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STRATEGIES AND BEHAVIORS OF CYBER DEVIANCE AND INTERNET TROLLING

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STRATEGIES AND BEHAVIORS OF CYBER
DEVIANCE AND INTERNET TROLLING

A Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

Central Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

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Law and Justice

by

Cody Mason Taylor

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CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Graduate Studies

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ABSTRACT

STRATEGIES AND BEHAVIORS OF CYBER
DEVIANCE AND INTERNET TROLLING

by

Cody Mason Taylor

August 2017

As society shifts towards making social media a center focus of contemporary life, trolls, are continually developing distractive dialogue. Although trolls may not be deviant in the sense of harsh online crimes, trolls do cause problems within online communities.

Jonathan Bishop (2014) and Whitney Phillips (2015) have developed a foundation of internet troll research. Bishop (2014) studied the behaviors of trolls, while Philips (2015) investigated their techniques. However, neither researcher sampled from an online massive multiplayer Online game.

Using one of the largest online gaming communities, World of Warcraft, this research examines the techniques and behaviors of trolling. Trolling was found to mainly be a response mechanism that consisted of heavy mockery and improvisation. This study indicates that trolls successfully disrupt and reroute conversations using a variety of mechanisms and techniques. General findings indicate that, while trolls may distract and derail public conversations, a clear majority of the activity reflected more juvenile and irritating behavior rather than significant threats to society.

The research of strategies and behaviors of cyber deviance examined in this work creates a foundation for future examinations of trolling behavior. While this study inspects the strategies,

future studies look to reveal the goals of trolls. Although trolling may be considered deviant, it has become an important aspect of the online culture that needs to be investigated.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The Internet became one of the world's most prized tools. Once used primarily for research, the Internet today evolved into a system for social interactions (Kemp, 2017). With the online population becoming more interactive, the potential for crime and deviance is likely to follow.

The growing potential of cyber deviance is well known within the United States (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2017). The spectrum of online deviance varies from juvenile insults and awkward statements, to serious crime, including threats, theft, hacking, and sexual discourse (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2017). However, society recently started to consider the disruptive internet troll community of being deviant (Phillips W., 2015).

An internet troll is an individual who seeks to disrupt an online community through obscenity and comical relief (Bishop, 2014). Because of an overwhelming progression of online interactions, internet trolls have become problematic, especially since trolls can use anonymity to their advantage.

Internet trolling has been a relatively new subject with little research. The leading researchers, Whitney Phillips (2015) and Jonathan Bishop (2014), have tried to examine and describe the activities of trolls. Furthermore, there is minimal variety of trolling research that identifies the strategies and behaviors in different settings.

The video game community rapidly progressed with the use of the Internet, especially with, Multi-Massive Online Role-Playing games (MMORPG) (Chikhani, 2015). MMORPGs create natural social interactions amongst players, which is an ideal environment for internet troll research.

One of the most successful games of the MMORPG genre is the World of Warcraft (WoW). Developed by Blizzard Software, WoW generated one of the most diverse and populated gaming environments to date (Statista, 2017). With such a large population, the player base is highly interactive with one another.

Because it is a highly populated and interactive game, WoW generated a notable trolling community. Unlike social networks like Facebook, WoW allows for players to stay anonymous through creating alternative names for each player's character. Players are encouraged to make alternative identities, which aids internet trolls, who create disruptive identities within these communities.

WoW provides a setting to examine the strategies and behaviors of internet trolls. This research intends to develop a better understanding of trolls' disruptive strategies and their use of politics, popular news, improvisation, gender, and any other discourses to create divisive environments in online communities. Through the exploration of trolling strategies and behaviors, this research intends to develop a stronger definition of trolling behavior.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The use and dependency on the Internet has increased over the last decade. Research indicates that through the growth of cell phone users and other outlets, use of the Internet has increased by 340% over 2005-2016 (Statista, 2017). Out of an estimated 7.476 billion people populating the world, there is an estimated 3.773 billion internet users (Kemp, 2017). This means approximately 50% of the world uses the Internet (Kemp, 2017).

The world also has increased its use of social media. There are currently an estimated 2.789 billion social media users (Kemp, 2017). Since the overall Internet user population is increasing, it would only make sense that online deviance and criminal activity would also increase.

IBM research indicates there are 1.5 million cyber-attacks annually in the online world (CBS, 2015). Considering 1.5 million cyber-attacks, it is estimated that there are “170 attacks every hour” (CBS, 2015, para. 1). The damage of cybercrime led to the discovery of an overall victim loss of \$781.84 million (Federal Bureau of Investigation: Internet Crime Compliant Center, 2013).

Cyber deviance extends to different forms of disruptive behavior and strategies. Internet trolls have developed strategies to disrupt and reroute online communities’ discourse (Bishop, 2014). Although currently legal, negative discourse on social media has teetered against online social standards. For example, hate speech—while legal and protected under the First Amendment—is used by trolls to intimidate or harasses individuals online. This behavior is legally acceptable but socially deviant.

The United Kingdom conducted a survey investigating the growth in the number of internet trolls (Gani, 2016). The survey revealed that through internet outlets such as social

media, 24% of teenagers have been targeted by trolls (Gani, 2016). Similarly, the gaming community also experienced a growth in internet troll activity.

World of Warcraft, a game that is built to facilitate social interactions within the game, experienced a significant presence of trolling behavior. This research seeks to examine the definition of trolling and to examine its connection to online games, such as MMORPGs. Furthermore, it will examine the strategies and behaviors of trolls within MMORPGs.

Deviance

When examining the behavior of internet trolls, it is important to have a clear definition of deviance. Deviance is “behavior that is recognized as violating expected rules and norms” (Crossman, 2017, para. 2). Although deviance may seem like a basic term in criminology, it is important to understand that deviance is a flexible term.

The definition of deviance varies because it is a label created by communities to identify behavior that infringes on social standards and norms (Cullen & Agnew, 2006). Any behavior that goes against a community’s social standards and norms can be labeled deviant (Cullen & Agnew, 2006).

An example is from Edwin M. Lemert’s framework of deviant classification (Cullen & Agnew, 2006). Lemert’s classification separates deviance into two distinct groups: primary and secondary deviance (Cullen & Agnew, 2006).

Lemert’s primary deviance focuses on the initial acts of deviance that arise “out of a variety of social, cultural, psychological, and physiological factors” (Cullen & Agnew, 2006, p. 273). Actions that are deemed as problematic for those focuses are likely to be labeled as deviant within a community. Categorizing and labeling a behavior deviant often develops a stigma to deter future behavior.

While primary deviance creates labels for community misconduct, Lemert's secondary deviance describes when an offending individual embraces the community's labels (Cullen & Agnew, 2006). Lemert's secondary deviance occurs when individuals embrace and act within a community's definition of deviance (Cullen & Agnew, 2006). Consequently, secondary deviance progresses the label of deviance by providing further details of the identity of deviant behaviors.

We can apply the notion of deviance to trolling behaviors. Trolling strategies and behaviors often conflict with social standards of gaming and online communities. This includes players, game developers, and game moderators (Maher, 2016). The general population of these communities do not want trolling, deeming trolls as deviants.

Cyber-Deviance

Cybercrime is defined by the "crimes committed on the internet using the computer as either a tool or a targeted victim" (Aghatise, 2006, para. 2). With half of the world having access to the Internet, cybercrime has grown significantly. Because cybercriminals do not have to physically participate in criminal activity, cybercrimes are low-risk with high-reward (Aghatise, 2006). Cybercriminals can create victim pools to act upon without direct physical interaction with the victim or victims (Aghatise, 2006).

With the world progressively using the Internet, there is a high-density population for cybercriminals to target. Cybercriminals can go throughout the Internet to find victims. Essentially, the Internet is a virtual hotspot for deviant behavior (Aghatise, 2006).

One approach to attacking individuals online is sending corrupted files (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2017). Corrupted files can have computer-viruses attached, which could lead to various forms of theft (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2017). Cybercriminals use of corrupted files has led to anti-virus software.

The increased focus of cyber security has been costly. From 2004 to 2017, the cybersecurity market went from being worth \$3.5 billion to \$120 billion (Morgan, 2016). Furthermore, cybersecurity is estimated to pass \$1 trillion by 2021 (Morgan, 2016).

Cybercrime is merely an evolution of traditional crime; however, unlike traditional crime, cybercrime is difficult to track because the actions take place within a virtual world (Davis, 2015). Furthermore, cybercriminals can develop false identities to mislead investigators (Davis, 2015).

The community of cyber criminals are problematic. Cybercriminals are amongst a small population of individuals that work together and have a great knowledge of technology's progression (Davis, 2015). Successful cybercriminals continually learn to stay ahead of the advances of cyber security.

Deviant communities within the online world have shown to be an important element of today's criminology. They are difficult to be stopped, and the best cybercriminals are much more advanced than some investigative agencies (Davis, 2015). To be able to prevent cybercrime, it has become inherent to understand the cybercriminal community.

Cyber-Bullying

Cyber-bullying is a form of cyber deviance that focuses on tormenting individuals using online amenities (Johnston, et al., 2014). Cyber-bullies use cyber networking to libel individuals, send threatening emails, and or write hurtful comments to individuals (Johnston, et al., 2014). Cyber-bullies are motivated to use the tools of the internet to be hurtful towards others.

Known as a "finista", cyber-bullies will develop a community based private account on social media, so that a group of people can post non-filtered content (Patterson, 2016, para. 1).

Often, finistas are used as an outlet for cyber-bullies to post harmful content of unaware people (Patterson, 2016). Posting libelous or incendiary content within today's society can be damaging for an individual's livelihood or safety.

Seventeen-year-old teenager, Michelle Carter, was charged and found guilty of involuntary manslaughter after maliciously texting an ex-boyfriend to commit suicide (Phillips K., 2017). Instead of getting the help this individual needed, Carter decided to antagonize the victim into suicide. Carter's technique of antagonization is an extreme example of the possible outcomes of cyber-bullying (Phillips K., 2017).

Cyber-bullying was not considered a problem until recent years (Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2013). Cyber-bullying was often dismissed as a form of bullying because it does not involve interactions physically; however, research indicates that cyber-bullying happens a third as often as the traditional form of bullying (Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2013).

Cyber-bullying has historically been viewed as less severe or harmful when compared to traditional bullying, but the consequences can have long-reaching effects. For example, victims of cyber-bullying need to completely leave an online environment rather than a single physical space (Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2013). Moreover, cyber-bullies don't need direct access to the victim to cause harm. Libelous content can have harmful impacts on a person's reputation whether or not the victim engages with the bully This is problematic since use of the internet has become much more relevant today.

A key factor of cyber-bullying is that it typically starts with in-person contact. Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson (2013) found that students' experience of cyber-bullying was typically developed from in-person interactions with other students. It is believed that cyber-bullying has led to drastic psychological and physical torment (Litwiller & Brausch, 2013).

Litwiller and Brausch's (2013) research comparing cyber to physical bullying found that both had association with "substance use, violent behavior, unsafe sexual behavior, and suicidal behavior" (p. 675). In greater detail, cyber-bullying was found to be just as significant to influencing suicidal thoughts from substance use and violent behavior as physical bullying (Litwiller & Brausch, 2013). The potential results of cyber-bullying have led to an increased focus towards prevention.

Texas House of Representatives passed a bill to aid in the prevention of malicious cyber-bullying (Cooper, 2017). After cyber-bullying influenced the suicide of teenager David Molak, Texas is now holding cyber-bullies accountable for their actions (Cooper, 2017). The offense of cyber-bullying is now classified as a misdemeanor, and schools are required to enforce policies and notify parents of instances of when their children are taking part in the deviant act.

Cyber-bullies are malicious individuals who seek to hurt individuals in an online setting.

Differing from other forms of cyber deviance, cyber-bullies seek to individualize their targets.

While cyber-bullies develop a vendetta like behavior towards individuals, cyber-trolls aim to take on the overall internet-populous.

Cyber-Trolling

As defined by Merriam-Webster's dictionary, trolling is defined as a technique of luring fish by pulling a lure in way which will attract and catch fish ("Troll", 2017). Similarly, cyber-trolls use attention grabbing dialogue as a technique to lure and control online communities.

Internet trolling is a pejorative term for individuals who disrupt or divide a community for the goal of amusement. Trolls' disruptive behavior is viewed as an irritation and a nuisance by online communities.

Players within League of Legends (LoL) are continually asking for developers to develop tools to eliminate trolling. From a forum, a player suggests that trolls are not being moderated efficiently, leading to ruining the game. Being one of the most popular games in the world, it is interesting to find trolling deviance take negative effects.

Twitch, a videogame streaming service, developed communities in which viewers act as guardians to prevent trolling deviance (Parker, 2017). For example, viewers of a stream will develop and enforce social standards (Parker, 2017). In some Twitch communities, if a troll uses sexist banter, the community will label that individual as deviant and proceed with restating the standards or ban the individual (Parker, 2017).

Researcher Jonathan Bishop (2014) sought to elaborate on the concept of trolls by categorizing and redefining trolling characteristics. Bishop (2014) defined a troll as an individual that is chaotic, who is driven to “entertain others, (by) bringing some fun and mischief to an online community” (p. 3). In addition, trolls are known to using a predatory mindset and watch and wait for the proper opportunity to “disrupt” a community (Bishop, 2014, p. 3).

Alongside the classical definition of a troll, Bishop (2014) defined the “E-Venger” (p. 3). The E-Venger is a troll that is motivated by trying to disrupt individuals into showing their “true colors” (Bishop, 2014, p. 3). Typically, this kind of individual is motivated by being hurtful toward the individual(s) who were hurtful towards the troll (Bishop, 2014).

In addition to the E-Venger, Bishop (2014) developed the Iconoclast troll. The Iconoclast is defined as an individual who is disruptive by providing information that will contradict the popular influences of a community (Bishop, 2014). For instance, even when most individuals in a community think one way, the Iconoclast will purposely argue and use citations to be disruptive (Bishop, 2014).

Bishop (2014) titled trolls who seek to inflict negativity within an online community as a Snert. This form of trolling focuses on arguing with individuals to change their mindsets (Bishop, 2014). This kind of troll argues with and opposes others to fulfill a personal satisfaction (Bishop, 2014).

Phillips (2015) spoke about how trolls are more focused on being impactfully comedic than being demeaning. The problem is that their strategies, even if their intentions are benign, can be harmful and disruptive to others.

One example is when Snert trolls were said to lead to the attempted suicide of Australia's Next Top Model's judge, Charlotte Dawson (Sauers, 2012). Dawson received hundreds of tweets a day that included hate speech and requests to kill herself (Sauers, 2012). Constant trolling behavior pressured Dawson to attempt suicide (Sauers, 2012).

Bishop (2014) titled trolls who seek online communities' attention through being a target as a "Big Man" (p. 3). The Big Man is a troll who enjoys being the antagonist. By being a perceived villain within an online community, the Big Man can reach their goal of getting negative attention (Bishop, 2014).

The Ripper is a troll whose goal is to disrupt a community through gaining empathy that influences additional trolls (Bishop, 2014). The Ripper will begin by victimizing themselves to gain a "false sense of empathy from others" (Bishop, 2014, p. 3). If successful, the gained empathy will influence trolls who will act upon the instance in a mockingly manner (Bishop, 2014).

Phillips (2015) found Rippers within the obituaries of Facebook. As Rippers acted vulnerable, other trolls were influenced to reply with "abusive comments and images" (Phillips, 2015, p. 71). Rippers influenced trolls that Phillips (2015) refer to as RIP trolls.

A Chatroom Bob is known to lurk on online chatrooms seeking to control a conversation (Bishop, 2014). For instance, Chatroom Bobs are known to gain trust of people within some communities to later expose the individual (Bishop, 2014). Essentially this kind of troll watches online environments to later expose its faults.

Bishop's (2014) "My Heart Bleeds for You Jenny" (or MHBFY Jenny) troll seeks to gain support of an online community by acting empathetic (p. 3). The problem with a MHBFY Jenny is that they act with little to no knowledge of situations regarding an online community (Bishop, 2014).

Controlling a community can also come from trolls aiming to include a comedic aspect, such as Wizards (Bishop, 2014). These individuals are described as creative, and will share content that may include falsehoods (Bishop, 2014). Wizards will also use comedic discourse to become disruptive within an online community (Bishop, 2014).

Lurkers are individuals who specialize in surveillance while taking very minimal attempts at using troll bait (Bishop, 2014). A Lurker is the kind of individual who is influenced by the pack mentality. Lurkers are the individuals who use the upvoting system in comment sections to make troll bait visually more supported.

Buckels, Trapnell, and Paulhus (2014) researched the demographics of internet trolls. Their research indicates that there are correlations between heavy Internet use, negativity, and being online extraverts (Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014). It was also indicated when trolls had more time to use the Internet, they were more likely to use it to harass online communities (Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014).

In addition to increased internet usage, survey data indicates that trolls often have personality characteristics in line with psychopathy, narcissism, and sadism (Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014). The survey also found that trolls who shown higher levels of psychopathy

spend majority of their Internet time commenting and trolling online communities (Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014).

Trolls are comfortable being out of line and disruptive. Unlike other deviants and criminals, such as armed robbers who carefully weigh the risks to rewards when finding a victim, trolls can hide behind a computer screen (Wright & Decker, 1997). Trolls' ability to be anonymous eliminates many social and other consequential punishments. Trolls are seldom at risk of any long-term punishments.

As discussed, a large portion of the world is connected through social media (Kemp, 2017). Research indicates that social media users on average will spend up to 50 minutes a day on websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (Mediakix, 2016). Because social media has a large population, it has been a hotspot for trolling activity.

Leslie Jones, the actress from the all-female cast Ghostbusters, experienced the distance trolls will travel to be impactful (Brown, 2016). Trolls left bigoted comments and death threats to show their disapproval towards her Ghostbusters movie (Brown, 2016). Snert trolls rerouted Jones's twitter account to being a toxic environment, which influenced Jones to quit Twitter (Brown, 2016).

Although society views trolling behavior negatively and is aware of its effects, people still engage in the activity. Research indicates that 10% of juveniles admit to trolling despite knowing its potential harm (Morse, 2013). This can be problematic in that individuals continue to troll despite knowing its impact.

Admittedly, trolls can be comical. Some of the trolling behaviors and actions are aimed to make people laugh. A troll told Philips (2015) that their goal was to be comedic rather than demeaning. A comedic atmosphere is aimed to develop what all trolls refer to as, "lulz" (Phillips W., 2015, p. 27).

Derived from lol, lulz is the troll version of the common acronym (Phillips W., 2015). Where lol means, laugh out loud, lulz means to be laughing out loud at someone (Phillips W., 2015). Trolls feed off being able to disrupt and laugh at loud at individuals (Phillips W., 2015).

Phillips (2015) was clear that trolls are likely to pass the line of appropriate jokes to get “lulz”; additionally, they might influence others to get involved. However, trolls feed off lulz because they are “generative” and they are “magnetic” (Phillips W., 2015, pp. 31-32). The methodology to generate lulz can lead to attracting additional trolls to the scene (Phillips W., 2015).

Although trolls aim to build a comedic atmosphere, their actions can become deviant. Harvard University revoked the enrollment of 10 incoming freshmen for making a Facebook page that focused on posting racist, sexually deviant, and other jokes that cross the line of normal social behavior (DeHahn, 2017). The students trolling indicated their behavior was intended for lulz, but it ended up being viewed as deviant to the public and to Harvard University (DeHahn, 2017).

Implications for Criminology

The conversation about trolls and trolling activity implicates several key ideas and concepts in criminal justice and criminology, including routine activity theory, social cohesion, and social control theory. Due to being habitual, cooperative, and intentionally going against the interests of an online community, the theoretical frameworks apply to the typical behavior of trolls. It is appropriate to review the connections of routine activities, social cohesion, and social control theories for this research.

Routine Activity Theory

Cohen and Felson (1979) found that under a routine activity framework, crime takes place when there is a “likely offender, suitable targets and the absence of capable guardians against crime” (p. 588). Within internet trolling, a troll is the offender, anyone within an online community is a suitable target, and the capable guardians are the community’s administrators.

Administrators can come from the game developer or from the community itself. Blizzard Entertainment, the videogame company that created WoW, implemented surveillance and tools to prevent trolling within their online community (Collister, 2014). Furthermore, Wow’s guilds within the game take initiative to enforce and develop social-norms within their own communities (Collister, 2014).

Social Cohesion Theory

Social cohesion theory also plays a part within the trolling community. The theory posits that “social groups arise out of an aggregation of individuals that have mutual interpersonal attraction as they share common characteristics” (Purohit, Ruan, Fuhry, Parthasarathy, & Sheth, 2012, para. 1). Trolls who want to cooperatively disrupt an online community would do so through cohesive actions.

An example within WoW was when a group of trolls raided a mock wedding that a couple put together (Jun, 2014). Trolls discovered the details of the wedding, and decided to gather as many others as possible and ruin the ceremony out of spite (Jun, 2014).

Another example is how during the Trump presidency, trolls formed an anti-censorship protest group known as Kekistan (Cheong, 2017). As Purohit and colleagues (2012) discussed, groups form through sharing common ideologies; Kekistan was developed to protest censorship

through politically-incorrect disruptive techniques (Cheong, 2017). Simply, through the cohesion of sharing the similar views on censorship, trolls have worked together to disrupt communities.

Social Control Theory

Social control theory states deviance is controlled by “mechanisms or processes that adjust individuals’ behaviors to adhere to certain rules in a social group” (Sibai, Valck, Farell, & Rudd, 2015, p. 250). Trolls, in opposition to this theory, engage in behavior to earn the ire of online communities. In other words, they deliberately seek to violate social norms.

Unlike a majority of deviance, trolls desire negative community reactions. This the uniqueness of an internet troll because they do not yield until they are forced by online administrators or moderators.

Although many online communities grant users the power to block individuals, trolls are resilient and often persist despite these restrictions (Sibai, Valck, Farell, & Rudd, 2015). Administration of online communities often need to moderate trolling techniques by banning those individuals from the community (Sibai, Valck, Farell, & Rudd, 2015). Trolls typically strive to oppose the social control standards set within online communities (Sibai, Valck, Farell, & Rudd, 2015).

In World of Warcraft (WoW), trolls may receive a minor in-game penalty, such as a warning (Nunneley, 2016). Players who are continually reported for being a problem will be restricted from communication in public trade, from sending in-game mail, or even from inviting others to play the game (Nunneley, 2016). Being penalized is evidence of guidelines within the WoW to distinguish deviant behaviors.

Internet Trolling Techniques

Trolls view their behavior as a game that only they can win (Phillips W., 2015). To be disruptive, trolls modify their games so that they can produce lulz and attract additional individuals into the setting (Phillips W., 2015). There is an unlimited number of variations in trolling techniques; however, effective trolls understand how to strategically attract individuals to their bait.

Troll bait is online slang word defined as “a topic certain to provoke incendiary response and disunity from the community it is addressed to” (Online Slang Dictionary, 2015, para. 1). If troll bait is effectively dispersed, an online community will be disrupted by the generation of lulz and by magnetizing other trolls. Being able to generate lulz and magnetize other trolls is the basis of developing effective troll bait (Phillips W., 2015).

Magnetized trolls are the number of trolls who were influenced to participate in a trolling instance (Phillips W., 2015). For example, if a troll used racist banter, the number of trolls influenced to join were considered “magnetized.”

To effectively distribute troll bait, trolls use an array of methods to catch peoples’ attention. Trolls will use any means necessary to deliver an effective “punch line,” including using offensive troll bait (Phillips W., 2015, p. 29). This means trolls will aberrantly cross the social standards of using politics or sensitive subjects.

Trolls understand that subjects, such as politics, racism, and sexism, are a very sensitive for individuals (Sullivan & Transue, 1999). Politics are important for individuals because strong involvement has been found to be personally influential (Sullivan & Transue, 1999). Trolls test the political tolerance of individuals by using bait that may be viewed as less favored or outrageous.

Trolls also use current popular news as troll bait. Research indicates that media and celebrities have a strong influence on society because it gives individuals a feeling of insight into a life that is more glamorous than their own (Fraser & Brown, 2002). When a breaking new story hits the press, or a celebrity is gaining a larger spotlight, trolls will use the heightened emotions as a basis for troll bait. An example is the trolls using media can be trash talking amongst sports fans.

The use of memes is another example how trolls will take popular media to use as bait (Phillips W, 2015). A meme is a picture of someone or something that is developed as bait for individuals. Phillips (2015) found that they are common for incorporating famous media stars while using simplistic dialogue to convey a point.

Trolls also use improv comedy to develop bait. Research indicates that being able to improvise dialogue properly can develop a stronger connection with individuals (Rocco & Whalen, 2014). Trolls watch over online communities' conversations to attempt to insert improvised dialogue to bait and disrupt the setting.

Bishop (2014) explained that trolls are habitual. Bishop (2014) exposed that there are trolls who will consistently participate in chatrooms and online communities. They openly jump in and out of discussions they find interesting. Even if a troll has little attachment to an area, a troll will leave bait. Effective trolls will understand their environment to expose its weaknesses within the online community.

The gaming community has a large trolling population. Trolls use the attachment that individuals have within games as bait. As the popularity of gaming communities continues to grow, trolls are likely to increase within these environments.

Gaming

Gaming is a continually growing dynamic of the United States (Takahashi, 2015). The gaming industry in 2014 was worth \$12.12 billion (Takahashi, 2015). With the gaming industry continually finding new ways to become part of every person's life, the industry is estimated to be worth \$19.6 billion by 2019 (Takahashi, 2015).

The early to mid-1975 ATARI came out with PONG (ATARI, 2012). Atari first sought to sell 50,000 units, but it wasn't long until Sears was asking to produce 150,000 (ATARI, 2012). The Atari game system is the first true step towards videogame home entertainment. Not only did the original Atari bring the joy of PONG home to families, but it brought the opportunity for families to play against each other (ATARI, 2012).

Playing amongst peers increased in popularity when Mortal Kombat was released (Fahs, 2011). Mortal Kombat was released in 1992, and it was popular because of its realistic graphics, violent obscenities, and multiplayer functionality (Fahs, 2011). It was luxurious and immersive to experience the controversial game with a peer (Fahs, 2011). The success of Mortal Kombat motivated the gaming industry to incorporate multiplayer game functions in future titles (Fahs, 2011).

By 2001, Microsoft released Xbox (Poh, 2016). With a stronger emphasis on the use of the internet, Xbox released Xbox Live (Poh, 2016). Although Personal Computer gaming was becoming more popular, Xbox Live was the first real console that attempted to use the internet as a bridge to connect players throughout the world.

Recently, the internet has become a centerpiece of the gaming industry. With the advanced progression of the internet, playing with individuals across the world has become much easier.

One game that has benefited from the existence of the internet is League of Legends (or LoL). LoL is a multiplayer online battle arena game that puts teams of players working together to strategically destroy and defend points within an arena. This game has been reported to have a monthly population over “100 million” (Kollar, 2016, section The Numbers Game, para. 10) (Kollar, 2016).

LoL, a game that is free to play, reached 100,000 viewers during their World Championship (Kollar, 2016). By 2016, LoL’s popularity grew to the point where the game’s championship was viewed simultaneously by 14.7 million people (Bradmore & Magus, 2016). Widely recognized and played, LoL is also notorious for being one of the most toxic online communities.

A toxic environment is referred to as a community that involves individuals who are completely negative towards one another. For instance, the shrill competitiveness of LoL has led to an environment that finds common occurrences of negative backlashing behavior (Skiffington, 2014). Simple mistakes can lead players to spend their game time focusing on negatively backlashing each other.

Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPG) are another type of game that deals with its fair share of trolls and trolling behavior. MMORPG’s is a genre of gaming that puts players into a large community where individuals will work cooperatively and competitively in a large open-world setting. One prized feature of MMORPGs is the ability to role-play in a relatively free environment (Messner, 2017).

In 1999 the game Everquest was released. One key feature of the game was the obligated player-to-player cooperation (Messner, 2017). Due to game mechanics, players built relationships and bonds within Everquest, making the game a milestone within MMORPGs (Messner, 2017).

In 2001 another milestone was met when Dark Age of Camelot was released (Messner, 2017). This game introduced a level of competitiveness through player against player in the form of factions (Messner, 2017). The game implemented an abundant amount of playing styles, which forced players to balance each other's skill level (Messner, 2017)

In 2004 Blizzard Entertainment released the World of Warcraft (WoW) (Messner, 2017). The game was ahead of its time for providing accessibility and similarity of MMORPGs before it (Messner, 2017). Plenty of games within the industry have strived to develop a strong community, but the World of Warcraft is believed to be the most successful (Ledford, 2013).

World of Warcraft

World of Warcraft (or WoW) is a MMORPG that was released in 2004. The game's focus is to provide an environment for all players to develop experiences through interactions (Ledford, 2013). WoW is a subscription-based game, with a current sitting population of approximately 5.5 million subscribers (Statista, 2015). It should be noted that these individuals have a reoccurring subscription fee to play the game.

A core feature of the game is to choose between two factions, the Alliance and the Horde. The Alliance is composed of races that are closer to humans than their counterparts, the Horde. The Horde contains a number of mythical races, such as orcs and goblins. The center concept of the game is for players to progress characters through the acquisition of items or "gear." These items are obtained from quests, raids, and world events.

As characters progress, players are introduced to additional and increasingly difficult content. Although WoW can be experienced in many ways, playing end-game content (i.e. raiding) is a reoccurring goal amongst players. However, some players use the social

environment as means to interact with other players. There are servers, for examples, that focus on role-playing.

The success of WoW is measured by the size of the community that has developed through the years. At WoW's peak, it was close to 12.5 million subscribers (Vas, 2015). Having that many players has made WoW a leader in the MMO industry.

To allow the vast number of players access to the game, Wow is divided by servers. Each server is the same version of WoW; however, they are formatted to fit specific regions around the world. For instance, there are approximately over 500 realms based and formatted to the time-zones throughout both North America and Europe (WoW, Wiki, 2017).

Within WoW, there are several variations of chatrooms or chat channels. Many channels allow anyone within a geographic area of the game to communicate or send messages that all other people in the area will see. Other channels focus on functions. For example, some channels are made for item trade, while other channels are made for guild recruitment. The usage of the chat channels to facilitate effective communication between players is a key to WoW's success.

WoW has allowed communities to develop, and the development team has consistently provided additional content for over fifteen years. Combination of a dedicated player base, simple in game communication, and game mechanics create social interactions in WoW. The game has reached goals and raised bars like no game has before, which is why it is important to preserve its legacy by finding how to prevent the work of trolls (Whitbrook, 2014).

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

There is very little research on the strategies and behaviors of internet trolls. This research is intended to analyze and categorize instances of trolling. The methodology discussed in this chapter outlines the process of collecting public conversations, and analyzing and classifying trolling typologies within the World of Warcraft (WoW).

This research will primarily focus on the strategies of implementing troll bait as a method to initiate a reaction and maintain responses. Being able to review these conversations will help define the strategies and behaviors used in internet trolling.

Objective

As defined, internet trolling is the concept of bringing chaotic mischief within an online community for entertainment purposes (Bishop, 2014). Using the World of Warcraft (WoW) as an environment, this research will examine the behavior of trolls in a public setting. Within the electronic community of WoW, we can reliably collect and analyze public conversations and examine the strategies and behaviors of trolls in these public electronic settings. The public chat channels used by players in WoW can provide an insightful setting for individuals engaging in trolling behavior.

Since researchers will be examining public conversations and looking for the key themes of trolls, this research will primarily be qualitative. NVivo 11, will allow researchers to analyze and categorize public conversations in the WoW chat channels into troll bait and trolling responses. In addition, NVivo 11 will produce a count for each theme of trolling and trolling responses.

To gather the data, researchers will log into WoW and record conversations within high populated chatroom areas. In WoW those areas are within largest cities, which allows players to chat with others in any large city across the server.

Researchers will analyze the conversations within trade and general chat. These chat channels are the most populated with conversations because they are the ones connected to each large city where most players are within game. It should be considered that each large city is opened to any player of any level, which allows for this research to be randomly analyzed for allowing a diverse population.

Research Focuses

This research is intended to examine the validity of prior commentary and explanations on trolling behavior including the research of Bishop (2014) and Phillips (2015). The research focuses on three major areas: (1) trolling techniques and methods, (2) community reactions to trolling activity, and (3) understanding a trolling instance full discourse.

First Research Focus

The first set of questions are designed to analyze theories, hypotheses, and rationales that explain the methods people use to troll others in a public setting. Specifically, these questions address the content and subject matter most efficient at generating reactions from online communities. Researchers consider four major themes that trolls used to generate strong reactions: politics, current media (non-politics), sexuality, improvisation, and other techniques (other methods that do not fall into any of the other four).

How often will trolls use political troll bait? Political trolling is likely to appear through commentary, mockery, and comedic conversation pieces connecting to politics. With the current political climate (2017), President Trump is likely to be a major political trolling tool for having

such a positive/negative political impact on people. Furthermore, Trump is the most consistent political news story being used through media outlets.

Does current media influence troll bait? Understanding the connections of individuals to pop-culture, it would be likely that trolls will use commentary, mockery, and or comedy to generate reactions from others. A typical media troll bait is to use a topic that individuals across the United States have attachment to, such as sports.

How likely are trolls to use sexuality or gender as troll bait? Considering the current political climate and support for the LGTBQ community, it is important to collect data on the number of times that troll bait will include homophobic slurs. Furthermore, because the stereotypic gamer gender is male, it is also important to analyze the number of trolling instances that include sexist remarks.

How likely are trolls to improvise their bait? Understanding that trolls are known to be spontaneous, it would be beneficial to measure their attempts of improvisation. Improvisation can be measured by counting the number of times individuals attempt to troll the trade chat by specifically targeting the advertisers. Furthermore, improvisation occurs when trolls adlib, or create bait off very little resources.

Do trolls use other types of troll bait? Data will be collected on other techniques and methods of trolling that do not fall within the four defined categories. In addition, comments and dialogue that do not fit within the other four categories will also analyzed for trends and themes.

The Second Focus

The second focus of this research is on the reaction to trolling behavior (or troll bait). How do individuals within the electronic community react to the specified troll bait categories and what are the various reaction to troll bait?

It is expected that there will be several different reactions to trolling behavior (or troll bait). These include the likelihood of individuals to respond with troll bait, a serious response, transition bait, or through “other” strategic discourse.

Responding with troll bait includes the moments where someone responds to another with troll bait. Serious responses are when individuals are trying to progress the conversation, rather than disrupt it. Transitioning bait is when individuals reroute the conversation. Lastly, the other category was used for the times when the responses did not fit within any of the pre-established categories.

Conversations taken from the WoW community channels will be coded as a reaction to troll bait. From here, these comments will be coded into themes and groupings. Different typologies and categories will be generated to create a description of how people generally react to troll bait. It is anticipated that troll bait will generate reactions (Lulz), while also influencing additional trolls (magnetizing) to distribute additional troll bait (Phillips W., 2015).

The Third Focus

Lastly, this research will unite the findings from the previous two sections, initiation of trolling and the response to trolling, to create a description of the cycle of trolling. In short, it is expected that trolling behaviors will be cyclical. Instances of trolling will likely attract additional trolls, which magnifies the conversation. This last goal of this research project seeks to describe commonalities in the process of trolling events and to create cohesive descriptions of how trolling events start, how they are sustained, and how they end.

This focus seeks to explain the development of how on instance of trolling occurs. Do trolling instances lead to conversations, a different trolling instance, or do they end the

conversation? This study will also provide greater detail by reviewing micro trolling instances (trolling instances within a trolling instance).

Sampling Frame

This research is being conducted on a specific server within the World of Warcraft (WoW) community that the researchers have easy access to. Most of the United States' servers within WoW are middle ranged population (Realm Pop, 2017).

Lightbringer is a player vs environment (PVE) server, which represents the most common form of server. In player vs environment (PvE) servers, players of the opposite faction cannot attack each other unless they enable it through the game. This is compared to player vs player servers (PvP) where players of the opposite faction can attack each other at virtually any time.

In addition to the other characteristics of the server, Lightbringer is on Pacific Coast Time (Realm Pop, 2017). Based on the time zone, population size, accessibility, and environment, Lightbringer is the right choice for data collection in this project.

PVE servers make up the majority WoW servers; therefore, it is a logical place to start data collection on one of these servers (Realm Pop, 2017). PVE does not allow for players to read messages from the opposing faction (Alliance and Horde). In other words, Horde players cannot see messages from Alliance players or vice versa. Because Lightbringer's player base is primarily Alliance, researchers will focus on this faction for its data collection.

Based on observations before data collection, medium to high population servers seem to have better access for data collection. High population servers have long wait times during prime data collection hours and tend to have low amounts of interactions and conversation in public

chat channels. Additionally, the selected server for data collection is a west coast region server which is beneficial for the data collection in this study.

The chatlogs will be collected using a text capture modification, which allows researchers to save conversations within public chat channels. The conversations will be recorded at the warriors' class hall (an area for players to gain character attributes) and Stormwind (Alliance Capital). Using these two areas will allow researchers to gain access to WoW's most populated chatrooms, trade/general chat.

Data Analysis Methods (Figure 1, p. 77)

Using NVivo 11 will allow the examination of the conversations collected and also allows the categorization of the trolling behavior. Data collection will begin by separating the dialogue between what is advertisement and legitimate conversation. After doing so, researchers will divide the legitimate conversation by serious conversation, initial troll bait, and responses to troll bait.

Advertisement (Figure 1.1, p. 77)

Advertisement is used to try to sell, recruit, and join players amongst WoW. This category is not particularly important; however, it occasionally influences trolling instances. Because of the large volume of advertisement, the majority of the ads are taken out; however, the moments where trolls attach themselves to the conversation will be saved.

Legitimate Conversation (Figure 1.1, p. 77)

Legitimate conversation is any dialogue within the trade chat that focuses on progressing a conversation. Unlike advertisement or seeking attention from individuals for services, legitimate conversations work towards taking individuals' thoughts and opinions. Legitimate

conversations will provide access to developing data to sub-categories: serious conversation, initial troll bait, or responses to troll bait.

Serious Conversation (Figure 1.2, p. 77)

Serious conversations are categorized for data to separate non-deviant dialogue from deviant dialogue. Serious conversations are continuations of legitimate conversations. For example, if an individual wants to find honest commentary and opinions within trade chat, then the individual is likely to avoid commentary that may seem mocking or comical.

Initial Troll Bait (Figure 1.2, p. 77)

Initial troll bait is the first coding instance of when trolls will put out disruptive dialogue in attempt to change focus upon themselves. These are the instances when there was no prior trolling instances or conversation. Researchers will categorize each trolling initiation by: politics, media, gender/sexuality, improvisation, mockery, and category titled other. Although there are categories, there will be times where commentary will fall into multiple categories; which will be coded for each category (politics – media).

Current/Popular Media (Figure 1.2, p. 77)

Current and popular media bait is inherent in this research because the news influences and connects society to world progression. As an example, the controversial events that surround the current presidential administration have an influence over troll bait. Researchers will highlight the instances of when trolls bait individuals with media attraction.

Gender/Sexuality (Figure 1.2, p. 77)

It is important to highlight the troll bait that uses gender and sexuality as its theme. The LGBTQ community is often the target of brash and insensitive comments and it is likely that many of trolling instances will include derogatory comments toward LGBTQ individuals.

Additionally, with women becoming more involved in the gaming community, gender and culture of gaming towards women has become a key conversation topic. This factor can be used to code and identify situations where trolls use gendered language to engage in trolling activity (Phillips W., 2015).

Improvised Troll Bait (Figure 1.2, p. 77)

Improvised troll bait is expected to constitute a large proportion of conversation in public chat channels. Before the data collection, this was seen when individuals respond directly to pre-programmed advertisements within public channels. Occasionally, individuals get upset or annoyed with the abundance of advertisement. Frustrated trolls try to get the advertisement owner's attention through troll bait that mimics the advertisement. This can also be spontaneous addition renditions of wordage such as inside jokes and adlibbing.

Mockery (Figure 1.2, p. 77)

Mockery-based troll bait is a key concept to highlight. Mockery is essentially used to disrupt individuals within a conversation. The expectation is that this will often be used by trolls. The purpose of testing mockery is to analyze derogatory remarks that disrupt conversations.

Other (Figure 1.2, p. 77)

Other is a category developed for miscellaneous trolling instances. Due to the sporadic uses of troll bait, there may be times where it will be difficult to name the category to which the bait belongs. Therefore, an “other” category is essential.

Furthermore, it allows for additional categories to be developed when needed. Studying an area of deviance that uses spontaneous dialogue, it could be revealed that there are different kinds of trolling techniques that are not thought of.

Response to conversation (Figure 1.2, p. 77)

Responses to conversation are important for this research since it allows researchers to discover the trends within trolling instances. Response types can range from serious comments to other instances of trolling. This is an important variable because it collects various forms of dialogue mechanisms in conversation discourse.

Responds with Troll Bait (Figure 1.2, p. 77)

Responses to troll bait are the times where someone replies to troll bait with troll bait: i.e. trolling the troll. Even in situations where the conversation participants agree, if one individual attempts to troll, then that instance will be recorded. These instances will have additional coding indicating what style of troll bait response is used (politics, media, improvisation, gender, other).

Serious Response (Figure 1.2, p. 77)

Serious responses are the moments when individuals attempt to progress a conversation through logical ideologies and thoughts. This is different from troll bait. Serious responses will more likely ignore the comical element of trolling and will likely be humorless and informative.

Transition Bait (Figure 1.2, p. 77)

Transition bait is the concept of responders use troll bait to reroute the direction of a conversation. An example can be how politics is used as the current dialogue piece when a troll comes along and changes the topic to something unrelated (for example, food). Researchers will record the attempts made by the trolls who seek to reroute the conversations within the variables discussed (politics, media, improvisation, gender, other).

Transition bait is not necessarily troll bait. Although the mechanism of rerouting is a tool used in troll bait, there are times when individuals are attempting to make a serious conversation transitions. Serious transitions will be coded when participants reroute a conversation using articulated dialogue.

“Other” response is again used to ensure all response types are accounted for. Because this is exploratory research, it is essential to keep open to different means of possible response. A piece of dialogue will be recorded as “other” response when it will not fit within any of the response categories.

Trolling Instances (Figure 1.3, p. 77)

Lastly, instances of micro trolling will be counted in addition to the number of trolling instances. Being able to differentiate is important because trolling instances will consider the times, conversation participants, and length of dialogue exchange.

Micro-troll instances are the number times when trolls use troll bait or transitioned the conversation within the trolling instance. For example, if a conversation goes on for 30 minutes, micro-trolling instances will be recorded for each troll response and transition. However, recording stops when there is a lengthy break of a conversation and there are no references or drawbacks to the prior conversation.

CHAPTER IV: DATA ANALYSIS

Over 30 hours of data collection indicated that trolling was used much more as a method of conversation to illustrate conversation participant's points rather than be hurtful. Furthermore, the research's data indicated that trolling was used significantly more as a response or transition than as an initiation.

First Research Focus

Through this research, trolling was found to being more a method of response than a troublesome behavior. This research has shown that a troll's goal is to distract or disrupt conversations. This is indicated by the extraordinary difference between the amount of troll bait and the responses. There was a total of 1143 recorded responses; of those responses, 720 (62.9%) of them were coded as troll bait.

Transition conversation bait is also an important factor within the category of responses. There were 314 instances of transitions in regards of responding to participants. Transitioning bait made up 27.4% of the response category. Successful trolls rerouted conversations to bring the spotlight to their conversation piece.

Politics

Due to the ongoing controversies related to the current presidency, it was my belief that President Trump would be used quite often as a topic of troll bait. However, I found that troll bait using politics was more based on other political events.

The below transcripts are presented as originally written by the trolls and the other participants.

Source 4: (Trolls using the Current Events of US Launch Attack against Syria as Bait)

18:20:11 [Person A]: well, we are in now...

18:20:14 [Person B]: ooo. US launched an attack against syria

18:20:19 [Person A]: yeap

18:20:22 [Person C]: another one

18:20:41 [Person B]: hmmm. Putie not going to like that

18:20:42 [Person A]: Putin's lackeys fighting each other...Trump and Assad

18:21:15 [Person D]: it's cool tho right? Liberals hate russians anyway, this is a win/win

Source 25: (Troll Transitions a Conversation into Political Banter)

17:43:50 [Person A]: Republicans voted over 50x to repeal the ACA... Why not votes now?

17:44:16 [Person B]: Because there is a Republican in office now. they don't have to smear the other guy anymore

17:44:21 [Person C]: I like health care ... for my balls

17:44:53 [Person D]: 7 years to come up with a replacement and they can't even do that.

17:45:10 Person B]: Lets talk about something other than politics

Source 26: (Trolls Refencing Trump Deportation and Controversial CNN Tweet)

19:37:50 [Person A]: spammers

19:38:02[Person B]: hes actually selling something people want, thats not spam

19:38:09 [Person C]: reported

19:38:12 [Person D]: LOL .. just put on ignore

19:38:14 [Person E]: blizzard has a limit on how often you can post you fucking idiot

19:38:36 [Person E]: deported

19:38:40 [Person A]: i know of the limit but when no one is talking in trade

19:38:44 [Person A]: once is enough

19:38:47 [Person F]: deported for reporting.

19:38:48 [Person G]: LOL deported

19:39:18 [Person I]: If you're Trump...you just chokeslam whoever's reporting in a WWE ring...

Some trolls would start conversations by using terms, such as “#pizzagate” (Source 7).

The individuals understood the controversy surrounding the Pizza Gate story, which trolls used to their advantage. In the same fashion, political troll bait was used to further dialogue.

Source 10: (Troll Attempting to Transition a Conversation)

15:59:45 [Person A]: Remember when you could go more than 5 minutes in trade without anyone mentioning trumb

Source 12: (Troll tries to Transition Conversation into Political banter using “Obama”)

22:27:51 [Person A]: i've seen them give ONE.

22:27:51 [Person B]: I call BS

22:27:55 [Person C]: lol

22:28:00 [Person D]: WTB 5 Felslate, pm

22:28:03 [Person E]: Obama

22:28:16 [Person F]: ya ive gotton 1 several times from them, highest was a lil over 9k

22:28:17 [Person G]: i just bought 10 relics and 10 trinkets, believe the hype

22:28:31 [Person H]: hype?

Source 26: (Troll Attempting to Initiate Political Banter)

19:15:05 [Person A]: NPR uses 5 thousand tweets on ID4. Trump supporters start calling NPR liberal snowflakes for typing such dribble not knowing that it was the Declaration of Independence. :0

Unless there was mockery involved, political discussion would be rare. An example is a troll baiting an individual by stating they “reported for saying kek in 2017” (Source 10: ref. 23). This was a tongue-in-cheek reference to the controversial political correctness in this recent history.

Source 4: (Troll Uses Political Transitions to Banter about Political Correctness)

20:10:48 [Person A]: pc america is hesitant to label the mentally ill due to the left nut wing media.. but thats all

20:11:09 [Person B]: ok. i'll say it then. people who are afraid of "pc america" are mentally ill case closed

Source 10: (Troll Referencing Current Protesting Strategies)

15:43:20 [Person A]: who hasn't committed a war crime or two?

15:43:21 [Person B]: boa trinket

15:43:21 [Person C]: varian did nothing wrong

15:43:21 [Person D]: NAZI NAZI

It is interesting to note that in some political examples, trolls would attempt to interweave the story of the game into political comments. In the above example, trolls attempt to equate accusations of war crimes (reference to events in Syria) to story characters within the game. Specifically, this example the conversation makes an illusion between Varian (a leader within Warcraft Lore) and Assad.

Overall, political discussion in the trolling community was underwhelming. Political banter only made up 14% of the popular media variable. However, political bait made up 2% of all trolling responses and only 5% of recorded transition bait. The dialogue was mainly influenced by current historic events.

Popular Media

As hypothesized, content coded under popular media was a common topic in the creation of troll bait. Using controversial speech tied into popular media led to individuals lashing back, and/ or making additional references. Although this variable may be extensive, troll bait has a large amount of comments derived from obscure references from news, music, videogames, and movies. Dialogue is created around popular media.

Source 10: (Trolls Mock Players having a conversation about WoW)

15:29:34 [Person A]: yes but legion is not the realt threar, void lords are

15:29:41 [Person B]: Voidlords are much more powerful.

15:29:46 [Person A]: and legion is the only thing that was keeping void lords in check

15:29:59 [Person C]: YAWN

15:30:07 [Person D]: this is getting too nerdy now

Source 10: (Troll Mocks Player Who Shows Connectedness to a WoW Story Character)

15:39:13 [Person A]: Garrosh was kind of a friend of mine? I know that sounds weird, but he holds a special place in my heart because I can relate to a lot of the things he had to deal with. I miss him. :c

15:39:22 [Person B]: Not a politician

15:39:28 [Person C]: Member when only Alliance had Paladins?

15:39:29 [Person D]: wow that is cringe :c

Source 25: (Troll Mocks Kings Fans)

17:37:39 [Person A]: god damn it paladins slow your roll

17:37:58 [Person B]: listen fuckface, it's not the yearly output, it's the output throughout the contract

17:38:16 [Person B]: as well as how they play together

17:39:02 [Person C]: He played awful this year. And besides, he's not getting younger, a player like Toews doesn't age like a fine wine... just saying. And no. I'm worse, I'm a Kings fan

17:39:25 [Person B]: ignored

17:39:37 [Person B]: god damn kings fan

17:39:39 [Person C]: We can talk about all the awful contracts Dean Lombardi made if you want as well as how stupid the Kings are for firing Sutter

17:40:24 [Person C]: I mean, Dustin Brown is still making 5.75 million a year for 20 points a year so I guess there is that

Transitioning troll bait used popular media as a discourse to re-direct conversations. If used properly, popular media can influence individuals to participate in disrupting a community. The popularity of the bait influences others to add to the bait.

Source 3: (Trolls Redirect Troll bait to a Goofy Movie Reference)

18:39:22 [Person A]: I wonder if you can play WoW at work when working for Blizzard

18:39:44 [Person B]: blizzard doesnt even play the game, what makes you think you would if you got a job there?

18:40:23 [Person C]: i knew a power line guy that played all the tile till a powwer outaget happend

18:40:57 [Person B]: powerline? you mean that awesome singer from the goofy movie?

18:41:19 [Person A]: Eye to Eye

18:41:31 [Person B]: the perfect cast

Source 10: (Troll Transitions Conversation about WoW Story to Questions of Bigfoot)

15:32:07 [Person A]: arthas culled strath, sargerass is culling universe

15:32:23 [Person B]: Arthas was actually evil, as opposed to Sargerass though.

15:32:25 [Person C]: spoiler alert: the naaru actually have forgotten us.

15:32:39 [Person D]: where does bigfoot fit in to all of this?

15:32:49 [Person B]: Bigfoot is the the hand behind it all.

15:32:52 [Person E]: bigfoot stole the naaru.

15:32:53 [Person B]: he is the alpha. The omega.

15:32:55 [Person F]: no they havent, one of their light bulbs is in my order hall 15:33:00

[Person G]: He's actually leading the army of the light, we haven't heard about bigfoot since he got lost behind the dark portal though

Source 14: (Troll Attempts to Transition Conversation Answering Question Pink Floyd)

7:31:00 [Person A]: Where do I go to learn broken isles flying after completion of the requirments?

17:31:17 [Person Br]: you have it

17:31:26 [Person C]: It's an achievement. There isn't anything to "learn" like typical flying.

17:31:30 [Person D]: get on something that can fly and press space

17:31:54 [Person E]: Thanks guys

17:31:56 [Person F]: Listen to the Pink Flyod song

17:32:49 [Person G]: Pink FLoyd sucks

17:32:57 [Person H]: Justin Bieber is GOAT

17:33:31 [Person I]: nah! he's not that Baaaaad

Source 30: (Troll Mocks WoW Hoard Protagonist when in speaks of in-game Weapon)

16:56:02 [Person A]: When you loose your Ashrbinger I get to laugh.

16:56:05 [Person B]: You've obviously never used the emulated Green Jesus via the Doomhammer.

16:56:23 [Person C]: Berg, come on. That'll never happen.

16:56:26 [Person A]: :^)

16:56:27 [Person C]: It's 'lose', not 'loose'.

Popular media influenced a great portion of the troll bait. Popular media was recorded 116 out of 720 responses to troll baits, coming to 16%. In addition, the 116 references were substantially more used than the amount of political banter. Popular media references were much more attractive for trolls.

Gender/Sexuality

Trolls frequently used speech that was coded under gender and sexuality. It was rare that trolling initiation would be used through this source of bait. However, it would be used in responses. Gender/sexuality flourished in terms of having a strong reaction and influence over others

Source: 7 (Troll baits with a Sexually Deviant Question involving their WoW Characters)

19:57:39 [Person A]: If I log out without any armour and someone looks at my profile page, can I get banned for porn?

19:58:06 [Person B]: are they under 18?

19:58:14 [Person C]: ^

19:58:17 [Person A]: Hopefully?

19:58:25 [Person B]: then nah you should be good

Source: 16 (Troll Initiates bait through Sexual reference to a mother)

23:10:01 [Person A]: i had sex with your mother

23:10:18 [Person B]: dad? is that you?

23:10:42 [Person C]: You mother fucker then

23:11:21 [Person D]: mmmm well now

23:11:28 [Person A]: creampie

23:11:41 [Person A]: allday

23:11:59 [Person D]: well i guess shes gonna make you pay child support

23:12:06 [Person A]: unfortunately

23:13:17 [Person A]: i have a thing for asians though

23:13:21 [Person A]: yellow fever

23:13:28 [Person D]: good job

23:13:31 [Person D]: ?

Typically, gender and sexuality was used in response to others. There was speech that would use sexual assault, homophobic slurs, STD's, and sexism to mock one another. One data

collection reflected 17.89% of its interactions to be trolls baiting with gender and sexuality (Source 3).

Source 14: (Trolls Argue and use Sexual references to Mock each other)

17:23:00 [Person A]: why would anyone ever advertise that in trade, ever. Lol

17:23:12 [Person B]: why not?

17:24:38 [Person A]: Primarily because it fucks over the people who diligently watch the BMAH and for what... a pat on the head? You have literally 0 benefit.

17:24:54 [Person B]: BMAH is open to all.

17:24:58 [Person A]: Shut up.

17:25:07 [Person B]: suck it, faggot.

17:26:47 [Person C]: and then trade went quiet....

17:27:45 [Person B]: cause someone is sucking it

17:27:49 [Person D]: proven fact..anyone who uses .. the "f" word..secretly desires penis

17:28:47 [Person E]: f that mother fer

Source 17: (Troll responds to Mockery with Homophobic Slur)

17:57:44 [Person A]: my only level 110 and i made it one of the worst for farming :/

17:58:02 [Person B]: stack mastery for havoc and speed clear like everything

17:58:10 [Person C]: DH's are easy to farm with

17:58:19 [Person C]: you never die no matter how many adds you pull lol

17:58:41 [Person A]: is there anything that tells me the raid entrance locations?

17:58:44 [Person C]: spec changes for farming and raiding

17:58:51 [Person C]: google

17:58:58 [Person D]: lol

17:59:00 [Person E]: the giant map icon

17:59:02 [Person F]: ur a retard if u thinking farming on a dh is bad, plain and simple

17:59:13 [Person A]: i think your a dike if you think i care

Source 25: (Players Make light of Sexual Assault to further the sex assault troll bait)

18:36:46 [Person A]: theoretically you could lose your virginity Person E but ya know, never been proven

18:36:59 [Person B]: i could have kllled Sargeras.. buit then >>>-----KNEE----->

18:37:01 [Person C]: Unholy DK's Apocalypse is badass too

18:37:17 [Person D]: theoretically you can be a virgin an infinite number of times

18:37:36 [Person E]: yeah its called second virginity they do it all the time

18:37:38 [Person Fj]: LF Cook

18:37:47 [Person G]: analonly

18:37:51 [Person H]: every time is the first time with roofies.

18:37:57 [Person I]: are you a virgin multiple times because of all the people that havent slept with you?

18:38:28 [Person D]: I think aslong as you forget what it feels like

18:38:33 [Person D]: that counts

18:38:43 [Person G]: so, we're talking about marriage then

18:38:53 [Person I]: maybe for a dude, but once your gut locker gets crammed full its never the same

18:39:10 [Person D]: not with that attitude

18:39:15 [Person H]: jesus lol

18:39:54 [Person J]: way worse i thinkl

18:39:57 [Person K]: it's not the locker getting full, it's the team getting down the hallway to the arena

Reference 26: (Troll Uses Homophobic Slurs to Mock Individual)

19:41:24 [Person A]: nah, 1 for trump, 1 for the animal that sleeps on his head.

19:41:26 [Person B]: he's th e fucking POTUS...he could have the entire vat of ice cream if he wanted. cry more lmao

19:41:28 [Person C]: muh ice creem

19:41:38 [Person D]: you want to be faggot ass i love trump racist that bleed the system living in your moms basement faggots. get off your moms tit

Troll bait with Sexual/gender themes constituted as a significant part of the data. For instance, trolls play a game where they link an item in game and place the word “anal” in front of it to make a grotesque joke. Immature as it may sound, one source I found had “anal” make up 22.66% of the chatlog for the day (source 23).

Reference 23: (This is an ongoing joke within WoW, where they use “anal” for improv)

22:17:33 [Person A]: [Mount Up] 4 anal

22:17:41 [Person B]: anal [Murderous Efficiency] due to anal [Avalanche]

22:17:55 [Person C]: anal [Explosive Trap]

22:18:14 [Person B]: anal [Armor Skills]

22:18:18 [Person D]: anal [Exhilaration]

22:18:28 [Person B]: anal [Auto Attack]

Gender and sexuality may be used consistently with the current events that have surrounded the political climate. An example being, “AC unit that blows me without my consent” (Source 10: Ref 26). These comments are backlash against the “politically correct”

culture, and the use of homophobic/sexist remarks are used to draw attention to an individual troll's dialogue.

Reference 25: (Troll comments on a political conversation adding a Sexual Reference)

17:43:50 [Person A]: Republicans voted over 50x to repeal the ACA... Why not votes now?

17:44:16 [Person B]: Because there is a Republican in office now. they don't have to smear the other guy anymore

17:44:21 [Person C]: I like health care ... for my balls

Text that was labeled with the sexualization and gender code constituted 17% of the response troll bait, and 14% of the transition bait. Groups of individuals improvised to add to the strength of the troll bait. Although this style was not the most popular, it did have a strong reaction in the community.

Improvisation

Improvisation may have been the biggest surprise out of the data collection. Out of all the variables improvisation ranked 2nd in both response troll bait and transitioning. Improvisation was a gateway to mock and or distract the chat communities. For example, from one troll disrupted a conversation about WoW lore by asking about Bigfoot's involvement in a game storyline (Source 10). Improvised questions about bigfoot slightly disrupted the conversation about WoW's storyline to reroute the focus towards bigfoot (Source 10).

Source 10: (Trolls Add to Bigfoot bait through Improvisation)

15:32:23 [Person A]: Arthas was actually evil, as opposed to Sargerass though.

15:32:25 [Person B]: spoiler alert: the naaru actually have forgotten us.

15:32:39 [Person C]: where does bigfoot fit in to all of this?

15:32:49 [Person A]: Bigfoot is the the hand behind it all.

15:32:52 [Person D] bigfoot stole the naaru.

15:32:53 [Person A]: he is the alpha. The omega.

15:32:55 [Person E]: no they havent, one of their light bulbs is in my order hall 15:33:00

[Person F]: He's actually leading the army of the light, we haven't heard about bigfoot since he got lost behind the dark portal though

Improvisation allows trolls to add bait to otherwise normal conversations. A consistent improved transition is included within the context of WoW trade advertisement. Using WoW items out of context led to players developing troll bait out of improvisation.

Source 8: (Trolls Disrupt a Player's advertisement through Improvised bait)

20:31:28 [Person A]: WTS [Dreamleaf] (Herb) --> Huge Quantities.

20:32:19 [Person B]: Whoaaaa buddy this is a public chat, you might wanna see those herbs elsewhere, someone might report you to the GM's

20:32:52 [Person C]: The CIA is everywhere

20:33:02 [Person C]: prank call, prank call

20:33:05 [Person D]: NSA is everywhere.

20:33:16 [Person E]: They are watching you/

20:33:37 [Person C]: Who is watching the watchers is the real question

20:33:47 [Person E]: whos watching those who are watching the watchers?

20:33:59 [Person F]: bird oerson

20:33:59 [Person C]: now you get it :)

20:34:07 [Person D]: batman.

20:34:11 [Person E]: lol bird person.

20:34:13 [Person D]: batman is always watching.

Source 17: (Trolls Disrupt Advertisement through Mocking Political Correctness) 17:40:07

[Person A]: <Chaotic Tendency> is looking for another non-paladin healer and a few more dps (full on hunters) to fill out our roster moving into Tomb. AoTC EN/ToV/NH.

Personal loot. Mumble required. We raid Tues/Wed/Sun 6pm-8pm server.

PM for more info!

17:40:28 [Person B]: reported for pali hate crime!

17:40:53 [Person B]: Down on hunters too, but that's understood.

17:40:55 [Person A]: the pali hate crime of too many hpals is bad?

17:40:57 [Person C]: please no paliphobic slurs

Source 32: (Troll Mocks Advertisement, and Trolls Improvise an Auction)

17:46:52 [Person A]: ANY OJNE WANNA BUY MY WOW TOKEKN

17:47:20 [Person B]: i'll give you 2 gold for it

17:47:30 [Person C]: i got 5 on it

17:47:30 [Person D]: 3 gold

17:47:37 [Person B]: 6 gold

17:47:40 [Person D]: 10

17:47:50 [Person B]: silver?

17:47:53 [Person E]: 10g 1c

17:48:00 [Person D]: 10g 1s

17:48:14 [Person B]: 11g

Improvisation was also used as a way for trolls to reference instances of popular media and pop culture. Popular phrases from television can resonate and influence additional trolls

function to draw more people to the conversation. Although improvisation may not be clearly deviant, it can be disruptive.

Source 10: (Troll Bait and Improvisation through South Park and Family Guy)

15:40:24 [Person A]: Member only Horde having Shamans?

15:40:31 [Person B]: Member when Sylvanas let Varian die because she couldn't hold her own against a few dozen demons

15:40:42 [Person C]: pepridge farm members

Source 11 (Trolls Disrupt advertisement through South Park Reference)

17:39:27 [Person A]: WTS [Vigilance Perch] 100k WHISPER ME

17:39:41 [Person B]: i'll pay you twofitty

17:39:58 [Person C]: Best i can do is tree fiddy

17:40:04 [Person D]: The 3v3 finals are awesome today

17:40:09 [Person B]: Biscuits!!!

17:40:13 [Person D]: Arcane is wreaking

17:40:13 [Person C]: they over now?

17:40:22 [Person E]: treefiddy

Gender and sexuality mixed with improvisation had a strong reaction with trolls. Trolls were influenced to attempt comedic influence when an individual initiated an instance involving sexuality and gender. It seems that the many of the spontaneous instances of troll bait utilized themes of gender and sexuality.

Source: 1 (Troll Initiates bait with Sexual Reference and Trolls Improvise)

20:08:03 [Person A]: i jerk it to pictures of nancy Pelosi

20:09:04 [Person B]: I jerk to pictures of mitch mcconell because turtles are hawt.

20:09:53 [Person C]: i jerk chicken, the less popular apple food product

Source 12: (Troll Mocks Players Perceived Relationship Statuses, Trolls Improvise Bait)

18:49:51 [Person A]: my GF make all the fancy crap like pretzel salted caramel chocolate chip

18:50:17 [Person B]: HA, he thinks he has a girlfriend. No one on WoW has a GF or BF

18:50:29 [Person B]: scientifically proven.

18:50:30 [Person C]: thats just you

18:50:43 [Person D]: In my head I do ;)

18:50:52 [Person B]: Oh...*sobs*...youre right...*CRY*

18:51:10 [Person D]: what is your hand's errr girlfriend's name?

18:51:18 [Person E]: LOL

18:51:28 [Person F]: "Rightie"

18:51:32 [Person H]: leftie*

18:51:32 [Person B]: lol

18:51:34 [Person D]: sounds T H I C C

18:51:46 [Person I]: who needs hands..when you can use your imagination? rofl

18:51:48 [Person J]: Your chicks are your...left and right

18:51:55 [Person F]: But, real talk here.

Other

In addition to pre-defined codes, this research used an other category to examine techniques and methods of trolling that did not easily fit anywhere else. The majority of other methods of trolling techniques used acronyms and symbols in public conversations. Although

using symbols may not be inherently troll bait, in some scenarios, these individuals are fulfilling what Bishop (2014) considers a Lurker.

Source 13: (Lurker Troll Uses Symbol to Add to the Mockery of a Player)

17:31:21 [Person A]: LF cool guild that has some people that like progressive metal

17:31:39 [Person B]: don't invite Person A

17:31:52 [Person C]: what is i only like Baby metal?

17:31:58 [Person C]: if*

17:32:03 [Person A]: baby metal is alright, ill consider it

17:32:18 [Person D]: Japanese schoolgirl metal or gtfo

17:32:27 [Person E]: lol!

17:32:29 [Person E]: ^^

Source 14: (Lurker Troll uses Symbol to create a larger trolling instance)

17:16:04 [Person A]: [Mana-Cord of Deception] 870 2.5k on the AH.

17:16:44 [Person B]: people buy these welfare epics?

17:17:19 [Person C]: Never had an alt mate?

17:18:18 [Person D]: ^

Source 28: (Another Example of Lurker Troll adding to the Trolling Instance)

18:10:40 [Person A]: google knows everything. you must not be asking the right question

18:10:45 [Person B]: "hey server, can i get some help"

18:10:51 [Person A]: no

18:10:51 [Person C]: server: no

18:10:54 [Person D]: "fuck off noob, the internet exists"

18:10:59 [Person C]: ^

18:11:01 [Person F]: lol

Source 32: (Troll Uses Symbol in the way that Symbolizes Self Physical Abuse)

17:55:26 [Person A]: is there anyone on that is playing a panda right now

17:55:47 [Person B]: i am a panda

17:55:59 [Person C]: same

17:56:04 [Person D]: WTS [Flask of the Countless Armies] 250g each!

17:56:04 [Person A]: ok just trying to figure out who i need to ignore ty

17:56:13 [Person E]: lol

17:56:27 [Person F]: WTS[Acolyte's Abandoned Footwraps][Sash of the Unredeemed]
cheaper then AH

17:56:30 [Person G]: oh no, Person A will no longer talk to me, /wrists

Racist Troll Bait

Blatant instances of racism were extremely rare within this research. Researchers speculate this is because it would not benefit trolls to use direct racist remarks since this would be a simple punishment decision for WoW moderators. The majority of the racist incidents or comments were times when players were either trying to be comical or mocking.

Source: 13 (Using Race based conversation as troll bait)

18:44:07 [Person A]: just play a druid, you can literally be anything

18:44:20 [Person B]: hate those guys

18:44:21 [Person C]: not if your black

18:44:25 [Person D]: except a deathknight. fail

18:44:32 [Person A]: lmao ^klato

18:44:48 [Person B]: XD its just a prank bro! XD

18:45:20 [Person C]: you saying black people only play DKs? because that sir, is Classist.

18:46:00 [Person D]: black people havent built a computer that runs on drug dependence and gang violence so they cant play wow

18:46:02 [Person D]: everyone knows this

18:46:39 [Person E]: thats a lie our guild felon is black

Throughout the coding, “other” was a lower tier. Response troll bait it was the least coded, and second to last to gender/sexual transition bait. However, it was the second most used with initiation trolling techniques.

The other category involved more consistent positive trolls. This style would be more inclined with Bishop’s (2014) MHBFY Jenny, in the sense of trolls seeking consolation and connection with a community that they do not truly know. Although Bishop’s (2015) is explained that those individuals are more influenced to insert themselves within a community, the ones from my research were looking to bait individuals with passive-aggressive dialogue.

Source 13: Reference 1

18:12:26 [Person A]: hi anyone wanna be friends

18:12:39 [Person B]: not with you

18:12:46 [Person C]: kys

18:12:48 [Person A]: mannnn

18:12:59 [Person D]: i will be your friend!

Second Research Focus

The data indicated that troll bait was much more common than serious conversation. As expected, troll bait is used in a way to continue a conversation while attracting others to either participate, or lash back. This research included coding for the times which involved individuals attempting to have a serious conversation; however, responses with troll bait was double the number of individuals trying to carry a serious conversation.

Considering the response to trolling, people who are exposed enough trolling behavior may lash back with other forms of troll bait. Out of the 1143 documented responses, 720 of the replies included troll bait; with mockery being the leading troll bait strategy.

Mockery

The theme of mockery was present in 359 of the 720 troll bait responses. Mockery was used to control conversations by insulting others. Insults can overtake a conversation and influence the people within the chatroom to refocus their dialogue towards defending themselves.

Source 26: (Troll mocks individuals on Grammar Issues)

19:42:27 [Person A]: Besides mastering basic english..

19:42:30 [Person B]: he is the fiddle fuckard and your the puppet

19:42:45 [Person C]: hahaha

19:42:47 [Person D]: you're*

19:42:53 [Person E]: you're* You should probably master 3rd grade grammar before you insult someones intelligence

19:42:59 [Person F]: he's gonna fiddle my diddly?

19:43:14 [Person G]: [WTS] Mage Tower Challenge scenario. Get an amazing Challenging Artifact Appearance for your spec now! Please visit WoWVendor.org for more info! [54VDR]

19:43:22 [Person H]: spellcheck is for pansy lil girls

The use of sarcasm is also prevalent within mockery-based troll bait. Unlike a direct assertive insult, using sarcasm or being passive can conceal troll bait within the conversation. Because passive-aggressive trolling behavior may go unnoticed, this kind of troll bait can prolong a trolling instance.

Reference 23: (The second individual demonstrates passive-aggressive troll bait)

19:17:39 [Person A]: Once this hotfix is active, you will only need to reach Revered with the Armies of Legionfall and fully explore the Broken Shore to earn Legion flying.
from MMO Champ

19:18:04 [Person B]: they're never wrong, right?

19:18:05 [Person C]: such a fucked up nerf

19:18:10 [Person C]: if it's true

Third Research Focus

There was evidence to support Phillips's (2014) trolling cohesion. If troll bait was comical or insensitive, there would be drawn-out conversations, which generated more conversation and influenced trolls.

There would be instances of mockery and banter that would transition to an actual conversation over time. For example, there were a few conversations that started with an individual using troll bait about their mother providing food from a famous fast-food chain that

was both mocking and sexist against his mother. However, the conversation transitioned into a conversation mocking and promoting other food chains.

Source 10: (Player Mocks Mother and Baited Banter about Fast Food Chain restaurants)

16:00:47 [Person A]: My mom got me 6 nuggets instead of 12, I can't believe this dumb bitch

16:00:54 [Person A]: Tired of her shit

16:00:57 [Person B]: Well it was because they made that one smartass comment to hardees

16:01:00 [Person C]: I miss the old McDonalds nuggets

16:01:05 [Person D]: ax the bitch

16:01:08 [Person E]: wat

16:01:16 [Person F]: order a pizza instead

CHAPTER V DISCUSSION

The data supported Bishop's (2015) work of a troll. The trolls represented in this data were primarily focused on attempting to create an entertaining atmosphere through mischief. This research also provided a better insight into Phillips's (2015) description of the process of generating lulz and magnetizing trolls. Lastly, the findings indicate that the actions of trolls tend to be less of a direct threat and more focused on creating a public spectacle.

Criminology Review

Trolls in WoW have access to suitable targets while staying hidden from capable guardians. Trolls do not intend to cross social standards in fear of being punished from administrators. However, they still push the limits of social standards.

Routine Activity Theory

Trolls adjust their behavior by understanding the environment within they are in. It is well known that prejudiced commentary is universally unacceptable, which to avoid WoW's administration, trolls rarely disrupted WoW's rules of conduct as outlined in terms of use and service. Unlike other subtle forms of trolling, racist language is readily indefinable and quickly reported. This notifies the community guardians (WoW moderators), who would ban the troll for the behavior. In a sense, the reward from making overtly racist statements did not outweigh the consequences.

Although trolls pushed the boundaries of social standards, rarely did they cross them. Trolls did seem comfortable speaking in a derogatory manner of the LGBTQ community, but they often refrained from being obvious. Typically, troll bait was used in a subtle context.

From a routine activity theory perspective, trolls fit the roll of the motivated offender and the community in WoW constitutes the suitable. However, the only capable guardians in WoW

would be the game moderators. It is reasonable to believe that troll bait will be subtler to WoW's social standards due to the fear of bait that crosses particular lines that could lead to being reported to moderators. However, the framework of troll bait is intended to press the lines of social standards to disrupt and discourse an online community.

Social Cohesion Theory

Social cohesion was a present factor within this study. Conversations under the construct for improvisation showed how a community will come together rift troll bait off one another. Although this variable was questionable, it may be the most important out the observations.

What improvisation provided was an aspect of support within dialogue. For instance, depending on the bait an individual can magnetize an abundance of trolls from a pun. This study suggests this through an item in game known as "dreamleaf", being that individuals would make drug references as bait. Such references would attract many people to the conversation acting similar to the magnetizing effect detailed by Bishop (2015).

Trolling instances that were sexist and/or homophobic generated strong community feedback, while influencing additional trolls to participate. Troll bait that incorporated themes of gender and sexuality were common and often attracted numerous participants. This indicates that particular themes may bring more trolls together than others and sexuality and gender tend to have a particularly strong magnetizing effect.

One example from the study was the individual who complained about his mother bringing back fast food. The individual complained and insulted his mother. Even if the story was completely fabricated, it was clear that the individual understood that he could influence trolls into joining in the discussion about this individual's perceived laziness and disrespect of his mother and women in general.

Gender and sexuality continued to show strong cohesion through improvisation. An inside community joke within WoW is to use the word “anal” in conjunction to an in-game reference (Source. 23). Although it may seem trivial, “anal” is used to cause discomfort within trade chat (Source. 23). This usage also highlights a juvenile nature within the humor of some trolls within the community.

Social Control Theory

Trolls who understand social standards and mechanisms of a community can control an online environment. Successful trolls understand what can aggravate individuals. Troll bait often pushes the limits of the social standards of an online community, and trolls seemingly welcome individuals who try to reinforce the set standards because they enjoy causing a disruption.

Trolls try to bring other individuals into large public conversations. If a troll can get an individual to publicly reinforce standards, trolls will try to capitalize on the vulnerability.

For example, there was an instance when an individual asked for any Pandarians (Panda WoW race). A couple individuals responded back saying that they were. Trolls responded back saying that they knew who they were going to avoid in the community.

Mocking players who chose panda characters motivated other trolls to participate in the conversation. Infuriating the panda players, the instances moved into mocking each other using sexualized themes to do so. Even when participants in the trade chat warned the trolls of being reported, the conversation continued through mockery and sexualized troll bait.

Furthermore, using sexualized dialogue added more trolls to the conversation. Improvising to raise the bar, trade chat started with mocking panda players to speaking of sexual acts with animals. The conversation may not be deviant in the way of breaking a law, but it is potentially problematic for those in the WoW community.

Another scenario in the research was when a troll mockingly demanded a player to stop sending advertisement. Multiple players confronted the troll to try and stop the insulting discourse. Trying to stop the troll bait ironically progressed the instance into transitioning into political banter.

The transition to politics started from confronting the troll. The bait used led to additional players and trolls to participate in the dialogue, which led to a political debate amongst trolls. This became problematic for turning a community into a toxic environment.

Social control is an interesting premise surrounding the trolling community. Trolls welcome reinforcement of social standards to be able disrupt and recourse the standards. Trolls can take control of a community once they understand the level of control the community has.

First Research Focus

This research indicated that trolls are primarily focused on being disruptively deviant. While a large portion of cyber-deviances are life threatening, trolling is a cyber-deviance that is more of an online community nuisance.

Trolls look to disrupt and reroute conversations using dialogue that resonates with individuals. Often the dialogue that trolls use baits others through confliction, but at no time during this research was the dialogue in measures of criminal activity. To prevent trolling, it is beneficial to learn the techniques and strategies.

The research conducted in WoW has provided a diverse view of trolling strategies and behaviors. Essentially, trolls will use bait that connects with individuals. May that be through politics, popular media, gender/sexuality, and or improvising; trolls will use what best resonates with the community they are in.

Political Troll Bait

Originally, I believed that politics would be a leading pattern within troll bait. As mentioned, living within a controversial political climate (2017), it would seem likely that the presidential campaign would be an ongoing bait reference. Although it was used often, politics was used more in line with the day to day current events.

By the time of this study, President Trump was in office for several months. I believe that the controversies of the President likely settled with players. From my research, it seemed that players have become much more used to the President and found the political climate less controversial over time.

When President Trump's administration was discussed, it was used at the times surrounding an event. One example was from a troll referencing his controversial Tweet from President Trump wrestling CNN. The source of the troll bait was used right around the time of the event.

The most consistent political banter was surrounding political correctness. The feeling of censorship has seemingly made trolls feel targeted. Throughout the research, trolls mocked sexual identity and censorship. To stay discreet, trolls would passive-aggressively bait communities by mimicking how they perceive the political correctness culture.

Overall, political banter was used far less than I expected. Society progresses forward no matter what, and the trolling community is no different. Overall, success of political troll bait relied on the use of either highly controversial or recent historic events.

Current/Popular Media

The use of popular media was much more prevalent than political references. After seeing the strategies and disputes of trolls, it is clear for why. Popular media was much more frequent than political troll bait and spanned a much broader spectrum of conversation topics.

Political troll bait is restricted to politics. Although politics can be disruptive, movie references can be just as impactful. In this research, there was a conversation that transitioned a conversation about workplace rules to 1995's A Goofy Movie.

Another example within the data was an instance where a group of trolls conversed about sex. Within moments the conversation transitioned into sexualizing King of the Hill's character, Peggy Hill. Using Peggy Hill led to transitioning the conversation into making references to her.

The use of these pop culture references may resonate more with the demographic of individuals in this community than political issues. In short, it is possible that a political reference may not have as much impact or footing to the community when compared to music, television, and movie references.

The data also indicated attempts disrupt communities through mockery. Often when players would converse about WoW's story concepts, trolls would bait by calling those individuals "nerds". Rarely did calling players nerds lead to a trolling instance, but the name calling still occurred.

It could be possible that the name calling was perceived in a light-hearted manner, or it could be that the individuals were too concentrated in the in-depth dialogue. What should be taken from those occurrences is that trolls will make attempts to target a community that is attempting to avoid contact. The trolls had no business or reason to be disruptive, however, these trolls chose to mock those individuals out of their own self-interests and amusement.

Aligned with discussion of opinions of WoW storyline, trolls used bait that favored their personal opinions. An example was when a troll openly shunned a player for being a “Kings” fan (Source. 25). Through mockery, the troll generated a conversation and magnetized additional trolls because a player showed their affiliation towards a sports team.

By using certain pop-culture, trolls can manipulate dialogue that will influence a disruption amongst players. From sports, movies, music, or any other media, trolls can and will use it for bait. If there is a reaction, trolls will continually attempt to disrupt online communities.

Gender and Sexuality

Sexist and homophobic statements have been a major technique for trolls to disrupt communities. The social consensus against sexist and homophobic speech seems to be effective for trolls. Within WoW, it seems that Trolls decided that racism bait is risky as it may attract formal guardianship by in game community managers, but sexism and homophobia seems to be a norm that riles the community without triggering formal sanctions.

Sexism was substantially present in troll bait. This data did not indicate any sense of a capable guardian, or any other prevention tool to stop this sort of dialogue. There was one instance where an individual warned of trolls being reported for speaking of sex with animals, but not in terms of people.

Sexist remarks were seemingly acceptable by the WoW trolling community in this data. They were willing to make openly sexist comments to insight reaction within the community. Instances ranged from speaking of female characters, players’ significant others, and even mothers. Opposing of sexist remarks was seemingly nonexistent based on a lack of community comments during data collection.

A further problem with sexist speech between trolls is that it can attract additional trolls that will add to the dialogue. The largest improvised trolling instance included the word “anal” around WoW references (Reference. 23). The number of players that participated and the duration of the bait could make players feel uncomfortable in the common public area.

The use of homophobic and sexualized mockery was seemingly acceptable within trade chat as well. There were cases of when trolls would bait players by homophobic slurs, sexist undertones, or sexualization of conversation participants. Other than retaliation that added to the generation of sexualized bait, there was very little examples of pushback within the chat.

Having little examples of players showing that they were uncomfortable with that kind of speech may be a result of stereotyping video games being solely for younger male adults. I don’t believe that this kind of speech would be as open if females or the LGBTQ were stereotyped as gamers. It is possible that the acceptance of sexist and homophobic speech is based the perception of an absence of females or LGBTQ community members.

Improvisation

Improvisation was a greater influence in troll bait than expected. The use of improvisation was amongst leading ways troll bait was used. Improvised dialogue was used to deliver additional focus and strength to troll bait.

In the instance of sexualization and gender, the troll using “anal” was a good example. Trolls came and stayed in chat to add different variations of the inside joke (Reference. 23). The concept is like improvised comedy, where the goal is to simultaneously add to a comedic instance. The Nancy Pelosi sexual reference was another good example of improvised sexualized troll bait (Source. 1).

Sexism as whole showed examples of improvised troll bait. Another example was from the player who mocked their mother that brought fast food home. What started as mocking a mother led to transitioning into having an ongoing debate over the best fast food restaurant chains.

Improvisation can also lead to ongoing troll bait using popular media. The use of South Park's recent "Member-berry" joke was an ongoing use of troll bait. Using "member when" is resourceful for being a universal conjunction to any desired troll bait subject (Reference. 10). It can be problematic in the sense of magnetizing additional trolls to trade chat.

The use of improvisation is indicated as a support to troll bait. Improvisation is a useful tool if used properly because it can magnetize additional trolls to a trolling instance.

Racism

As expected, racism was not very prevalent within this research. There was no directly racist banter (e.g. ongoing use of racial slurs) within this study, however, there were some occasions where their unconscious racial discussions occurred. I believe with WoW's large population, openness to all people, and the ability to report deviant discussion based on race checks majority of racial banter.

When trolls used racist bait, it is much more subtle than racial slurs. Racist troll bait was more in lines of trolls comparing or connecting racial identities to stereotypes. An example was when a troll said that their "guild felon was black".

That trolling instance was amongst the most blatant examples of racist troll behavior. Racism is problematic by being demeaning to groups of people that may populate the community. Although problematic, racist troll bait was rare in this research.

Racism was only recorded for 8 out of 1143 responses, and only 1 of those occurrences used a racial slur. Race would be used as bait, but nowhere near the amount of all the popular media and gender/sexism.

Mockery, popular media, and gender/sexism is much more of an issue of deviance within WoW than racist troll bait. However, this data only collected a small fragment of racist remarks. To keep the community at peace it is critical to bring awareness of racial, sexist, and homophobic troll bait and find a way to truly resolve this issue for players that may be offended by the banter.

Other

Other variables I found included spontaneous bait that was more used to add onto the effectiveness of the troll bait. What fell into the section of other was the use of symbols and acronyms. This style of trolling was more aligned with Bishop's (2015) Lurker.

As explained, the Lurker strategizes to be as hidden as possible (Bishop, 2015). In this research, it indicated that the Lurkers use a herd mentality to bait conversation participants. Although the Lurkers may not directly troll individuals, their use of symbols create a larger instance for initiated troll bait.

Examples of the Lurkers was their use of the up-vote symbol (^). This symbol indicates agreeing with individuals who posted a comment before them. The problem is when they use it on obvious troll bait.

An example from the research showed an instance where a Lurker added an up-vote to an individual mocking a conversation participant's music preference. Again, it is very subtle, but it adds to the strength of the troll bait by providing additional focus and support. Openly showing support to negativity can lead to magnetizing trolls to the instance.

Although the use of “lol” or the greater than symbol may seem very minimal, it still indicates that an individual was disrupted enough to participate in the trolling instance. Consistently, there were times where there would be trolling banter, and an individual would simply leave “lol”. “Lol” may not be insulting, but it can serve the purpose of recognizing and adding to an individual’s troll bait. This contributes to the success of the initial trolling effort and could see to magnetize further troll activity.

The use of the greater than signs is a very simple troll bait. This is a reference towards elementary level intellect, which a troll is saying that the debate as simple as one of the easier level arithmetic lessons. When an individual puts out $x > y$, they are really saying “it’s as simple as that”.

Second Research Focus

Through all the responses, over half of them are with troll bait. This goes to show that majority of players who participate in trade chat feel comfortable enough to lash back at trolls. Through anonymity of hiding behind computers, majority of conversation participants indicate that they are willing to respond to trolls with bait.

720 responses out of 1143 were using troll bait, this data indicates that players participating in trade chat will lash back. Being anonymous, players may participate within the routine activity and control theory. Both theories need a form of a capable guardian that can reinforce social standards, however, WoW seems to lack any form of a clear guardian.

Trolling instances that fall within the routine activity theory framework needs a likely offender, a victim, and a lack of capable guardianship (Cullen & Agnew, 2006). From this research, trolls and players seemingly have lost influence from guardians by their lack of self-censorship.

An example is from the homophobia and sexualization of troll bait. Players who used dialogue that involves homophobic slurs have not had any reinforcement to set the social standard line. Lacking a capable guardianship leads to trolls refusing to indicate any self-control involving homophobic or sexist dialogue.

The framework of control theory also was seemingly neglected. The absence of a visible guardian or social standards may even influence trolls to bait more often. Which again, sexualized influenced troll bait had no clear indications of reinforcement.

Reinforcement is important to remind individuals of social standards. Using homophobic slurs would seemingly be admissible for punishment. However, considering the large number of players participating in homophobic dialogue may indicate that it is socially acceptable within WoW's public chatrooms and does not seem to be punished by community moderators.

Players may also ignore social norms to stand up/debate for themselves. In instances of mockery, trolls will bait others in a format that is effective. Unfortunately, trolls may ignore any signs of WoW guardianship to implement derogatory troll bait.

Third Research Focus

This research provided to support Phillips's (2015) generating and magnetizing ideas behind the behavior of trolls. Through generating and magnetizing trolling behavior, bait can be sustained for a longer amount of time. Through the successful use of troll bait, trolls control an environment leading to a strong production of reaction and conversation.

Trolls' ability improvise was key strategy with baited responses. A conversation can dynamically change using puns and or generating community based jokes. Being able to muster inside jokes or references can orchestrate a large community ` reaction and success of a troll.

Improvisation can lead to trolls generating a game for other trolls to magnetize towards. Simply developing a drug reference from an advertised WoW item can bait a player into a conversation. That kind of conversation can also influence trolls to participate, creating self-sustaining trolling event.

A trolling instance can be prolonged through mockery. Mockery based troll bait agitates online communities, leading players to lash back. Some players and trolls refuse to be mocked, leading towards heated conversations amongst an online community. Again, all of this activity feeds into the troll's goal.

Mockery had the highest amount of data collected for response troll bait. The absence of visible guardianships likely influences players to use any range of obscenity that they choose. The only substantial way to prevent overly offensive troll activity is formal responses and punishment from community managers which does not seem to be present in many situations.

With the absence of visible and capable guardians, trolls are not likely to stop being disruptive. As routine activity theory requires an assessment of capable guardians, anonymity likely prevents troll's from being deterred from baiting WoW's trade chat.

Control theory requires set social standards. Constantly pressing the social standards limit, trolls use bait to distract and disrupt online communities. Pressing the limits of social standards is another game that trolls play.

Trolls pushing the limits of online communities can influence others to participate. By pushing the limits of social standards, online communities continually need to rework their social standards. By continually pushing the limits, trolls develop a sense of cohesion.

Social cohesion is derived from individuals coming together out of mutual interests. As Philips's (2014) discussed through magnetization, trolls become motivated through the mutual

interest of being disruptive. No matter the reason for trolling, trolls are cooperatively motivated to push the limits of social standards.

Through successful cooperation, trolls can take control of an online community. Being able to cooperatively take control of trade chat can reroute the seemingly acceptable standards amongst players. Trolls having complete control of an online community can lead to ongoing trolling instances.

This research gave great insight of trolls' strategies of taking control an online environment. To take control of an online community, trolls must understand the community's social standards. Understanding an online community's social standards can provide trolls with the insight to control an environment.

Limitations

This research is very preliminary and is amongst the first of its kind. There is very little research that investigates trolls within a gaming community. Being exploratory research, this study had some limitations.

One limitation was that this research was confined to the server, Lightbringer. This server was picked because of the simplicity of collecting data in populated areas and that it is also uses west coast time. It was beneficial for this research because it allowed for this data to be collected during times which there was a larger player population.

It would be beneficial to investigate servers that use different time zones for providing different regional cultures. Servers on east coast time zones could be different from west coast in terms of trolling strategies and behaviors. Regions may differ in terms of social standards.

This research was limited by only recording data from a player vs environment (PvE) server. WoW provides players with different experience opportunities through player vs player (PvP) and role playing (RP) servers. Players immersed in different server styles could have been

supplemental to this research, however, majority of players are in the PvE servers.

This research was also limited to the Alliance. Although there is no evidence that there is a significant difference between Alliance and Hoard, it would still be interesting to see the differences between factions.

Lastly, the most crucial limitation is the inability to collect data on trolls being reported. This limitation could have been beneficial by having the access to identifying what kind of troll bait behaviors is unacceptable. Although seeing actual reports could have been complementary, being able to collect data on responses was supplemental

CHAPTER VI CONCLUSION

This research was conducted to provide additional information about cyber deviance and trolling behavior by considering the electronic gaming community that has generally been untouched by researchers. Trolling behavior pushes on key boundaries of acceptable behavior and has the potential to infringe on the enjoyment and autonomy of other people. With cyber deviance becoming necessity area of study, cyber trolling should not be dismissed.

The World of Warcraft servers provided researchers with an opportunity to record trolls in a natural setting. Because WoW moderators are generally unseen, trolls generate bait how they please. When uncontrolled by capable guardians, trolls can become a growing nuisance for the WoW community.

Primary deviance is when individuals are influenced from “a variety of social, cultural, psychological, and physiological factors” (Cullen & Agnew, 2006, p. 273). Through primary deviance, gaming communities developed the pejorative label, troll, as a deterrence. However, openly accepting and continually acting as a troll is implicating the use of secondary deviance (Cullen & Agnew, 2006).

Secondary deviance is individuals who recognize and continue to defy social standards (Cullen & Agnew, 2006). Embracing and acting within the boundaries of being deviant, leads to trolls being deviant.

To prevent the growth of internet trolls, it must become a priority to develop policies that are just. However, it must be inherent that policies do not infringe upon any online user’s rights.

Implications of Trolling Research

Being within a virtual world, online communities may seem trivial. However, some online communities may be the only avenue of social interaction for some. Trolls must be

addressed to prevent any harmful effects. Recently, Michelle Carter was charged with involuntary manslaughter after bullying an ex-boyfriend into committing suicide through a text-message conversation (Phillips K., 2017). Although Carter's actions would be considered cyber-bullying, this research provided instances of trolls baiting with harmful dialogue.

Developing proper policies and procedures to deal with trolls should be considered. Creating policies to address trolling behavior is difficult because they are secondarily deviant, and they use the ability to be anonymous to their advantage. Trolls also act against control theory by openly test the boundaries of social standards enforced by online community guardians.

In terms of trolling policies, the First Amendment's boundaries should be recognized. Freedom of Speech allows for United States citizens to express themselves in a peaceful manner (Acker & Brody, 2004). However, the First Amendment does not protect individuals from hate speech or inciting criminal activity. When coming to terms of online trolling policies, there must be equal balance of freedoms to restrictions.

It is also difficult to develop policies for trolls because most online communities are privately owned. Being privately owned leads to online communities being monitored by their own administration. Online communities must control their environments.

The First Amendment protections can be implemented by player support, education, and trolling awareness. If players can reinforce the social standards of an online community, trolls will have a more difficult time crossing community established boundaries. Online communities that can set limitations of their community, can develop an environment that they desire.

Going outside the boundaries of the First Amendment online can be damaging to an online community. If trolls lead to inciting criminal dialogue, law enforcement, licensing issues, law suits could overtake the community. So, it is essential for online communities to take control of their environment.

Phillips (2015) discussed in her findings that internet trolls were not focused on belittling individuals. Although this research supports Phillips's (2015) finding, this data also showed that trolls will constantly test the community's social standards. This is why it's important for online communities to develop balanced standards that focus on preventing troll bait that falls outside the protection of the First Amendment.

Future Research

As this research focused on the strategies and behaviors of trolls, future research will focus on the influence of trolls. Why do trolls want to take part in domineering an online community?

Future research can investigate trolls' social learning progression within the Internet. In future Internet modifications, trolls will be forced to develop new baiting strategies (Cullen & Agnew, 2006). In addition, society will progressively become more aware of trolling strategies.

It is critical to learn who these individuals are. With a large population of the world having access to the Internet, trolls may not be the stereotypical teenager male. Being able to find the trends of demographics could lead to supplementary data on trolling influence.

Identifying the motivations and demographics of trolls will benefit the online user base by developing a definition of what a troll really is. As this research identifies the "how," future research strives to learn the "why."

Conclusion

With the increasing use of the Internet, trolling behavior and strategies will continually develop. Understanding trolling strategies and behaviors are important so that online communities can recognize disruptive bait. Because trolls use anonymity as an advantage, trolls will continue berating online communities with disruptive dialogue. Internet trolls may not be

traditionally deviant, but their progressive growth in popularity has taken the focus of the Internet. Trolls may not be deviant in the terms of conducting criminal sanctions, such as theft or abuse, but they are constantly defying the social standards of online communities. The constant attempts of being disruptive in a community could be considered problematic.

In terms of deviance, it seems trolls embrace the label of deviant. Through all the implemented troll responses, trolls enjoy fulfilling society's consideration of deviance. Being a consistent problem can lead to trolls being considered as deviant.

A troll is someone who can manipulate or distract an online community. This research indicated that mockery responses and popular media transition bait can distract online communities within WoW. Also, through improvisation, trolls can continue or add troll bait in a fluid manner.

Understanding trolls' objectives within an online community is important. The World of Warcraft has provided trolling research with new landmark perception. If we can identify what a troll is, as a society, we can progressively improve online communities.

METHODOLOGY FIGURE

Table 1.1 Categorizing Advertisement and Legitimate Conversations

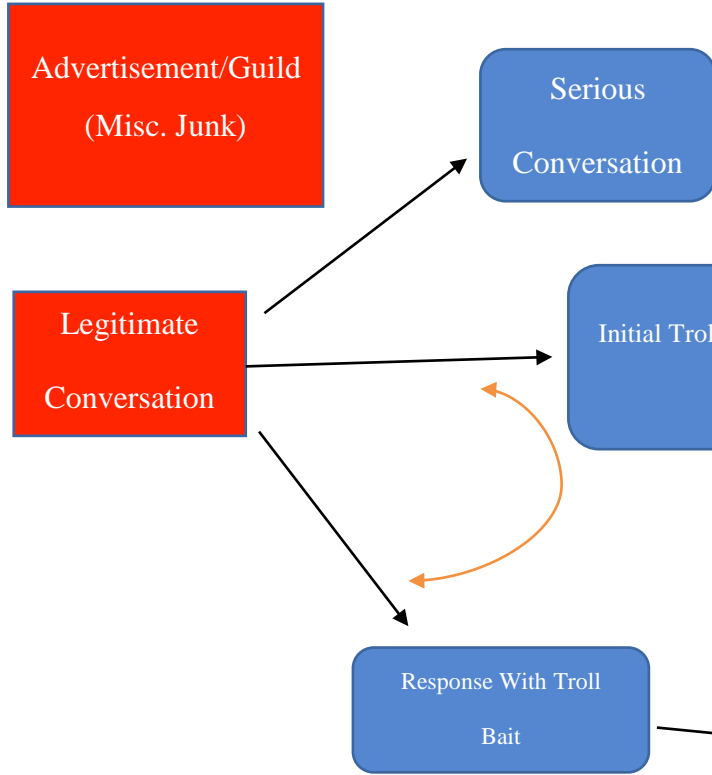


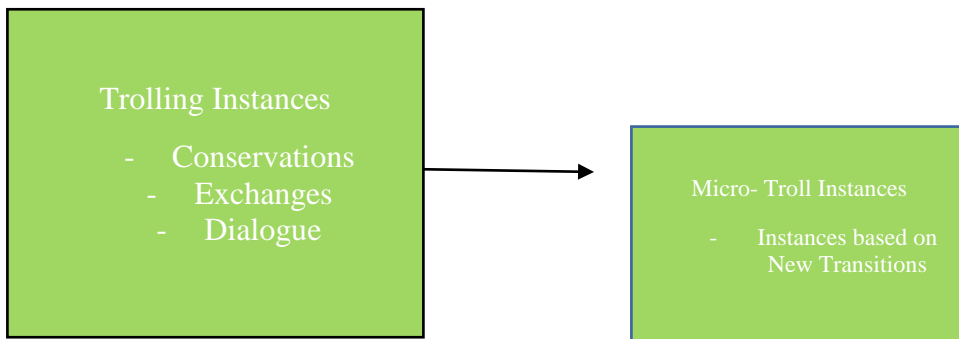
Table 1.2 Categorization of Conversation/Trolling Behaviors

1. Politics
2. Media
3. Gender/Sexuality
4. Improvisation
5. Mockery
6. Other

1. Response Troll Bait
2. Serious Response
3. Other
4. Transition

1. Politics
2. Media
3. Gender/Sexuality
4. Improvisation
5. Mockery
6. Other

Table 1.3 Categorizing Trolling Instances and Micro Troll Instances



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