and trolling, their appearance, and trolling research. Chapter Four then discussed three extreme trolling cases that demonstrated the depth and reach of troll activity and the effects it has on Internet users. This chapter examines the issue of feminist trolling using a case study and a research study. Twitter is recognised as a rich environment for trolls due, in part, to the failure of it to manage trolling (Edwards, 2016). Twitter have tried to control trolling with policies that encourage the reporting of, and banning of, troll accounts.

This chapter is divided into these parts: Part 1 defines terms in the chapter and gives examples of what anti-feminist trolling looks like, Part 2 is a brief case study of the anti-feminist trolling attack on a book store, and Part 3 is an academic study of feminist trolling.

Part 1 – Definitions and Examples of Anti-Feminist Trolling

What is Feminism?

The definition of feminism used in this chapter is based on a combination of two sources: Chris Beasley (1999) and an organisation named The Sydney Feminists Incorporated (2014) who draw on the Cambridge Dictionary for their definition. Combined, the definition of feminism is:

Feminism is a range of political movements, ideologies, and social movements sharing a common goal: to define, establish, and achieve political, economic, personal, and social rights for women. It is based on a belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way.

This definition is both political, as in advocating for women’s rights to be enshrined in law to achieve equality, and moral, where it informs people to think, speak and act in appropriate ways towards women. This also includes allowing them the opportunity to participate equally in society’s offerings, such as education and work. It is not about physical strength; most
reasonable people know there are things men and women can and cannot biologically or physically do. Feminism is about not marginalising or preventing someone’s life opportunities based exclusively on their sex or gender. It has been controversial because it has challenged male dominated structures and cultural ideologies that have existed since recorded history was made.

Feminist theory is a complex set of ideas developed and tested over decades to explain the reasons for the inequality woman experience in society. A discussion of these theories is not in the scope of this book; Wikipedia offers a comprehensive entry for feminism and feminist theories that provide further reading and a summary of it. However, these theories are often about the distribution of power showing how social arrangements work to show how male/female disparity works (MacKinnon, 1982). Trolling is a form of power being unevenly distributed because males still outnumber females as Internet users.

Two other terms that frequently appear when discussing feminist trolling are sexism and misogyny. They are included because of their use that occurs when discussing such trolling. These terms are defined as:

**Sexism:**

Sexism is the systematic inequitable treatment of girls and women by men and by the society as a whole (Bearman, Korobov & Thorne, 2009) and consists of these components (Glick & Fiske, 1997):

- Hostility toward women (such as using hostile affects like name-calling at women and reproducing negative stereotypes of women)
- The endorsement of traditional gender roles (restricting women’s conduct to fit societal prescriptions and confining women to roles accorded less status and power than those of men)

**Misogyny:**

Misogyny is a hatred or disdain of women. It is an ideology that reduces women to objects for men’s ownership, use, or abuse. It diminishes women to expendable beings. This ideology is widespread and common throughout society (Adams & Fuller, 2006).

**Internet Feminist Trolling Examples**

Trolls use many types of social media to display hatred towards feminists. Memes are the most common form of trolling followed by social media. Trolls will make fun of women’s physical appearances and use threatening language involving encouraging harm, like rape, to feminists.

Figures 55 to 60 show six examples of feminist trolling obtained from the public domain of the World Wide Web. They function to humiliate and degrade women and disrupt rationale debates about women’s issues.
Internet Meme 1:

![Image](image1.png)

*Figure 55. Mocking women for their feminism (Everiss, 2015)*

Internet Meme 2:

![Image](image2.png)

*Figure 56. Mocking and stereotyping feminist meme (Quick Meme, n.d.)*
Twitter Tweet 1:

Figure 57. Anti-feminist tweet advocating physical violence against feminists (Dent, 2015)

Twitter Tweet 2:

Figure 58. Tweet attacking Lauren Rankin (Rankin, 2013)
Twitter Tweet 3:

*Figure 59.* Alt Right\(^5\) figure Milo Yiannopoulos insults actress Leslie Jones on Twitter (Knight, 2016)

Facebook Post:

*Figure 60.* Facebook post of a troll threatening Paloma Newton (Connaughton, 2016)
These examples display the types of vitriol that are frequently seen on the Internet. Although many who post these may never carry out violence against women, this trolling is considered a form of violence. They also re-enforce stereotyping that has been entrenched in society for centuries.

In this part of the chapter I have set the framework for understanding what is feminist trolling, what it looks like and defined the words sexism and misogyny that will appear throughout this chapter. The rest of the chapter is concerned with fighting feminist trolling in two parts: a case study and a research study.

**Part 2 – Fighting Against Feminist Trolls: The Case of Avid Reader Bookstore Brisbane**

This part discusses a case study of fighting feminist trolling occurring on the social media accounts of Avid Reader Bookstore in West End, Brisbane, Australia. The aim of this section is to explore how Internet users, angry at the constant trolling of women and feminism, react to it by deciding to fight back against trolls. First, a background of the case is presented, second, a description of the incident that lead to the bookstore’s social media manager to take on the trolls and third, using examples and an interview, how this was done.

*Background to the Trolling of the Bookstore’s Social Media Sites*

Avid Reader Bookshop is a bookstore located in West End, an inner city Brisbane suburb, which has been trading since September 1997. It has a reputation of being a quality bookstore stocking titles that are often difficult to get and a large range of alternative titles that commercial bookstores may be reluctant to sell. A differentiation it has from large book chains is its relationship building with authors, their agents and publishing companies. It has hosted guest authors’ speakers nights, including authors such as comedian and travel writer, Michael Palin, Australian author Peter Carey and Brisbane politician Terri Butler. Several public book clubs are run by the bookstore and a new cafe opened in the store in 2017.

The bookstore attracted media attention in 2015 when it refused to stock a biography by controversial former Brisbane Lord Mayor and Queensland Premier Campbell Newman. Although the bookstore stated that customers could order it from them, many, including Newman, called it ‘antidemocratic’ (McBryde, 2015; Remeikis, 2015). In 2017 they shared a post on their Facebook page from Australian feminist writer Clementine Ford, the author of the book *Fight Like a Girl*. The post received a large amount of likes, but the bookstore began to notice comments that disapproved of the post. Ford has received trolling abuse for her views and, like Charlotte Dawson, has attempted to identify trolls resulting in further abuse and threats.

There was irony, according to reporter Stephanie Convery, in the trolling attacks which started the same day of the posting, as Ford’s next book examines toxic masculinity called (tentatively) *Boys Will Be Boys* (Convery, 2017). Men’s rights activists were angered by the post reviewing the bookstore with one star reviews. The trolling also consisted of giving the book store a one-star rating, which did not bother the bookstore as social media, and Brisbane-based author, Christopher Currie commented (Mitchell-Whittington, 2017). However, he decided to hit back at the trolls with humour, which further infuriated the trolls.
Reporting the story, Story (2017) posted a number of screenshots of the trolling showing the types of trolling comments. Figures 61 to 63 show the types of anti-feminist comments that attack the bookshop, Ford and accuse it of misandry.

Figure 61. Avid Reader Bookshop anti-feminist troll comment 1

Figure 62. Avid Reader Bookshop anti-feminist troll comment 2
The support for the bookstore grew with other Facebook users supporting them, as the comment in Figure 63 written by Kath Lloyd shows. Additionally, the story gained international attention and Clementine Ford publically congratulated Avid on the stance they took against the trolls.

Figure 63. Avid Reader Bookshop anti-feminist troll comment 3

The Bookstore Fights Back: Their Strategy for Managing Trolls

Story (2017) interviewed Christopher Currie, about the strategy the bookstore used against the trolls. His comment about why he chose to take on the trolls was reported by Story as:

“I guess all we have to say is thanks to the pathetic MRA babies who are giving us and Clem’s upcoming [book a] publicity boost. One star reviews don’t particularly worry us, but what does is that this is a tiny sample of the unthinking, rabid abuse Clementine Ford (and indeed any woman on social media) receives on a daily basis. All we can do is ridicule these ridiculous people and hope they soon fall asleep at their keyboards.”

From reading his comment, and those who supported them, the strategy of making fun of the trolls seemed to have been effective in two ways:

1. It defused the angry and sometimes unreasonable comments the trolls posted

2. It brought public attention to feminist trolling and that this was a way of managing it that although seen by some as ‘childish’ and ‘unprofessional’ was successful in showing to the public that anti-feminist trolling is itself childish

The spreading of the strategy on Twitter was enhanced by the use of Twitter hash tag called #trollhateonlymakesusstronger. Using sarcastic and humorous comments back at the trolls meant that overall the bookstore won a battle against them. While that may not be a strategy every business may use, it illustrates that people will engage with trolls in groups to fight
negativity and abuse. This is in sharp contrast to the mostly passive and individual strategies that were used to fight trolls in early Internet spaces such as Usenet.

News media websites took screen shots of Avid’s social media postings to show the humorous content the social media manager posted to ridicule the trolls. Story (2017) posted in her story two examples of Twitter messages. The first shows an interaction between Avid and some of the trolls while the second is a humorous message to further humiliate the trolls’ messages by a customer bringing in a cake:

Figure 64. Tweets between Avid Reader and trolls

In this figure, the two respondents have had their names and Twitter photo masked because the full context of the Twitter entries is unknown because Story has only provided examples obtained from Avid’s account. Even though they exist in the public domain, for this book’s purposes it is considered inappropriate to name them. The main feature of this tweet is posting ‘cry us a river’. This is sarcastic but humorous indicating the trolls are being rude, whining and complaining. Another troll uses sarcasm in ‘very professional response’ indicating they are trying to criticise Avid. However, the retort is also humorous as the social media manager uses a song by OutKast to reply to the troll:

OutKast Ms. Jackson (Songfacts, 2017)

I’m sorry Ms. Jackson (oh), I am for real

Avid Reader Twitter Account (Story, 2017)

We’re sorry John Jackson, Men’s Rights is not reeeeal

This amusing comparison is witty and clever but also functions to beat the trolls at their own game. An interpretation here is not that the reply demeans men, but rather serves to reflect to the troll that their comments are ill-informed.
The bookstore could claim victory in not totally defeating but reducing the anti-feminist trolls effects on it. This is evidenced by the number of Facebook and Twitter users that supported the bookstore’s position and strategy on stopping the trolling. A number of high-profile authors and celebrities also posted messages supporting the bookstore. The trolling did decrease over the following weeks. An interesting celebratory and support gesture was one customer baking a cake to the bookstore’s staff, which Avid tweeted as

![Figure 65. Anti-Troll celebratory cake](image)

The #trollhateonlymakesusstronger hashtag helped spread the tweet further. This gesture by the customer showed the depth of support for the bookstore against the trolls. The story was also reported nationally and internationally on a number of news media sites.

The social media manager Chris Currie was the main staff member responding to the troll comments. In November 2017, I ask him questions by email which, with his permission, I have reproduced here:\footnote{9}

**Question 1:** Why did Avid choose to do this strategy as many businesses ignore trolling or ban users from following them on social media?

Avid Reader is a business, but it's also representative of a strong set of community values. We pride ourselves on inclusiveness, social awareness and human rights. The decision to “take on” these trolls was simply an extension of those values. Avid Reader has never been backward in coming forward when it comes to asserting our values, especially on social media.

That being said, there is obviously a strong case for the “ignore and block” policy when it comes to trolls who are, essentially, always seeking attention. This particular brand, however (the "Anti-Feminists"), we had encountered before at Avid, and their hallmark is that of so many white men (and they are nearly always white men): unchecked privilege and lack of consequence for their actions. My intention, as Avid's social media manager, was to expose and ridicule these men.
The next step in the troll attack was to bombard our Facebook page with negative, one-star reviews, which is a common form of attack, and one which encourages a "back down" by the business being attacked. Unluckily for the trolls, they didn't count on Avid Reader not caring about their Facebook rating, nor our wonderful fans and customers, who backed us to the hilt.

**Question 2: Was the strategy of responding to anti-feminist trolls intentional or spur of the moment one?**

As I mentioned, it was simply an extension of our normal strategy. I had no way of knowing the extent to which it would escalate, but I still would've handled it the same way had I known what was about to happen.

**Question 3: You tweeted that taking on the trolls had an effect on your family life in the time you gave to respond to many trolls. Do you still feel it was worth undertaking responding to the trolls?**

Yep! I got paid to make fun of grown men in mental diapers, whose arguments deserve to get ridiculed over and over. Yes, it took over my life for a few weeks, but here's the thing: I got to treat this as something of a novelty, whereas this is an everyday reality for many people who identify as female on social media. People like Clementine Ford (whose Facebook post started this whole thing when Avid commented on it) endures the most astonishing wave of vile abuse every single day, simply for not ever backing down to trolls and not catering remotely to the whining of men.

**Question 4: How did you, and if possible to answer all the staff, feel about the level of support Avid received from the public and noteworthy authors and Clementine Ford about taking on the trolls?**

It was really, really heartening to receive the support of not only our customers and friends, but the extended network of literary and feminist communities. I was most touched when people who hadn't heard of us or lived far away said they would make an effort to visit just because of our stance towards the trolls.

**Question 5: What made you think of using OutKast in this Tweet?**

I spend way too much time on Twitter, and the response was a play on this tweet: https://twitter.com/JNalv/status/304345341535338496

**Question 6: Does Avid consider that this strategy was a wise one and would it be done again if it arose again even if it was a different issue such as racism or homophobia?**

I can't speak to whether it was wise or not. What I can say is that I would do it again in a heartbeat if Avid (or a person or organisation we cared about) was subject to any form of bigoted, close-minded trolling.
Conclusions: Assessing Anti-Feminism Trolling Strategies

Avid Reader Bookstore’s decision to challenge the anti-feminist trolls is to be lauded for its effectiveness and humorous approach. It may not be a strategy that every business should take on. For example, it is less likely a corporation would respond with such an engagement of return comments that go to the troll’s level. Yet it is tempting for business owners to challenge trolls, though erosion in credibility is a risk the business may experience. In Avid’s case it was effective because it drew support from the public, not just Avid’s fans and the authors who like them, but a public tired of trolling against women. It cannot be quantified that every person who support Avid is, or believes in, feminism. What is evident from the case is, despite the ‘don’t feed the troll’ mantra, if Internet users tire of the relentless vitriol they will band together to support the elimination of the specific trolling.

As a side note to this case, it is interesting to note that men who either claim to be, or support, feminists can be called traitors by the trolls should these men post online any supportive comments. Researcher Elaine Campbell (2017) practices a research method called autoethnography that is highly contentious for its lack of a scientific approach to it. Her comment illustrates well a problem that any business or professional person experiences when trolls attack. As shown in research, trolls will usually attract the views of those who are not white, male and espousing masculine points-of-view; however, this does not mean every single troll fits this stereotype:

I spent one afternoon looking at a Twitter account set up specifically as a bastion of “real” research, noting who and what was targeted as a subject for mockery. My list included (though was not limited to) the following examples: scholarship by queer black women, lesbian narratives, explorations of gender norms in hypermasculine spaces, autobiographical accounts by transgender persons, experiences of women of color in the academy, proponents of queer feminist theory, research into social construction of gender, and accounts of sexual harassment. Feminists and proponents of feminist theory were particular targets. Many of the academic papers referenced by the Twitter account were accompanied by comments such as “no evidence here, please—we're feminist scholars.” Female academics were by no means the only recipients of this sarcasm. One man who had identified as a feminist was held in equal contempt.

Identifying, as Campbell has, who trolls target is valuable, though the decision to take action against them requires care. It is likely that Internet users will continue to challenge trolls, as they have, just in greater numbers and with the same vitriol. The advantage though is the solving of one problem that has plagued the Internet since its inception; challenging the reproduction of stereotyping. Calling out trolls on such behaviours are noble, but are yet to be quantified as being effective.
Part 3 – The Anti-Feminist Twitter Troll Study

Background to Study

To demonstrate the seriousness of trolling, Part 3 presents a study of anti-feminist trolls and the management of them. Trolls can usually only be managed, not totally eliminated. As the Internet and all its varied applications and media platforms have grown and the spread of the Internet has grown across the world, so has trolling. Internet users have, however, grown tired of the constant abuse on a personal and global level that has become a daily activity. As social media has been seen as a democratic platform for millions to have a voice, trolls feel they have the right to say what they want without being criticised. The same social media platforms now have users striking back against trolls alone or in organised groups.

The types of personal strategies to combat trolls vary; these are the strategies of individual Internet users not the policies of Internet and social media platforms. Although the popular slogan ‘don’t feed the troll’ has an element of wisdom, clearly Internet users choose to fight back at trolls. Yet the term troll is now associated with anyone who posts abusive comments. The example of the trolling comments of Milo Yiannopoulos on Twitter and those who chose to challenge him, especially during his support of Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential Elections, demonstrate that people are willing to challenge troll comments.

There are many issues in 2017 that attract trolls and could be research topics of interest to discover the extent of anti-trolling strategies. Donald Trump, Brexit, Marriage Equality in Australia and Black Lives Matter are among them. All these topics attract trolls but in turn attract those who decide to fight trolls. This fight is done in ways ranging from name-calling, trying to argue and reason with trolls, to legal cases, exposure of trolls’ names in the mass media and fighting to have trolls banned from social media. This seems counter-intuitive; why argue with ‘a fool’. Yet reading posts about such topics shows that Internet users are not prepared to continue to let trolls continue with their vitriol.

The best way to investigate this topic was to conduct a study of the social media platform, Twitter, to see how people use it to challenge troll comments. It is valuable to conduct this study to show that Internet users actively fight anti-feminist trolling. Although not every person may support feminism, from a preliminary investigation of media reports and literature, Internet users are tired of troll comments and will take action against them.

The research project’s conduct is provided in the notes to show how it was designed and written, although some details of the study’s procedures also appear in the paper’s methodology section. It was conducted with the same care in doing research procedures and ethics as any research does, with details about ethics and other issues provided in the paper and in the end of chapter notes. What is examined are the strategies Internet users undertake using Twitter (tweets) to fight troll comments and attempt to bring to the public’s attention the importance of questioning trolls ideologies and statements. This article focuses specifically on this phenomenon of what are the motivations and strategies of Internet users who are tired of troll comments.

Before presenting the paper, a number of disclaimers and other information appear in the notes section. This is to show that the research followed standard procedures to produce a credible example of a research paper. Its presentation begins on the next page.
Fighting Anti-Feminist Trolls: A Study of Strategies that Challenge Trolls’ Vitriol

Abstract

Feminists have been a target of Internet trolls that social media platforms have struggled to control. However, users of these platforms have challenged trolls’ vitriol by using particular written strategies in the construction of messages to attempt to stop this behaviour. This study explores responses to anti-feminist trolling that challenges trolls’ vitriolic comments on social media platform Twitter. Using a sample size of 500 tweets and Braun and Clarke’s (2006) Thematic Analysis methods, an overarching theme of shaming was found as the main strategy employed by those fighting troll anti-feminist vitriol. Four sub-themes supported the overarching theme are discussed that display the types of strategies used that also show subtle but salient differences in shaming trolls’ behaviours. The paper concludes with a discussion of the results, acknowledging limitations of the study and the possible implications for Twitter and tweeters who challenge troll behaviours.

Key Words: Anti-Feminism, Shaming, Strategies, Thematic Analysis, Trolls, Twitter, Vitriol

Introduction

Social media has struggled to control the increased vitriol and abuse of trolls who disrupt communication flows between those that use it. Trolls have attacked others for their ethnicity, body image, sexuality and gender, but attacks on feminism on social media have gained much momentum in recent years. Females are targets in online environments and are often dismissed as unattractive man haters who invite sexual attention and deserve physical violence (Jane, 2012). Women generally receive more threats and comments attacking their gender by individual trolls and by mobs of troll perpetrators than men (The Broadband Commission for Digital Development, 2015). Trolls promote a power imbalance between them and their targets and although a choice to participate, women may not be able to get away from the perpetrators or do not wish to stop using the Internet (Monks & Coyne, 2011), hence their continued abuse at the hands of trolls.

However, there is a growing movement towards challenging troll comments as those using social media become weary of, and annoyed at, troll vitriol and abuse. This is especially evident on social media microblogging platform Twitter. Although a contested term, trolling is described by Bishop (2014, 2013) as causing disruption, provocation, menacing and offense. By contrast, feminism has a specific, common understanding as Beasley (1999) describes as a range of political and social movements and promotion of rights that are based on a belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way. Part of this has been asserting the right to use the Internet and all its application, hence why the term Cyberfeminism was coined in the early 1990s where the ideologies of the feminist communities demanded the right to use cyberspace and technology equally to men (Wajcman, 2006).

Much literature in Internet and gender studies explores anti-feminist trolling portraying those harassed as victims only. The Internet and its various platforms are seen as a being part of a
‘feminist toolkit’ that helps promote and foster understandings of feminism (Singh, 2017). Yet part of this online environment is the mostly uncontrolled attacks on gender and feminism that have reached a large level of vitriolic attacks especially on social media. At worst, feminists experience distressing online violence and threats that make them decide to, or even be forced, to withdraw from online environments and refrain from online engagement with others (Subramanian, 2015).

Social media users, feminists or not, employ certain strategies, or plans of action, to achieve the goal of attempting to stop anti-feminist troll comments. The actions of these users, for this study called tweeters (users of Twitter), seen through the comments they make back at the trolls is an area of scarce research. This paper specifically addresses the strategies those who fight anti-feminist trolls using public unidentified tweet data to explore how this is undertaken. This paper will first discuss feminism, shaming and feminist use of the Internet to show where this study is situated in the Internet Studies field. This is followed by an explanation of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) Thematic Analysis methods used to analyse the strategies used by tweeters, including an important comment on the ethics of this study and addressing the use of Twitter public data. The results are presented followed by a discussion of them, closing with conclusions, limitations of the study and some implications for practice in managing trolls.

**Literature Review**

Although now contested in many societies, feminist theory organises society into two sexes, man and woman, which underlies the totality of social relations (MacKinnon, 1982). Alternatively, Lorber and Farrell (1991) state gender characteristics are how humans sort and define themselves and others. These ideas operated within the many Internet environments that have grown since its inception. However, as gender is one of the first means by which people introduce and represent themselves in electronic communications, it has long been an issue that gender stereotypes are reproduced on the Internet (O’Brien, 1999). Feminism as part of a ‘women’s’ outlook on life, particularly in demanding social and economic rights, has attracted disdain and disruption when those who identify as such dare to express their beliefs in online communication. As Ferrier (2003) quotes Betty McLellan, the ‘male machine in every country is so powerful and so ruthless’; this is evident on social media.

Studies of woman, and of those identifying as feminists, using information technology invariable talk of a long history of abusive, sexist and alarmingly threats of violence that have existed across the Internet over a long period of time. Cullen (2013) undertook an extensive study of feminism and Twitter, examining the social platform as a tool for feminist activism. Her data uncovered many themes, but a main finding was showing that feminists used Twitter for activism in the areas of education, employment issues, but also for empowerment and to express views. Although, as Pruchniewska and Duffy (2016) argue, maintaining the momentum of empowerment required much audience building and constant social media updating with little reward for such labor. Trolls can undo this work with their vitriol and abuse.

Other researchers have successfully addressed this issue, bringing much valuable knowledge about strategies used to combat Twitter trolling. For example, Burns (2014) examined the hashtag #YesAllWomen created by a tweeter in response to a violent rampage by a man in the United States who before his suicide posted online a document outlining why women should never reject his sexual advances. Burns asserts that the participants using the hashtag
sought only to bring awareness about women and feminist objectification and violence against them. Yet trolls actively abused those tweeters using the hashtag, while Twitter did nothing about the situation, such as banning the trolls (Burns, 2014).

Another dimension of Twitter trolls studies has been when the trolls are identified as being women who are against feminism. Brandman (2015) conducted a content analysis of tweets that targeted feminists by using a hashtag called #WomenAgainstFeminism. Her findings identified the types of troll comments that were considered anti-feminist showing the most salient strategy trolls will employ is to compose stereotypical tweets that tarnish all feminists as man hating (Brandman, 2015). Both Burn’s (2014) and Bradman’s (2015) Twitter studies showed the types of tweets that can constrain women’s use of the social media. Troll vitriol has the effect of shutting down women’s participation, unless the female tweeter decides to fight back or ignore such comments. Nevertheless, it is not just the female tweeters who challenge anti-feminist trolls and will use a variety of words in their tweets as strategies to do so.

Trying to get trolls to feel shame or ashamed of their behaviour has been occurring online as women continued to grow as users of the Internet. Kasna (2014) reported how weblogs (blogs) were effective tools some women used to shame their sexual harasses online and try to save other women from sexual harassment. This was a form of feminist backlash Kasna states that was effective in achieving the aim of women protecting each other. Shaming trolls has been difficult to measure, for it is fairly unknown to any degree if anti-feminist trolls do feel shame and cease such activities. A confessed troll named George Casper (2014) wrote of his shame at trolling people, including women, for many years. The sense that trolling thrives on online anonymity, also described by Suler (2004) as ‘The Online Disinhibition Effect’, can alleviate the pain of shame by acting out on other people, obtaining pleasure from making others feel bad (Casper, 2014). It is rare to read of trolls expressing such remorse for their vitriolic actions.

This is not to assert that feminists and their supporters are all obtaining pleasure by returning the same shaming back to the anti-feminist trolls. To shame another is to try to get the other to reflect on the ‘bad self’ and to painfully scrutinise ones actions to negatively evaluate one’s behaviour and to see one’s entire self as being someone terrible by their behaviours (Tangney, Wagner & Gramzow, 1992; Tangney, 1991; Lewis, 1971). It is therefore seen as desirable to try to get another person, such as the feminist troll, to negatively evaluate themselves as bad for posting vitriolic tweets, especially ones such as condoning the rape of feminists for their beliefs and actions. The benefits of continuing to shame trolls lies in, as Rentschler (2014) asserts, social media being fast mass communication channels to give credit to their decision to disclose such violent acts. Feminist online responses to rape culture offer a form of solidarity (Rentschler, 2014); therefore, shaming trolls acts as a counter measure when trolls try to devalue feminist moves to highlight such issues.

What is concluded from this literature review is that Twitter has a key role to play in keeping alive feminist thought and opinion, but is under pressure by troll’s vitriol. Burns (2014) and Brandman (2015) both illuminated the practices of vitriolic trolls against feminists, advancing our understanding of the strategies anti-feminist trolls use to cause distress. This study looks specifically at the tweets tweeters will use against anti-feminist trolls to add to this body of knowledge. Shaming as a strategy, acting as a way to get a person to negatively evaluate themselves because of their troll behaviour, is the focus of this study that is undertaken through the discover of shaming themes.
Research Questions and Methods

The questions of, and reasons for, this are first discussed. Then this section discusses Thematic Analysis methods as used by Braun and Clarke (2006). The data collection and analysis is discussed, as well as ethical considerations of the study.

Research Questions

Internet users have become tired of troll vitriol and abuse targeted at women and feminists. What has been little explored is how people challenge feminist troll comments. It is difficult to fully quantify the motivations of responses to trolls as they can be spur of the moment reactions or well-thought planned ones. The structure and composition of tweets that seek to challenge troll behaviours can inform on what Internet users are doing to challenge stereotyping and other negative behaviours. These can be supplemented by Twitter hash tags to allow the spread of challenging trolls to a wider audience who may get involved in challenging the troll as well.

The questions informing this research are:

1. How are anti-feminist trolls vitriol countered acted by other Internet users’ comments?
2. What, if any, strategies can be identified as being used by Internet users to counter anti-feminist trolls’ vitriol?

Two terms defined for this study are:

1. Vitriol is defined as bitter criticism and malice towards others usually to cause offence and harm.
2. A strategy is a plan of action designed to achieve an overall goal.

These questions and terms defined the parameters of the study and informed the data collection characteristics.

Data Collection

The sample size chosen was 500 tweets from Twitter to give an overall view on troll vitriolic comments. This was considered enough of a sample set to discover strategies, which turned out to be an accurate number of tweets to analyse. A practice followed was to make sure the aim of capturing and assessing data for relevance was to preserve the content, presentation and social context of the tweet (Risse, Peters, Senellart & Maynard, 2014). Data was searched for using Twitter’s Application Programming Interface (API) and TAGS v6.1; however, the simple Twitter search function at the top of the platform was sufficient to find needed tweet data. Search terms were used such as ‘feminist’ and ‘troll’, as well as hashtags such as #feministtroll.

Tweets were examined for certain words and phrases especially, but not limited to, the appearance of the word ‘troll’. For example, a tweet that qualified as belonging to the data set
was “Troll probably doesn't even know what feminism and feminist means” because it contained the words that suggested a strategy may have taken place in response to a vitriolic troll comment. The data is reliable and valid because it will be consistent over time and is a fairly accurate representation of the total population being studied and truly ‘measures’ or describes what is intended to be measured and described (Joppe, 2000).

**Data Analysis**

Discovering themes in data has been a popular choice in qualitative research despite some controversies over subjectivity. For this analysis the most suitable analysis method is Thematic Analysis as advised by Braun and Clarke (2006). The exploratory nature of this study benefitted from this method because it is capable of detecting and identifying factors that influence issues generated by the participants or tweeters, drawing interpretations consistent with the collected data (Alhojailan, 2012). It also allowed an inductive approach to be done where the data was precise, could move to generalised coding and ideas, while finally moving to an explanation of what is going on that answered the research questions.

The steps listed below were rigorously followed based on Braun and Clarke (2006), although the thematic analyses work of Attride-Stirling (2001) and Pollio and Ursiak (2006) was consulted only to see if subtle differences of method would have needed to be used. All authors tended to use these steps which were applied in this study:

1. Data was gathered and organised into QDA qualitative software to assist with data management with Microsoft Excel also used to organise the coding with a code book created. This was the familiarisation stage of Thematic Analysis.

2. The first stage of initial codes were generated which gave an initial list of ideas about what the data was revealing. Two good guiding questions were what are people doing and what are they trying to accomplish? These were sorted into categories and coded appropriately.

3. Themes were then grouped to represent the data. Potential themes were noted but discarded or merged with others as continued examination and memo writing of ideas took place. One thing that did emerge in the process was the development of an overarching main theme that described the data set, supplemented by sub-themes. The results of this study showed this as happening.

4. The overall theme was defined and reviewed and sub-themes that supported it was done to inform the writing of the study’s results. This stage was time-consuming but valuable because it allowed questioning if the theme was coherent and made sense to be in the set. However, it also allowed reviewing the main and sub-themes and helped to see patterns emerging. This informed the write up, although this accuracy and confidence in knowing it answered the research question was assisted by sorting data in Excel and reading again if the sub-theme matched the overall theme.

Before presenting the results of this way of doing Thematic Analysis, showing the major theme and sub-themes, it is important to discuss the study’s ethical considerations. These are important to disclose as working with social media data presents issues of privacy and consent that are often missing in such studies.
Ethical Considerations

Twitter data may be public data, but using it presents ethical issues because the data is used without the written consent of the person who created and posted the tweet. This is becoming a serious issue because tweets are considered big data in the public domain that researchers feel is theirs for the taking. Calls for social media platforms to protect data and restrict its use in research has been attempted, but the solution lies in the account holder either enforcing their privacy settings or specifically stating their online data is not to be used in research.

The key issues which do affect this study are argued by these authors as:

1. Researchers using social media data must consider if the research presents a risk to the studied community. Anonymising individual data may protect the content creator but research can turn negative attention on those being studied (Shilton & Sayles, 2016).

2. Many guidelines across academic organisations state that consent, confidentiality and anonymity are often not required where the research is conducted in a public place where people would reasonably expect to be observed by strangers. It is also stated that although Twitter users have expressed concerns with this view, Twitter blurs boundaries between public and private spaces (Williams, Burnap & Sloan, 2017).

Priego (2014) comments provide compelling evidence that the using Twitter data presents a low risk to those tweeters if it is published on the platform and can be seen by the public:

A researcher like me is interested in scholarly and artistic networks online composed by individuals who have willingly set up public accounts on Twitter and who post content willingly using hashtags to organise their postings under particular categories and therefore be found under such categories. Individuals worried about the data they publish publicly, freely, openly on Twitter being collected by researchers for research purposes other than the ones they intended should perhaps reconsider how Twitter works. Moreover, it seems to me the likelihood of an individual user’s sensitive data being further disseminated from an academic’s research Twitter dataset is much smaller than the likelihood of it going viral as originally published through a Twitter client.

This is acknowledged as a correct view and as such this study is considered low risk. There is the possibility that Google web crawlers do record every public tweet and they can be seen in Google and other search engine searchers. Yet public tweets can still be disguised and there are many accounts not using the person’s real name.

In view of this, the study is guided by the Association of Internet Researchers (AOIR) ethical guidelines (AOIR, 2002) that state use of digital data is acceptable if the site is an open, public site. Twitter is such a site. Further, Bruckman (2002) and Madge (2007) provide advice that this study does: no password is required for access and no site policy specifically prohibits data on it for being used for research purposes. Twitter does not explicitly prevent researchers from using their data.
The data was also masked with the user or account name not given in the data results examples. Also the tweets used in this study are protected and archived in an offline storage hard drive.

**Results**

A major theme arising from examining the tweet responses to anti-feminist trolls’ vitriol and how they are countered by tweeters is shaming. The definition of shaming in this study’s context is the tweeter attempts to embarrass or make a troll feel guilty because of their actions (comments), characteristics of the message (especially sexism and misogyny) or associations with other trolls, people or issues. This assertion of shaming as the main theme comes from examining the repeated use of words and phrases that specifically the tweeters used to show their disapproval of the anti-feminist vitriol. It is not claimed that the tweeter always deliberately uses this as a thought out or pre-planned strategy, as in the sense of a business or war strategy where specific things are stated then acted out. We may not know the tweeter’s motivation if it is a deliberate or on the spur of the moment enacting a strategy to shame the troll. Yet the anger of most of the tweeters suggests that it is a strategy because the same types of criticisms of the anti-feminist trolls consistently appeared.

The overarching theme of shaming is supported by four sub-themes that show the variance in the shaming strategy. These sub-themes have characteristics that although are shaming strategies aiming for an outcome of challenging troll vitriol, they are slightly and subtly different in composition. Table 1 shows the Thematic Analysis results and definitions of themes and sub-themes:
Table 1

Themes and sub-themes in shaming anti-feminist trolls’ vitriol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>DEFINITION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shaming</td>
<td>The tweeter attempts to embarrass or make a troll feel guilty because of their actions (comments), characteristics of the message (especially sexism and misogyny) or associations with other trolls, people or issues.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUB-THEME</th>
<th>DEFINITION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Call Out Shaming</td>
<td>Calling out behaviour, make the troll embarrassed to be a troll.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backlash Shaming</td>
<td>Tweeter uses a strong, often negative reaction to a troll or trolls especially if the issue is a feminist social or political issue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarcastic Shaming</td>
<td>Using mocking words to shame troll that can also show contempt for them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comeback Shaming</td>
<td>A quick, not always well-thought out reply to a critical troll comment to shame the troll.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The characteristics of the four shaming subthemes are now discussed with selected tweet data examples and, if relevant, Twitter hashtags included in the examples. This will show how shaming operates as a strategy to respond to anti-feminist trolls. As the emphasis is on the tweeter’s comments not the troll’s, only these will be shown, but if needed the context of the interaction between the tweeter and troll will be disclosed.

**Call Out Shaming**

Call Out Shaming is a subtheme where the tweeter will call out specific trolling behaviour with the hope of making the troll experience shame and embarrassment for their vitriol. It also is a strategy for giving out information about troll and troll activity to others. The troll may have been using more subtle and less abusive anti-feminist messages, but the tweeter, directly affected or not, sees it has something that needs attention brought to the Twitter audience. Its frequency in the data set was found at 111 tweets.

In example one the tweeter had previously engaged with the troll who had criticised the tweeter and called them names. The tweeter calls out the troll previously as a troll but then as a misogynist:
Tweet Example 1:

I knew you're a misogynist dude, and I told you days before you're a troll. Is that the best you can do?

In this case the tweeter invites continued engagement with the troll by encouraging further engagement with “Is that the best you can do?” In example two the tweeter has done some investigation before calling out the troll as being one of several things. This shames the troll because more information is disclosed to the Twitter community:

Tweet Example 2:

Looked at your bio page you're a troll & either a female who uses her body to get ahead, or a misogynist who hates woman who say NO.

By contrast to the other two tweets, Tweet 3 sees a call out shaming strategy that discloses the troll’s stand on a controversial issue. The tweeter shames the troll not only by name calling but stating he is controlling women’s rights to abortion:

Tweet Example 3:

Time to tune this ignorant, sexist, misogynist troll out. He doesn't care about embryos. He just wants to control women's sexuality.

This strategy brings the hope for the tweeter that the anti-feminist trolls is exposed for who they are and what they have done, and will stop. Its effectiveness is minor but reasonably significant because others may decide to support the tweeter or block the troll to avoid conflict. Therefore, as a strategy it is assessed as effective as it alerts other tweeters to anti-feminist trolling and calls out behaviours that are seen as being hostile to feminist thought.

Backlash Shaming

When a tweeter uses shaming as a backlash strategy it means the tweet consists of a strong, mostly negative, reaction to troll comments. What was particularly evident in this subtheme was the tweeter shaming the troll when a feminist related social or political issue occurred. The reaction to well-known people making anti-feminist comments in the form of a backlash was seen more readily in this subtheme. Tweet 4 shows this example of a backlash against American boxing promoter Floyd Mayweather Jnr is indicative of what was found under this theme:

Tweet Example 4:

Floyd Mayweather is an abusive misogynist & literal troll goblin who needs to crawl back to the bridge he was born under.

Part of backlash tweets to shame is to use the strategy of name calling, which appeared in the majority of tweets in this subtheme, and disclose a strong negative comment about the troll’s behaviour. These are seen in Tweets 5 and 6:
Tweet Example 5:

Don't call yourself a "professor" if this is what u resort to when a woman realizes you're a narcissistic prick. #hypocrite #feminist

Tweet Example 6:

Stfu, you anti feminist misogynistic prick. James's ex wife is very pretty you're trash and he left his kid for a hoe ok.

To support such a backlash strategy many used, as Tweet 5 shows, hashtags to allow others to find or stumble across a troll. These tags included: #womanhater, #hypocrite, #troll and #nothelping. Tags serve to contextualise and mark information, hence their value in exposing trolls’ activities and encouraging backlashes against them (Weller, Bruns, Burgess, Mahrt & Puschmann, 2013).

This strategy has a high degree of anger used against the troll’s vitriolic comments. Many tweets had abusive and swearing comments with much calling out of troll’s being hypocritical in their trolling comments. The 48 tweets also used the words ‘misogynist’ and ‘prick’ as used to indicate someone abusive, not referring to male genitalia. Overall, this sub-theme suggested that the anti-feminist troll should be shamed because the tweeters were angry at the troll comments and felt such strong use of language may attempt to shut down troll vitriolic comments.

Sarcastic Shaming

Sarcasm shaming uses mocking words to shame the anti-feminist troll as well as express contempt for the comments made. It can employ humour but usually the tweeter uses sarcasm in caustic manner designed to maximise the troll being seen unfavourable by others. The results showed this type of shaming was not always employed, but when it was it had a good effect when used against a troll, but also about anti-feminism in a general context.

For example, two general uses of sarcasm are shown in Tweets 7 and 8:

Tweet Example 7:

Shocked and delighted that I wrote 2,000 words on feminist theory and NOBODY has objected. Not a single troll so far. Boom, you guys. Boom.

Tweet Example 8:

I'm shocked that anti-feminists trolls are trolling about an anti-feminist troll. /sarcasm

These two tweets show the employing of humour in a sarcastic tone that mock anti-feminist trolls. These tweeters identify as feminists and disapprove of troll comments, but are mocking the overall behaviour of troll activities. Tweet 8 employs humorous sarcasm to mock trolls who are identified as anti-feminists but seem to be themselves trolling another anti-feminist.
Yet sarcasm shaming was also frequently directly addressed to anti-feminist trolls, mocking the trolls’ behaviours, beliefs and comments. Two examples showed this:

Tweet Example 9:

Nice to see you using Twitter to engage in intellectual mature discourse #antifem

Tweet Example 10:

Your mother would be proud of such intelligent comment

When cross-checking themes and subthemes there can be overlapping in classifying shaming strategies, yet tweet 11 shows how multiple meanings can be ascribed to a tweeter’s strategy. Nevertheless, this tweet can be classed as a call out or backlash shame, but the sarcasm of the ‘rare treat’ words suggests the tweeter is mocking the troll:

Tweet Example 11:

Another misogynist troll on Twitter, what a rare treat for everyone!

Sarcasm shaming can blend into other subthemes, but it is an effective tweeter strategy in its own right. The value of this way of shaming lies in the potential to highlight to the troll that the tweeter is displeased at the anti-feminist comment in a direct way that voices displeasure and distain at the comments made. Though only 21 instances of sarcasm shaming tweets were noted, the caustic and abrasive nature of the tweets returned to trolls is effective in shaming the troll. They shame behaviour rather than individual vitriol, but also continue to remind those reading the tweets of the overall bad behaviour of anti-feminist trolls which reinforce the battle feminists have to remain free of abuse on social media.

Comeback Shaming

This shaming strategy was reasonably significant in the data, but raises some questions that cannot be answered unless asking the tweeter about the speed of the responses to the trolling comment. It is a quick but not always well-thought out reply to a critical troll comment to shame the troll. An assumption about this shaming is that it is likely the tweet is composed as an immediate response constructed to comeback at the troll. However, not all comments involved harsh name-calling or denigration, but included some factual and reasonable responses. This sub-them had 43 tweets; therefore it is a reasonably used shaming strategy.

In one example, it is unclear if the troll was upset by the comeback, but the decision of the tweeter to no longer engage with the anti-feminist troll quickly is usually a good shaming strategy to end engagement with them as this tweet displays:

Tweet Example 12:

Feel free to continue dialogue with the other racist and misogynist troll on this thread. As mentioned, we will not engage with you further.

Of note is that there is a difference in language use to construct the tweet than the backlash shaming strategy. These seem not as strongly accusatory but specifically state facts against
the troll’s vitriolic comments. As Tweet 12 suggests, the tweeter does indirectly call the troll racist and misogynist, but instead of swearing and name calling they state the fact they will no longer engage with them on Twitter. However, a comeback shaming strategy is to accuse the troll of behaviour and make a statement about such behaviour. For example, Tweet 13 sees a tweeter defending another tweeter with a comeback statement that the tweeter is not a misogynist troll:

**Tweet Example 13:**

he’s the troll?? nah, you the misogynist that crawled up in here, not him

Troll behaviour is identified and comeback statements are constructed that shame the behaviour by identifying the troll’s transgression (misogynist behaviour) and restating back to the troll how undesirable it is. In Tweet 14 the tweeter constructs a comeback statement refuting they asked for abuse on Twitter and that they were not name-calling other tweeters. It ends with a stern tit-for-tat statement in capital letters suggesting the troll was the one courting abuse from others:

**Tweet Example 14:**

First you say I asked for abuse and when I give you the adjective you deserve-misogynist, you say I am calling names. Then let me tell you guys again in the language you best understand- YOU ASKED FOR IT TOO.

While the comeback tweet examples illustrate specific shaming of behaviours, many of them were expected insults back at the troll constructed to insult them. Tweets 15 and 16 are indicative of comeback tweets that are simply functioning as a way of insulting a troll and are likely not to have been well-thought out in construction:

**Tweet Example 15:**

Darling you ain't no oil painting #troll #antifem

**Tweet Example 16:**

Awwww don't be jealous my trolling friend because she earns more than you ever will #troll #antifem

The use of hashtags allows a further reach on Twitter of shaming the troll in a comeback statement. It was not unusual across all sub-themes, especially comeback, to see tweeters ganging up on trolls and as Tweet 13 displays, defending other tweeters from troll vitriol. Overall, comeback shaming strategies function in the same way as other strategies but are broader in construction; hence abuse and accusation are interwoven with stating facts. They are effective in attempting to get the troll to feel shame but have an added layer not present in the other strategies. This layer is the tweets get highly personal and are more likely to disclose specific information about the troll reflecting back to them their anti-feminist comments are incorrect and offensive.
Discussion and Study Limitations

The study’s results suggest that tweeters are consistently trying to shame anti-feminist trolls and encourage the troll to feel guilt. Although it is reasonable to assert such comments are unsuccessful in making trolls change, it is likely that using these strategies are seen as a desirable way of deflecting the unreasonable and abusive comments aimed at feminists and feminism. The theme of shame was broken into four sub-themes which showed subtle differences in shaming the trolls evidenced by the tone of the tweet, the words used and, to a smaller extent, the spreading of the tweet to a wider audience by the use of hashtags.

It is also difficult to state which sub-theme was more effective in shaming the troll. However, reading the tweets it was clear the tweeters were trying to get the troll to feel consequences. Even if it is difficult to gauge this as there was an absence of troll comments viewed in the sample set that apologised for their behaviours, reading the passionate responses suggests anti-feminist trolls are worthy to be challenged on Twitter. The troll comments are not reported in this study, but they contained messages of violence and name-calling to various degrees, as well as unreasonable criticisms at feminism. Even if the reader does not support feminism, the tweets could be viewed as Internet trolling as disruptive, offensive and threatening, even if the troll would have never carried out acts of physical violence on the tweeter target.

The key finding that shaming challenges anti-feminist troll vitriol is that although it is an act used to attempt to make a troll feel embarrassed or guilty for their comments, the way tweeters shame are subtly different. This is why the sub-themes emerged; the words used in the tweets showed some differences in the strategy used to do this. However, it must be disclosed that it was difficult to assess which shaming strategies were more effective or not. The study identified differences and showed that shaming can be identified and labelled in ways that show there are differences in tweeters’ approaches to shame.

Analysing the sub-them shaming strategies did show some differences. Calling Out trolls had a different tone of commentary then the others, specifically identifying and broadcasting the troll’s behaviour. Backlash shaming by contrast will be more specific in shaming the troll in response to the troll’s comment about a feminist social or political issue. Sarcastic shaming is a more obvious in the mocking tone of the words used but was more general in targeting the troll and not always about a feminist issue. Comeback shaming was the weakest strategy because their tone suggested quick, not always well-thought out tweets were written that although identified behaviours, but are the most personal because they disclose specific information about the troll. All shaming strategies try to induce embarrassment and guilt. Their key subtle differences are the tweet’s constructions try to achieve this aim, they just are identified and categorised in ways that make it useful to see what is being done, and how, to challenge anti-feminist trolls.

There are limitations to the study that should be addressed. The results can be accused of being biased or subjective for the main reason that the views from the study are obtained from text only. This is true of many studies using Twitter data where a person who created the content is not asked about their intent or behaviour in composing tweets. It is also true that another researcher doing the same research on the same data set may find different results. The study also only considered the tweeter not the troll’s comments which suggest a biased towards the feminists. However, this study being exploratory had the flexibility for themes to emerge from the data set.
The results claim a classification and explanation of what is going on in understanding the phenomenon of anti-feminist trolling. It does not state that more or different interpretations of behaviours are occurring, nor does it accurately state the intent of the tweeters as it cannot be known without asking the informants. However, the study still offers a view of behaviours that address a serious social problem of violence against women and Internet trolling. Therefore, the study has succeeded in describing behaviours observed through the construction of themes and sub-themes that offers an explanation of social behaviours.

Conclusions and Implications of Study

This study has described the types of strategies users employ under the theme of shaming and its subthemes to show how anti-feminist trolls are challenged for their comments. Thematic Analysis allowed the showing of the overarching theme of shaming and the way tweeters compose and construct tweets to shame trolls. The conclusion reached is that tweeters growing weary of tweets attacking feminism and feminists will attempt to address anti-feminist vitriol by shaming trolls. This study showed the way it was done. Shaming trolls is done in slightly different ways, hence the classification of sub-themes, but all strategies are used to try to stop what is often violent and offensive vitriol.

The implications of the study are to highlight Twitter’s failure to address this issue. Social media is the platform for use not the publisher. The content creator is responsible for the tweet, although there are rules governing what can be posted. These rules are often not enforced, hence why tweeters do shame anti-feminist trolls. The study displayed the types of tweets that while may be as offensive as those of the trolls, are understandable because of the frustration people have in seeing these tweets. A problem is how to manage such content without imposing censorship and stifling freedom of speech. In conclusion, this study shows the way tweeters challenge anti-feminist trolls and leave open more discussions of what may be better ways of managing such vitriol.
References


Shilton, K., & Sayles, S. (2016). “We aren’t all going to be on the same page about ethics:”
ethical practices and challenges in research on digital and social media. 2016 49th
Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, Koloa, Hawaii, United States of

Singh, M. (2017). What’s the matter with representation? Feminism, materialism, and online

Subramanian, S. (2015). From the streets to the web: looking at feminist activism on social
media. Economic and Political Weekly, 1(17), 71-78.

Suler, J. (2004). The online disinhibition effect. CyberPsychology and Behavior, 7(3), 321-
326. https://doi.org/10.1089/1094931041291295


and girls: A world-wide wake-up call. UN Women. Retrieved from

wireless world. Labor and Industry, 16(3), 7-20.
https://doi.org/10.1080/10301763.2006.10669327

introduction. In K. Weller, A. Bruns, J. Burgess, M. Mahrt & C. Puschmann (Eds.).
Twitter and society (pp. xxix-xxvi). New York: Peter Lang.

Williams, M., Burnap, P., & Sloan, L. (2017). Towards an ethical framework for publishing
Twitter data in social research: taking into account users’ views, online context and
Chapter Summary and Conclusions

This chapter highlighted how trolls operate on the social media platform Twitter highlighting the issues of sexism, misogyny and anti-feminist trolling. The case of Avid Reader Bookstore showed that people have values and part of that is they are tired of seeing troll comments. Their comments are not welcome and people will employ various strategies to respond to them. Avid’s case showed a business that was not willing to continue tolerating troll comments. Although some may view responses as childish and going against the not feeding the troll mantra, it shows that the Internet is not always a welcoming place for those who choose to harass, degrade or offend others.

The third part of this chapter was a full research study of anti-feminist trolling and responses to it. Viewing the study, again the issue of why interact and respond to troll comments arises. As I stated in my first book (Nycyk, 2015) we cannot always avoid seeing, or being a victim of, some abuse from a troll, hacker or cyberbully. It is a choice not to interact and there are mechanisms, legal and from the sites and platforms, that can punish trolls. What is operating in society is that the Internet, especially social media, gives a voice to millions more than previous mass media. If people use that for ill will then they can expect that one day people will respond against trolling. It is clear that trolling will not stop but the choices of what strategies to use by understanding troll behaviours, however unpleasant reading it can be, is valuable to consider when you choose to, or not, respond to trolls during your online experience.

Chapter Six will not discuss some strategies to manage and prevent trolling.
Notes

1 Quote from Emma Jane (2012).

2 Twitter comment from Jean Burgess QUT
https://twitter.com/jeanburgess/status/758769743507689472

3 Quote by Clementine Ford reported in The Guardian Australian online edition about the sale of her book by Avid Reader bookstore, West End Brisbane, and the attack on Avid’s social media sites by anti-feminist trolls, reported by Stephanie Convery (2017).

4 I caution to be aware of problems with Wikipedia’s accuracy and quality of the information that appears in it. However, I feel this Wikipedia page is a reasonable introduction to the definition and concepts of feminism and feminist theory that help assist in understanding these terms. The page is found at this address on the World Wide Web as at 2017 - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminism

5 Alt Right is short for Alternative Right. These are people who have far-right political ideologies and ideas including antifeminism and homophobia. They believe in nationalism, promoting their own nation’s interests over others, and populism where the claim is they are supporting the concerns of ordinary everyday people instead of the rich and elite in a society.


7 The figures of Avid’s Facebook page’s troll pages were obtained from Story’s (2017) Pedestrian website page, that are in the Internet public domain. As such they show the names of the Facebook users.

8 Misandry is a term for having a contempt and dislike of the male sex.

9 The questions I asked were formed after consulting the work of Foddy (1993) and Spradley (1979), who are experts in social science and ethnography interviewing, which helped form concise and relevant questions about the management of the anti-feminist trolls. Chris Currie, now formerly of Avid Bookstore, and the bookstore’s manager also gave permission to reproduce the answers.

10 The referencing rap band OutKast and their song Ms. Jackson Chris Currie refers to comes from the Twitter account of Josh Nalven (2013) located at https://twitter.com/JNalv/status/304345341535338496

11 The research article was researched and written according to traditional ethical procedures. A number of points are disclosed here to further to support the legitimacy of the study. For this book I decided that a study was necessary to show how Internet users have grown tired of trolls using research methods I am familiar with.

The following points address aspects of the study:
This study is for illustrative purposes only. It has not been peer-reviewed; that is, the study has not been read by reviewers in the field of Internet Studies, nor has it been submitted to an academic journal or other publishing outlet. However, a modified or new form of this article may appear in print at a future date.

A research design proposal was completed to guide the research but does not appear in this book.

The articles references appear in the article and in the works cited list.

Research bias and rigor are addressed in the article, but it is important to state that tweets, the Twitter data, and hashtags are considered legitimate truthful sources of data. We cannot know someone’s intent for posting on social media without asking them. Tweets are biased as they reflect peoples’ views on a subject, but as research data using them exactly as they appear is an acceptable practice. I agree with Cihon and Yasseri (2016) that when using the search features of Twitter to find the relevant data, the data-collection set and methods must represent the underlying population being studied. This is what I did in this example study.

The main issue is the ethical use of Twitter data. I have been researching and publishing cyber studies for a decade. This problem is important because researchers are struggling with the demands of privacy and use of data against the benefits of using big data. This term means structured and unstructured data that is high in volume, quick in velocity (speed of attainment) and variety (Norwegian University of Science and Technology, n.d.). A comprehensive discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this text. However, it is important to clarify my position on this because social media data has been collected by researchers without the informed consent of the person who posted on it.

I maintain that social data research is mostly a low risk activity. However, the other side of the argument must be pointed out. Informants can be found due to the sophisticated search features of Google that do pick up the finest level of data, including full tweet text. Twitter, unless the user adjusts privacy settings, is a public platform. The dilemma is articulated well by Williams, Burnap and Sloan (2017) as have simply considered online communications as public data, representing them in publication verbatim without consent or anonymisation. Yet as Bruns and Burgess (2012) argue, large research projects that can benefit society and provide new knowledge are in jeopardy if Twitter decided to limit researchers accessing that data.

I agree also with the positon of Ernesto Priego (2014) which, though lengthy, is worth reproducing because it sums up both sides of the argument. In particular, his last sentence is relevant; there is less chance of a person’s tweet being discovered in a private and protected researcher dataset than that tweet becoming viral and retweeted (shared) by many:
A researcher like me is interested in scholarly and artistic networks online composed by individuals who have willingly set up public accounts on Twitter and who post content willingly using hashtags to organise their postings under particular categories and therefore be found under such categories. Individuals worried about the data they publish publicly, freely, openly on Twitter being collected by researchers for research purposes other than the ones they intended should perhaps reconsider how Twitter works. Moreover, it seems to me the likelihood of an individual user’s sensitive data being further disseminated from an academic’s research Twitter dataset is much smaller than the likelihood of it going viral as originally published through a Twitter client.

Taking into account these dilemmas, when collecting the data I mask the account or person’s name where I obtained it and if needed shorten the message. I have always implemented the advice of Bruckman (2002) and Madge (2007) who combined offer the advice that if there is no password required to be used to access the site all postings are therefore private and can be used. Also, there is no specific order in writing from Twitter users prohibiting the use of publically published tweet data.

The final issue is the protection and management of the Twitter data. All tweets are archived in a secure place and as previously mentioned, the data’s source, the person’s name or account name is masked.
CHAPTER SIX
MANAGING AND PREVENTING TROLLING

But how to deal with online abuse? Unfortunately, despite the fact that the wolves in the wires have been with us for decades, society has been slow to acknowledge online abuse as a problem and slower still in formulating methods to tackle it. Successfully prosecuting those sending offensive or threatening communications is a long and rocky road. – Claire Hardaker and Mark McGlashan

Another classic “solution” often thrown casually about is to tell targets of abuse to just “close their account”. By this logic, why not tell a victim of burglary to just move house? – Claire Hardaker

Trolls do harm Internet users. They are responsible for much unpleasantness online. Trolls have had negative, criminal and health effects on peoples’ lives, but also have interfered in the running of countries. It has become a mainstream practice and accounts for the rise of incivility in societies where empathy and common courtesy has been abandoned. The focus of this chapter is to make you aware of what can be done about trolls and trolling. As with my first cyberbullying book (Nycyk, 2015) this chapter is written as my advice only and you need to be comfortable with how you would deal with a troll. In this chapter I discuss personal and legal ways of managing trolling, though I will mention Australian law primarily, but make reference to other country’s laws that are constantly evolving.

Have Internet Sites and Social Media Failed to Contain Trolling?

Trolling is an immense problem for any type of site but especially social media. Asserting that Internet and social media sites have failed to protect their users from trolls is reasonable. Criticisms of Internet sites, especially Facebook and Twitter, are that they do not do enough to punish trolls or remove them from their platforms.
This has been widely reported in the media. For example, the Chief Executive Officer of Twitter, Richard Costolo, responded to criticisms in the media in 2015 as an admission of failure to protect Twitter uses from abuse (Hern, 2015):

In the memo, obtained on Thursday by The Verge, Costolo writes: “I’m frankly ashamed of how poorly we’ve dealt with this issue during my tenure as CEO. It’s absurd. There’s no excuse for it. I take full responsibility for not being more aggressive on this front. It’s nobody else’s fault but mine, and it’s embarrassing.”

“It’s no secret and the rest of the world talks about it every day”, Costolo continues. “We lose core user after core user by not addressing simple trolling issues that they face every day.”

West had written on Monday: “I’m aware that Twitter is well within its rights to let its platform be used as a vehicle for sexist and racist harassment. But, as a private company - just like a comedian mulling over a rape joke, or a troll looking for a target for his anger - it could choose not to. As a collective of human beings, it could choose to be better.”

In February 2017 Twitter announced it had taken steps to stop and limit abuse and harassment. It banned British commentator Milo Yiannopoulos in a high profile case for his comments. Twitter wanted to be seen to be doing something about the unrestrained trolling. As reported by the Associated Press in New York (2017) in an article in The Guardian:

Twitter has been under fire for failing to address hate and abuse on the site since its founding a decade ago. Its reputation as a free speech haven has come into conflict with efforts to protect users.

The crackdown is not limited to far-right extremists. In August, Twitter said it had suspended about 360,000 accounts over the previous year for violating its policies banning the promotion of terrorism and violent extremism. But the company said the changes announced on Tuesday were “unrelated to that and focused on abuse and harassment”.

Twitter also said it was creating a “safe search” feature that removed tweets with potentially sensitive content and tweets from blocked and muted accounts from search results. The tweets will still exist on Twitter if people look for them, but they will not appear in general search results.

People have complained to Twitter, Facebook and other sites about trolling and cyberbullying abuse. The issues for social media that make it difficult to always manage it are: the amount of reported abuse to them is so high that despite a large workforce of moderators in Manilla and other places they cannot get to every post and remove or ban trolls and troll comments, and Facebook has been criticised for telling its users that the post does not fall within violation of guidelines. For example, photos of animal cruelty may be considered necessary yet a photograph of a couple kissing may be deemed offensive. The subjectivity of social media rules has been frustrating for users who see trolling but are met with the site saying it is not trolling.
Containing trolling and punishing trolls is viewed as desirable and necessary, yet there are ethical issues involved in doing so including the ongoing violation of user privacy and the demand that the Internet be a place of free speech. One example occurred in July 2017 when the New York Times reported that the United States President Donald Trump posted a meme that had been created by a Reddit user. This suggested that Trump’s staff may be on sites finding out what people are posting, in text, image and video, about the president. This raises the conflict of controlling trolls and, like the Dibbell’s (1998) Mr. Bungle rape incident, facilitating debates to what extent should people be punished for trolling and to what severity.

The incident suggests that if Internet and social media sites are lax about trolling punishments, who should be monitoring and punishing trolls and to what extent? Jagannathan Good and Greene (2017) describe the incident being critical of Trump’s policy of finding the troll and of it being an attack on freedom of speech in the United States:

President Trump continued his social media beatdown of the free press Sunday with a doctored video of himself pummelling a man with a CNN logo plastered on his face.

The Twitter takedown featured altered footage from a 10-year-old WrestleMania event when a pre-presidential Trump clotheslined wrestling honcho Vince McMahon outside the ring and followed up with several quick punches to the head.

But instead of McMahon’s shocked reaction, the video places CNN’s red-and-white logo onto the wrestling promoter’s shoulders. The new video was widely interpreted as a presidential nod that it’s OK to body-slam the media.

The meme appeared on the Reddit site but went viral. Figure 66 is a publically obtained copy of it (New York Daily News, 2017):

Figure 66: Troll meme showing Donald Trump wrestling Vince McMahon with superimposed CNN Sign on his face.
Kaczynski, (2017) reported on the CNN site how the troll was caught, raising issues about how private your posts really are:

The apology came after CNN’s KFile identified the man behind “HanA**holeSolo.” Using identifying information that HanA**holeSolo posted on Reddit, KFile was able to determine key biographical details, to find the man’s name using a Facebook search and ultimately corroborate details he had made available on Reddit.

This has attracted controversy because CNN stated they have the right to publish the person’s real name and details, but as at the time of writing have not. The troll issued an apology to Reddit which, although removed, was reproduced on other sites. This was done because of the threat CNN may pose to showing his details to the public. Berke (2017) reported the troll’s previous behaviours:

The user’s own history is rife with examples. He posted a graphic in June featuring a litany of CNN employees on a chart with the Jewish Star of David next to their heads. The was (sic) titled “Something strange about CNN…can’t quite put my finger on it.”

He also wrote, “F— ISLAM,” in a post on Sunday and commented on a photo of refugees walking together in a crowd, writing, “there’s a MOAB (Mother of All Bomb’s) for that.”

However, the user appeared remorseful in his apology and discussed how “trolling” or posting deliberately antagonizing and hateful comments on the internet, was an “addiction.”

Therefore, although catching trolls is advantageous it can come at the cost of the one’s privacy as the ability to be publically outed and shamed can occur.

**Preventing and Managing Trolling**

*Is ‘Please don’t Feed the Trolls’ a Sensible Strategy?*

Being offended or hurt is subjective and personal to the person who is the victim or the person who reads the trolling. For decades the advice has been embedded in Internet culture by the phrase ‘Don’t Feed the Trolls’. This means do not engage with them, type comments back to them or contact them by email. It does not mean not being upset or taking offence, but to keep the context in mind. They are words and images on a screen only. If it is aimed at you then gathering information and reporting them is a sensible strategy.

The issue is your decision to decide to spend your time and effort arguing with trolls. On Facebook troll accounts easily flame peoples’ views on issues. Controversial views, topics and people do cause mob like activity but the boundary between giving an opinion, fighting and inflaming can be narrow. If you read the responses to news stories on Facebook pages you can see examples of trolling and flaming rather than logical reasoned debates. Social media are for opinion and debating and can be disrupted by mob abuse, yet when some users try to debate sensibly they are often abused for doing so.
High profile people in politics, the arts or the media often do not feed the trolls with counter abuse. Entertainment artists like Madonna, Taylor Swift, Justin Bieber and others endure troll abuse but rarely respond. However, this does not mean they are not immune to its unpleasantness. In 2017 popular solo singer Ed Sheeran stopped tweeting on Twitter due to the mean comments made about him. This may be seen as drastic but his followers were 19 million Twitter accounts. Reported in the media he said (Gill, 2017):

I got called ‘wet wipe’ and ‘Hitler’ after one of my articles. A month later, a video appeared where a man analysed a picture of my face: ‘She’s all right, but nothing special,’ he said into the camera.

Sheeran also commented (Beaumont-Thomas, 2017):

“I’ve actually come off Twitter completely. I can’t read it. I go on it and there’s nothing but people saying mean things.”

He added: “One comment ruins your day. The headfuck for me has been trying to work out why people dislike me so much.”

He said that Lady Gaga fans were some of those responsible for the abuse. “[They] read an interview in which they assumed I was talking about her and they all fucking hate. And it wasn’t anything to do with that at all.”

Leaving your social media or Internet site because of trolls is unfortunate and unnecessary. In a way the trolls achieve their goal of disruption because you do not want to see their comments. Not feeding the trolls can be difficult but it has merit they cease to be a part of your Internet experience and you can assess quickly how important it is to engage with them.

Talking to Others about your Being Trolled

Much advice is given to those who are being trolled or cyberbullied to talk about their feelings especially adolescents and children. There can be perceived shame in being viewed as ‘silly’ or ‘stupid’ for being upset by trolling especially if it is aimed at you. As discussed in Chapter Four, extreme trolling had drastic consequences for those receiving it. People have suicided over the troll abuse. It is recognised as a serious social problem and a symptom of increasing incivility in many societies.

The key strategy is to assess how comfortable you are talking to someone about it. In Australia organisations such as Beyond Blue or Lifeline provide an anonymous service that will not judge your feelings. You can also work out a strategy to manage trolls. Talking about it is important, it is crucial that you pick the right person to help you decide how you will manage your situation if you are being trolled or are just upset by troll comments.

It is reasonable to want to continue using Internet and social media sites to give your opinions, keep in contact with people and follow what other people are doing in their lives. Not feeding the trolls is wise to keep in mind and also avoid becoming too involved in online arguments even if you feel strongly about an issue.
Blocking, Ignoring and Reporting - The Main Strategies

The three effective ways to manage trolls is by blocking them, ignoring them and reporting them. First, it is wise to know the policy of the social media, virtual community, chat room or any Internet site as to their measures for managing undesirable behaviours from members. In this section the three major social media platforms, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, and their policies on managing and preventing trolling are examined to show how these policies try to maintain civility and avoid trolling disruption.

Twitter:

In response to constant and large amounts of trolling Twitter introduced new safety features for its users. These are found in the Twitter Safety Centre. They are important because though they may not prevent trolling, they do control content and how you interact with others on the microblogging site. These are as follows (Twitter, 2017):

1. Blocking Specific Words

If a user does not wish to see certain words (Twitter uses ‘language’ so therefore it assumes bad language and swearing) blocking specific words is possible. This is called muting. These include words, phrases and the Twitter hashtag (for example #killfags could be muted so the user cannot see tweets with that hashtag) and will not appear in the user’s Twitter timeline or notifications.

It is interesting that Twitter allows the function of muting for a period of time only such as 24 hours to 7 days to permanently. This can be useful during distressing times such as the trolling of victims of the 2016 Orlando Pulse Nightclub shooting where religious trolls tweeted unpleasant comments such as ‘god’s wrath’ and ‘they were paedophiles’. This is a good option if certain words or phrases trigger your emotions. The words are blocked and you do not see the trolling tweets.

2. Conversations

Although it is wise to keep copies of tweets as evidence if trolls target you, Twitter has introduced a muting function to stop you getting notifications related to tweets you are mentioned in. However, these do not block anyone or remove the conversation from the home timeline. It means not seeing inflammatory comments towards you.

3. Accounts

Although accounts can still be blocked, there is now a mute account function to stop seeing others’ tweets, but then you can unmute them and see their tweets again. This can be used if you do not want to see someone’s tweets for a period of time but do not want to block them.

4. Notifications

Filtering accounts is now available which also decreases the chance of seeing troll comments. If you do not want to see tweets from people or companies you do not follow there is now the ability to do this. This is important because previously unless your tweets were protected and
the public could not view them, companies and others could follow you even if you did not want them to do so.

There are also fake Twitter accounts called bots that can clutter your Twitter feed with unnecessary messages. Matwyshyn and Mowbray (2012) identified, many Twitter accounts are bots which automatically follow you, so to have these options to manage trolling is a response that has long been called for by those who use Twitter.

**Facebook:**

As the most popular social media platform Facebook is used no longer just for contact between friends and acquaintances but now incorporates news stores, support for health issues, targeting your profile for specific goods and services, special interest groups and for obtaining a job. Fake troll accounts are notorious for inflaming people causing arguments and disrupting conversations. Like Twitter, Facebook has a safety centre. The centre offers features so you do not have to interact with trolls.

Facebook (2017a) offers the following features to block trolls:

- Unfriend the person. Only your Facebook friends can contact you through Facebook chat or post on your Timeline
- Block the person. This will prevent the person from adding you as a friend and viewing things you share on your Timeline
- Report the person to the centre

In response to past trolling Facebook (2017b) also has emphasised to users the best strategies to manage trolling and cyberbullying:

- Don’t retaliate. Most bullies are looking for a reaction, so don't give them one
- Don’t keep it a secret. Reach out to someone you trust, like a close friend, family member, counselor or teacher, who can give you the help and support you need
- Document and save. If someone has posted something you don’t like, you can print or take a screenshot of it in case you need to share it with someone you trust
- If you feel you're in immediate danger, contact your local authorities

Despite some comments over the past five years that it is in decline, Facebook at 2017 shows no sign of abandonment from users. This is because of its diversification; it is often now used by users to read the news. Special interest groups on any topic are numerous as people move away from virtual bulletin boards to Facebook groups. Trolling can be deterred more easily on Facebook but fake troll accounts are still a concern. Facebook’s measures are adequate but may need to adapt to suit new types of trolling that may occur in the future.
The video sharing site YouTube is controversial for many reasons including copyright violation and defamatory material of various kinds. Yet the most controversial part of YouTube are the user comments section below the video. Although it depends on the type of video the volume of negative troll flame comments and the language used deter people from commenting. Sexism, racism, homophobia, slander and personal threats abound with little off limits. Trolls can also make videos that inflame unnecessary debates. It is easy to ignore the comments, but the comments have still been a concern for YouTube. YouTube has been slow to respond to the flaming and trolling issues.

Commenting on the problem of inaction from YouTube for many years, MacKinnon and Zuckerman (2012, p. 23):

But while YouTube provides a platform for discussion and reaction to content, these conversations are themselves easily hijacked by trolls. YouTube does not help contextualise controversial content, or neutralise its inflammatory nature by exposing and condemning the conditions under which it was created, or the way in which it is being used.

The second issue is the subjectivity of taking offence at troll comments. In my research (Nycyk, 2012) examining flame comments, there are some words that although offensive to groups and cultures are in some contexts acceptable to use. As stated before in this book, the word ‘faggot’ can be used in a derogatory and inflammatory way yet accepted in some YouTube video comment sections. This was especially seen in gaming videos. The same applies to words such as ‘retard’ and ‘nigger’. Some African-American YouTube videos use the word in affectionate way as part of that culture thus not having the same offense or disrespect. Trolls will use these words to describe race and sexuality to inflame others but the offence taken is individual.

YouTube responded to the use of hate speech that was occurring by setting guidelines to acceptability of what can be posted in video and comments. There is a reporting centre where you can report videos and any other content. YouTube (2017) has two mechanisms for reporting:

1. Flag the video – send a report to YouTube through an online form that can be completed on the YouTube Community Guideline site.

2. File an abuse report – also through an online form on the Community Guideline site.

It is true if you glance through video comments that trolling is not under control on YouTube. The other choice is to not read the comments and enjoy the videos, but do not engage with the trolls who make the comments.
**Caution in Giving Your Information and Opinions to Others Online**

It is becoming more crucial to be careful about the information you give out online to anyone, even those you trust. The mass commercial media now takes your tweets, Facebook postings, emails and other Internet posts and reproduce them on their news sites and in print to a mass audience. Dating sites and apps, as discussed in Chapter Three, are sites of trolling where people can be highly vulnerable. March, Grieve, Marrington and Jonason (2017) study of dating app Tinder’s trolling showed how personal information can be trolled and reproduced on other sites. The site Lamebook (http://www.lamebook.com/), that copies and posts users’ Facebook postings, masks some details but personal details have been posted. The Reddit and 4chan sites have published personal details about people. It has been endemic since the Internet has been able to transmit information that giving out private details online has been a troll strategy.

Be aware of the sources online that you give any of your information to. Assess if the person you are communicating with is genuine. If you have any misgivings terminate the conversation. Do not give out even your email address unless it is necessary such as in a business transaction. There does not have to be a mistrust of every person you come in contact with online. Be aware that trolls come from any part of the world and may impersonate people you know. Be careful about posting comments at trolls on Facebook or making a troll comment. People have been fired or suspended for making comments on Facebook about others, as the example of the Monash employee who made trolling comments at Charlotte Dawson. Be selective and aware, but do not stop using social media or other Internet sites just because of troll threats.

**Keeping Copies of Trolling**

When someone makes trolling comments against you they can be hurtful, embarrassing and distressing. It is important to keep records such as screenshots or save copies to your computer and back them up on an external hard drive not a cloud service. This is important because you may need to show evidence to the moderator of the site, the police or in a court of law. Make sure you note the date of the posting as this can identify patterns of trolling abuse. Keeping copies can be vital to identifying, finding and punishing the troll. It has been done many times and has been proven to be effective in getting rid of it.

**Police Help and Legal Action**

The decision to report trolls to the police and take legal action depend on the type of threat the troll or trolls make and in the case of legal action your willingness to pursue recourse in a court of law. Unfortunately, although trolls are caught and prosecuted it is difficult without significant financial resources to pursue them. Yet prosecution in many countries has been achieved.

The main reasons why troll prosecutions are difficult include:

1. Police forces can have limited resources to help you and in some countries cybercrimes are not a priority or are ignored.
2. Transnational border issues, that is, the troll can be anywhere in the world and the country where they are may have no laws to neither prosecute trolls nor have treaties with your country to arrest the troll and transport them to your country.

3. The police may not consider the material trolling important although threats to property, persons and pets are taken seriously.

4. As I will elaborate shortly, legal resource through slander and defamation proceedings is expensive often without a satisfactory result.

The legal system has had difficulty creating laws to keep pace with constant technological changes. Public pressure on Internet and social media companies has placed an imperative on governments to pass laws quickly to manage trolling. A key motivator for this pressure has been the suicides of children and adolescents. Yet the police and courts struggle with prosecuting and building cases against those who commit acts which contribute to the suicides.

It is important to briefly mention the issue of defamation proceedings because many people feel that it can be something that they hire a lawyer to do to obtain monetary recourse for harm. Defamation is (The Free Dictionary, 2015):

Any intentional false communication, either written or spoken, that harms a person’s reputation; decreases the respect, regard, or confidence in which a person is held; or induces disparaging, hostile, or disagreeable opinions or feelings against a person.

If your reputation has been damaged and you notice people avoid you then there is a possible avenue of legal recourse through taking out defamation action. However, as previously stated, it is expensive and if trolls doing the defaming are in another country that they may not be able to be extradited to face defamation charges.

There are agencies and help in Australia for trolling and cyberbullying issues that may be able to provide help. First, does the legislation fit the definition of a criminal act? The legislation is The Australian Telecommunications Offences and Other Measures Act Part 10.6 Division 474.17(1) which states that using a carriage service like a mobile or computer to menace, harass or cause offense is punishable with monetary fines and incarceration (Australasian Legal Information Institute, 2012). It reads:

CRIMES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (TELECOMMUNICATIONS OFFENCES AND OTHER MEASURES) ACT (NO. 2) 2004 - SCHEDULE 1

474.17 Using a carriage service to menace, harass or cause offence

474.17 Using a carriage service to menace, harass or cause offence

(1) A person is guilty of an offence if:
(a) the person uses a carriage service; and
(b) the person does so in a way (whether by the method of use or the content of a communication, or both) that reasonable persons would regard as being in all the circumstances, menacing, harassing or offensive.
Penalty: Imprisonment for 3 years

The issue with this legislation is that it must be provable that trolling took place. Keeping copies of trolling is advisable, but there is also the effort of getting information from the Internet Service Providers which can prove the trolling came from someone’s ISP address.

Since 2015 Australia has had metadata laws that can assist in successful prosecution of trolls and cyberbullies. Metadata is defined as data about data but is formally defined for legal purposes as (Rule of Law Institute of Australia, 2016):

- Metadata is part of a communication that describes the who, what, when, where and how of a communication. It does not include the content of the communication itself
- To investigate crime and protect national security government agencies have powers to access telecommunications data (the legal term in the TIA Act), known as metadata (the term everyone uses)
- Metadata is usually created whenever a person sends or receives a communication over a phone or internet service

This is the *Telecommunications (Interception and Access) Act 1979* which requires telecommunications companies to retain a particular set of telecommunications data for at least two years. Although the legislation requirements are complex describing many aspects of what authorities can request, there are six main elements that can be obtained from trolling accounts. Although email and phone conversation data are mostly what is obtained by law enforcement, websites and social media data can be collected. The Australian Government’s Attorney-General’s Department (n.d.) can find out six things to help prosecute a troll or cyberbully:

The subscriber of, and accounts, services, telecommunications devices and other relevant services relating to, the relevant service

1. The source of a communication.
2. The destination of a communication.
3. The date, time and duration of a communication, or of its connection to a relevant service.
4. The type of a communication and relevant service used in connection with a communication.
5. The location of equipment or a line used in connection with a communication.

Although this legislation is contentious in terms of privacy and government interference in your Internet and mobile phone use, the purpose here is to make you aware of what can be done to stop trolls. These laws were made for Australia’s national security but have been used by law enforcements and courts to prove trolling offences took place.
As at 2017 there are two agencies with an online presence that can assist with information and report of trolling and cyberbullying. These were set up by the Australian Government in response to growing online threats from trolls, bullies and hackers. First, the Australian Cybercrime Online Reporting Network (ACORN) can assist, but it is important to note that it is a referral agency only and does not have the power to investigate incidents (ACORN, n.d.). Second, they have created an Office of the eSafety Commissioner which concentrates on children and adolescents although adults can make a complaint about trolling and bullying material. The site is explicit in giving information on how to collect information to give to them about the incidents such as taking screen shots (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, n.d.).

The information in this section pertains only to Australia, but a brief mention should be made of other nation’s laws. Some countries do not have any laws covering trolling activity prevention. Even the United States and United Kingdom have been slow to act to pass legislation and in the United States it is complicated as some states have passed additional legislation to the federal laws governing such harassment. The United States has the US Federal Anti-Cyber-Stalking law is found at 47 USC sec. 223 while the United Kingdom has the Malicious Communications Act 1988. The best course of action if you are in any country, if Internet access is allowable, is to consult the Internet for information and speak to the police first and a lawyer if necessary.

Involving the police and the legal system is fraught with difficulties but laws and avenues to prosecute trolls do exist. Talking to someone and getting information is crucial to deciding if to involve either or both.

**Conclusions on Prevention and Management Strategies**

This chapter’s purpose was to make you aware of the strategies available to manage and prosecute trolls. Although it is an Australian perspective, these principles and avenues can be applied to any country. Unfortunately, some countries do not take this issue seriously and have strict Internet censorship, yet trolls still operate there. Weighing up the decision to prosecute trolls involves barriers that can be difficult to overcome.

Not feeding the trolls is widely given as the best advice because you cut off giving them the attention they want. Much of the trolling discussed in this book is unpleasant but the choice to not give them the attention they crave is a wise strategy. It is easy to want to retaliate but many issues must be considered before doing so. Starving trolls of attention works and prevents your Internet experience from being distracted by them.

If you take action or not keeping copies of trolling comments that are affecting you is vital. It is important not to feel you cannot use the Internet because of trolls. Our reliance on the Internet is growing and the negative side of it will not go away. We need to be aware of how to manage and prevent trolls to continue the quest for a fair and civil Internet that still allows us freedom of speech.
Notes

1 Quote from Claire Hardaker and Mark McGlashan (2014) in The Conversation.

2 This Don’t FEED the Trolls illustration appears in Stefan Krappitz’s (2012, p. 42) thesis. It is an ASCII graphic Stefan used with attribution from Janne Nikula (n.d.) who reproduced them from a webpage created by Janne which is found at http://jni.sdf-eu.org/trolls.html


4 Although these have been discussed in my first book, since 2015 there have been upgrades to these sites in policy and in the way trolls and cyberbullies are managed. It should also be noted that over time this may change again, so this chapter reflects the policies as at 2017.
CHAPTER SEVEN
CONCLUSIONS AND CLOSING THOUGHTS ABOUT THIS EXPLORATION OF TROLLS UNDER THE DIGITAL BRIDGE:

Online abuse is more akin to a slow poison that continually erodes confidence, security, and peace of mind. Dealing with it is not easy, either for the target or investigative bodies, but we must get better at recognising that it is as “real” as offline abuse. To dismiss it as otherwise is to not only deny someone the help they may desperately need, but worse, to enable online abusers to carry on inflicting misery. – Claire Hardaker

Clearly, trolls value pranking and offensiveness for the pleasure it affords. – E. Gabriella Coleman

Whatever their motives, and even at their worst, perhaps we can learn something from trolls. Trolling is a very broad church, ranging from /b/ bullies to amateur philosophers, from the mildly offensive to the illegal. An increasing desire for digital affirmation is leading more of us to share our most intimate and personal lives online, often with complete strangers. What we like, what we think, where we’re going. The more we invest of ourselves online and the more we are reading we are to be offended, the more there is for trolls to feed on. – Jamie Bartlett

I have taken you under the digital bridge where Internet trolls live to see the harm, disruption, hurt and extremism they cause. Like cyberbullying, it is a serious issue needing more debate on how to manage it, more discussion to alert people to it and more research on its effects. I used research, stories, media reports, opinions, authors’ books, academic articles, a research study and video screen shots to show how trolling looks. On reflection, unlike my comment in 2015 that cyberbullying for adults was not taken as seriously as it should as an area of research (Nycyk, 2015), I can now state that cyberbullying and trolling is taken seriously by researchers, governments and law enforcement in 2017 and will continue to be. It is a serious threat to not only one’s own peace of mind but to the fragile peace in today’s volatile global political systems.

Internet and social media sites have responded to public demands for them to manage and stop trolling. It is also of note that trolling is seen as a serious social problem by governments and the law. Trolls may have changed in the way they deliver their messages yet their behaviours and strategies to disrupt have not. The alarming sophisticated ways which, unlike Web 1.0 are no longer bounded by being on one part of the Internet only; they are now of international concern. Trolls can change the course of human history and shape the way we view the world and others in it.

Trolling has changed in terms of the cultural understanding of it. People are now called trolls for minor or infrequent comments. It is applied to anyone who makes rude comments. Prankster trolling is encouraged through new phone apps that are to the troll funny but still can disrupt others’ use of the Internet and mobile phone. This is the troll agenda. It interrupts your Internet experience and challenges your world view. Trolls no longer hide their names. Trolling has been debated now more than ever but how to stop it remains elusive.
Was trolling really meant to be a funny activity only? For what is the LULZ? The evidence presented in this book suggests otherwise. Look at the symbol of trolling that was created by Carlos Ramirez in 2008 called Troll Face:

![Troll Face Image](image)

*Figure 67: Ramirez's Troll Face Figure (The Meme Wikia, n.d.)*

The laughing, smirking, all teeth showing grin mocks the Internet user. Ramirez captured well an image of someone behind a keyboard who derives pleasure from the disruption they do. They are no different to the folklore trolls. Mischievous, malicious, annoying, disrespectful, any number of words describes them and their activities. Yet society, its governments, lawmakers and Internet site owners are aware of trolls. Acknowledging trolling as a serious social problem has occurred due to the media and researcher attention given to it. However, it has become an accepted practice that many do feel has no solution.

People say you can just turn off the Internet and not engaged with them. This is true, but our networked world is increasingly forcing people to interact with the Internet to accomplish tasks previously we would do in the offline world. Not feeding the trolls is a wise strategy for combating them. Trolls thrive on attention. While there is no expectation that everyone will be civil and respectful online, it is still not idealistic to expect respect from those you interact with. When trolls are caught people celebrate their removal from the Internet, but there is always someone to take their place. Our individual task is to assess our level of interaction with them and choose not to engage with them or read their posts.

Catching and prosecuting trolls is a double edged sword. The law can stop trolling but is difficult to get the justice desired by many. Monetary costs are the main deterrent as is the effort required to gather evidence. Trolls operate across the world. The person who is trolling you may be in a country where you will not be able to demand they be held accountable. Yet the mechanisms and laws to stop trolling carry with them invasions of privacy by governments and the police that can be used against you. Freedom of speech and privacy are still valued but are we able to sacrifice some of that so we can catch trolls?

It can also be disheartening to see what trolls are doing to Internet users. In this book I explored many distressing situations with text, photos and images of what trolls do. The extreme trolling cases put forward many issues of how do we manage such repeated, personal and vicious attacks on individuals and groups? Not everyone agrees that trolls should be prosecuted for their actions. Not every Mr. Bungle may be malicious or have criminal intent. Yet the troll can cause such damage to people and to the sites they use. MySpace for example still exists yet the relentless trolling through spamming and harassment saw it become an abandoned Internet site.
The growing body of academic literature on trolling is encouraging because it shows society does take the problem seriously. Independent corporate and government research also give increasing credibility to recognising the seriousness of trolling. Defining trolls and trolling is changing as technology changes. Research helps find out who, what, how and importantly why it happens. We cannot label every troll as one with a mental illness or psychopathic tendencies yet we see mob trolling as people fight with each other and grow angry at their behaviours. Discovering theories and explanations for these behaviours helps us understand the conditions in which someone becomes a troll. Over time and as technology changes further we will continue to add to this body of knowledge which in turn can be used practically to manage trolls.

A theme this book has used is that trolling has become a mainstream practice. The factors of increased Internet consumption, mobile computing, easier to use software, increased numbers of users as more areas of the world obtain Internet coverage and the increased incivility of societies all play a role in trolling. Previously trolls could be contained and did not bother the Internet user as much as they do now. Bounded systems meant there was a choice to join sites such as Usenet and even then you did not have to be trolled by someone. Unbounded public systems such as social media have made that choice more difficult. Trolls posses the power and organisational abilities to interfere in nations’ affairs and no matter where you are in the world they can affect your Internet use.

We cannot ignore the actions of those who commit trolling crimes such as online memorial trolling or those that troll by spreading disinformation attacking sites where we obtain information. The disappointing aspect of trolling is the continued perpetuation of stereotypes when offline social progress has been made in the lives of previously repressed people. Sexism, racism and homophobia are used by trolls to continue the hatred of those who have fought for equal treatment in society. In a way the status quo of power relations that favour the dominant ideologies of male white power still operate. By contrast, trolls can serve to get people to fight such ideologies and correct injustices that still occur.

There is one issue that is important to consider above all discussed in this book that can be confronting. Have we ourselves trolled others? This is not to suggest that one angry comment makes you a troll. Rather, have we bullied someone on Facebook for having differing beliefs? There are topics that make people angry and we may feel powerless to change society. Venting on the Internet anonymously can alleviate our feelings but not the problems we face. Also, have we stood by and watched others being bullied and not defended them? To think one is a participant in the trolling process can be confronting; we must be aware that our words and actions can offend and hurt others. The trolled can become the troll, but we have the choice to not allow that to happen.

What will the future of trolling be as technology changes further and the Internet continues to connect with billions of people? Technologies once thought of as science fiction are now reality. Artificial intelligence, augmented and virtual realities and robots may confront lawmakers with new issues in trolling. If a robot trolls us is that the same as a human? Science fiction movies like Demon Seed, 2001: A Space Odyssey, Tron, The Matrix and Woody Allen’s Sleeper have all presented years before their realisation problems of bullying, harassment and trolling. I am reminded of the 1976 film Logan’s Run which has a device that reflects dating apps. In the film actor Michael York’s character, Logan, uses a machine called ‘The Circuit’ to obtain sex partners. His partner he materialises, while not a troll, is more interested in espousing her views on social issues than giving intimate pleasure to York’s
character. We now see that the dating app can be a place where such things happen so such a scenario shown in the film is in the future more than possible.

The thoughts and conclusions about trolling this book has presented served to make you aware of what trolling is, what it looks like, why it happens and what to do about it. What I would like you to take away from this book is similar to what I wanted you to take away from my first book. If you are being trolled take action even if it means ignoring trolls or stepping away from the Internet site or social media you use. What others say about you that is mean or rude is not who you are. Continue to enjoy and use the Internet, as is your right, and do not allow others to ruin what is one of humankind’s best inventions that helps us all in our lives.
Notes

1 Quote from Claire Hardaker (2014) researcher of trolling issues.

2 Quote from E. Gabriella Coleman (2012).

3 Quote from Jamie Bartlett (2014).
WORKS CITED

**Academic Journals, Conference Papers and Theses**


Bishop, J. (2012). The psychology of trolling and lurking: the role of defriending and gamification for increasing participation in online communities using seductive narratives. *Vadeker.net*. United Kingdom. DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-0312-7.ch010


Hardaker, C. (2013). “‘Uh.....not to be nitpicky,,,,,but...the past tense of drag is dragged, not drug”: an overview of trolling strategies. *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict, 1*(1), 57–85. DOI: 10.1075/jlac.1.1.04har


**Books and Book Chapters**


Philips, W. (2015). This is why we can’t have nice things: mapping the relationship between online trolling and mainstream culture. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.


**Internet Sources**


Machinima. (2011, December 24). RESPAWN EXTRA - This Gun F-ing Rocks Type 95 EP3 by Wickedshrapnel (Modern Warfare 3) [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSKdoDx_-NE&feature=g-logo&context=G2f5be11FOAAAAAAAABAA


Miller, N. (2016, March 13). Trolling the messenger in the name of propaganda. The Sun Herald, pp. 34.


Reddit Inc. (2016d). Have fun with this, fisherman vibe please [Online image]. Retrieved from https://www.reddit.com/r/PhotoshopTrolls/comments/4x4n6y/have_fun_with_this_fisherman_vibe_please/


Web 1.0/2.0/3.0 Summary. (n.d.) [Online image]. Retrieved from https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/736x/3b/7b/22/3b7b22e371a7332da04f40096913b10a.jpg


Works Cited under Internet Sources include material obtained from Internet sources such as the World Wide Web, emails, mobile (cell) phones, photographs, videos, social media such as Twitter, YouTube and Facebook, blogs, virtual communities or elsewhere, but not academic journals, conference papers, honours, masters and PhD Thesis’s, or any research papers obtained online. Please note that some web material will change or be removed after publication of this book.
Trolls disrupt the journey of those using the Internet through insulting, disruptive and baiting behaviours. At worst they cause consequences that are devastating to individuals. This book uses many types of research to explore the issue of trolls and trolling on the Internet.