Copyright page

Weaving the internet together: Imagined communities in newspaper comment threads

Dr. Bryn Alexander Coles*

Department of Psychology and Counselling, Newman University, Bartley Green, Birmingham, B32 3NT, United Kingdom

Melanie West*

University Centre Shrewsbury/University of Chester, Guildhall (Room 211), Frankwell Quay, SY3 H8Q, United Kingdom

Abstract

Online newspapers (and other spaces) are increasingly seeking to utilise user-generated content alongside professionally developed material. However, this might leave websites increasingly vulnerable to trolls, who work to disrupt online communications in online spaces. Such behaviour can have serious consequences both in peoples online and offline lives, and for the development of coherent online communities. One means of controlling is through the manipulation of the online space to create social norms of polite behaviour through the founding of 'imagined communities' online.

Approaching the issue from a discursive psychological perspective, this paper draws upon comments published in two online British newspaper comment sections responding to the publication of an academic article on trolling. Imagined communities are shown to arise irrespective of the presence of the virtual infrastructure to support the development of these imagined communities.

Key features of imagined communities identified here are: individuation (as opposed to deindividuation); mutual influence between posters; shared history for both the users and the online space; the use of humour to cement social bonds. Analysis also revealed tensions in posters understanding of online and offline behaviours.

*Corresponding author

Email address: a.coles@newman.ac.uk (Dr. Bryn Alexander Coles)

This research holds implications for understanding online spaces, and the interactions between users within these spaces.

1. Introduction & background

1.1. The act of trolling

The act of 'trolling' is generally defined as being a negative online behaviour intended to disrupt online communications, aggravate internet users and draw individuals into fruitless debates (Binns, 2012; Bishop, 2012; Shachaf & Hara, 2010).

Increasing numbers of businesses are depending upon user-generated content within their business model. User generated content is essential for the sustenance of networking sites (Agichtein et al., 2008), has become integral to the tourism industry (O'Connor, 2008), and has been shown to impact positively upon music sales (Dhar & Chang, 2009). Online newspapers too are moving towards greater integration and interactivity with their readership in seeking to utilise user-generated content alongside their professionally developed material (Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Thurman, 2008).

Perversely, where trolls successfully spark controversy and outrage, they may drive traffic (and thus revenue) towards a given website, encouraging 'debate' as ever more posters are drawn into fruitless debate (MacKinnon & Zuckerman, 2012).

Yet negative consequences of trolling abound. At its most benign, trolling might simply present an irritation which internet users can ignore ('don't feed the trolls' – Bergstrom, 2011; Binns, 2012). More severe consequences might include the disruption of the online space such that an established userbase or readership cannot develop, or a developed community dissipates (Binns, 2012).

Trolling however may have more serious consequences in individuals off-line life. Trolling and cyberbullying has been associated with an increased risk of self-harm and suicidal ideation, for example (Bauman et al., 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

Recognising the harmful nature of trolling, governments increasingly seek to impose legislative bans on trolling. Such legislative interventions seek to send the message that the mainstay of trolling tactics – deliberately racist, sexist, religiously intol-

erant, disablist or sexually intolerant speech – are not longer to be tolerated online. Those falling foul of the law could find themselves facing large fines, or incarceration alongside gaining a criminal record (Adams, 2015; Bishop, 2013a; Butler et al., 2009; Select Committee on Communications, 2014).

1.2. *The personality of trolls*

Researchers are interested in who, how and why people engage in such disruptive online behaviours. One account of both trolls and trolling is that it is motivated by negative personality traits and characteristics. Buckels et al. (2014) conducted an online survey of over 1,200 participants measuring a variety of self-reported personality traits, along side participants self-reported enjoyment of engaging in online trolling activities. The authors report positive correlations between the characteristics of sadism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism. From this, Buckels et al. conclude that trolling represents a form of 'everyday sadism'

Similarly, drawing upon an interview conducted with a self-reported internet troll, Bishop (2013b) reports egocentrism; the need to boost self-esteem, the feeling of power, and callousness as key personality factors which contribute to disruptive online behaviours. 'Callousness', as defined by Bishop can be understood as analogous to the notion of 'sadism', as described by Buckels et al.. Bishop goes as far as to link trolling with anti-social personality disorder, as defined by the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychological Association.

1.3. *The circumstance of trolls*

Trolling may however not be a feature of deviant personality alone. It may also be influenced by a sense of online anonymity (Bishop, 2014; Shin, 2008; Suler, 2004), leading to a sense of deindividuation (Bishop, 2013b). While greater deindividuation has been shown to be positively associated with membership of online communities Mikal et al. (2015), it is also linked to greater self-disclosure and the emergence of counter-normative behaviours (Bishop, 2013b). When deindividuated, individuals are known to engage in aggressively antisocial behaviours with little regard for the consequences for themselves or for others (Ayal & Gino, 2012; Kim & Park, 2011).

4

Conversely, Cho & Acquisti (2013) argue that greater identifiability of individuals serves to moderate undesirable behaviour. Users to online newspapers were found to be more likely to post offensive messages when they could do so anonymously. However, while requiring individuals to post messages under their real names decreased antisocial activity, it was also found to decrease interaction on the websites – it provided an obstacle to the growth of the online space, and the formation of an online community. Maintaining an individuals status and identity markers in an online environment then may serve to remind posters of whom they are, and how they relate to other members of the online space (Hogg et al., 2004). This in turn serves to preserve their sense of self-regulation.

1.4. Imagined communities

Many online spaces do not necessarily cultivate a sense of anonymity. Websites which draw upon user-generated content, such as social networking sites, instead invite users to imbue their pages with a sense of their personality and to establish personal connections with other online individuals. Following this approach, visitors to these websites can get a sense of whom the curator of that content is. Furthermore, some online newspapers require users to post comments under their real names, as opposed to using pseudonyms (Cho & Acquisti, 2013). Requiring users to use their real name, or requiring them to reveal their character when posting online may be argued to compromise the posters sense of anonymity.

Social networking sites expressly intend to act as community building services, focusing explicitly upon virtual networking, and leading directly to the formation of imagined communities (Acquisti & Gross, 2006). Microblogging sites such as Twitter have also been shown to be capable of forming imagined communities. This is despite such platforms being of an asymmetric nature, insofar as there is no need for reciprocity and interaction between platform members (Gruzd et al., 2011).

Given opportunity to interact, people will seek to form communities of like-minded individuals. The internet allows people to interact without ever meeting, and increasingly provides the tools necessary for people to form communities without actually being co-located. This may be explored and explained through the notion of 'imagined

5

communities' – the forging of (new) societies and communities through emphasising arbitrary commonalities within groups (Anderson, 2004).

Imagined communities may provide a redress to the problem of trolling. Through the establishment of such communities, positive social norms of online behaviour can also be established. Members of the imagined community, as part of the ingroup, would be expected to conform to these standards of behaviour Binns (2012); Bishop (2012). Such norms could be further reinforced by 'community policing', in the form of moderators working to remove undesirable elements from the online space (Lampe et al., 2014). As deindividuation is positively associated with group identification, norms established by the imagined community may help to strengthen the prosocial behaviours exhibited online (Mikal et al., 2015).

Gruzd et al. (2011) argues that imagined communities, in an online context, should also encompass elements of the 'virtual settlement' (Jones, 1997) and 'sense of community' (SoC) (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

In order for an online space to constitute a virtual settlement, it must facilitate interactivity between more than two members. This interactivity should ideally take place in a common, public area where members can meet and interact. There should also be a sense of sustained membership over time – a common history for the group and its members. Taken on it's own however, it does not necessarily imply the existence of a community.

The SoC includes a number of features which, when identified in the virtual settlements, may be taken to indicate the presence of a stable community. Communities should include a sense of membership – evidence of there being an ingroup to whom posters belong, and an outgroup to whom posters do not belong. Posters should also display the ability to exert influence over each other – to argue, debate provoke and react to each other. Community members should also be able to provide support for, and be supported by, other community members and to demonstrate a shared emotional connection. Finally, there should once again be a sense of there being a common history between members of the online space (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

How frequently do imagined communities emerge online? Do they only arise when foundations are explicitly laid (as is the case on social networking sites), or might imag-

6

ined communities arise whenever interactions between individuals occur, as suggested by the case of Twitter? The present paper contends that imagined communities may arise in any online space where two or more individuals can interact with each other, irrespective of the presence of the virtual infrastructure to support the development of these imagined communities.

The analysis presented here will focus on an unlikely site for the emergence of imagined communities – online newspaper comment threads in the wake of the publication of Buckels et al. (2014) paper on the personality characteristics of trolls. Newspaper comment threads may be considered unlikely places for imagined communities to emerge, as there is no formal means in place for users to connect with each other. Despite its asymmetric nature, even Twitter allows users to influence and interact with each other by either following or 'retweeting' what other users have said, thus allowing for social bonds, connections and influence to develop (Gruzd et al., 2011). The purpose of online newspaper comment threads however is simply for readers to post a response to the article hosted by the newspaper. There is no necessary role of membership with or affiliation to the newspaper. Posters do not necessarily register an account and build a profile to post a comment. Posters do not necessarily have to follow, retweet, friend, like or even acknowledge any other users contributions to the site if they do not wish to. As such, posters can act in a truly anonymous, deindividuated manner. Posters have no reason to hold any personal investment in the website, its content or its readership.

Trolling has been theorised as being facilitated by the twin factors of personality and anonymity. Online trolls have been demonstrated to have a specific set of personality traits which lend themselves to online misbehaviour (Bishop, 2012; Buckels et al., 2014). Further, online anonymity is thought to facilitate online misbehaviour, by removing internet users sense of individuality, culpability, and accountability. However, this literature review demonstrates that the internet is not necessarily conducive to the emergence of anonymity and deindividuation, thought to be necessary for the manifestation of trollish behaviours. Rather, the internet is conducive to the emergence of online communities which serve to identify and make accountable internet users.

Two British newspapers will form the focus of the data collection – a tabloid newspaper (the Register) and a broadsheet (the Independent). These newspapers are chosen because they met the inclusion criteria, outlined in the method section, below. The analysis will present four major themes identified within participants online talk concerning the nature of trolling. These themes are: That trolls (and others) are not deindividuated; the presence of mutual influence; the use of humour; and a division between the online and offline worlds. Together, these themes indicate the presence of an imagined community – a collection of like-minded individuals separate from each other yet acting as if they are connected.

The analysis which follows will explore each of these themes in detail. It will show how themes interlink, and display upon other related notions through to be important for the establishment of imagined communities. This paper explores the nature of interactions between users of an online space, where there is no necessary connection between those users. This paper aims to demonstrate that even without a formal infrastructure to support the formation of communities, users of a given online space will still seek to join with like-minded individuals to establish an imagined community.

2. Method

2.1. Data Selection

Data for this project follows the procedure described by Coles & West (In press). Data collected was not elicited for the study, but rather represents a 'naturalistic record' (Griffin, 2007; Potter & Hepburn, 2007), drawn from online newspapers in response to the publication of the journal article 'Trolls just want to have fun' (Buckels et al., 2014). The British Psychological Society ethical guidelines state that behaviours enacted in a public space, where individuals do not hold a reasonable expectation of privacy do not require consent from participants (Ethics Committee of the British Psychological Society, 2009). As this data is drawn from publicly available online comment threads which do not require membership to view, it was deemed to meet this ethical standard.

Data is presented here with the usernames which posters originally published their comments under, and follows the same capitalisation used by those posters. The decision was taken not to change these usernames in order to protect the identities of posters, as a simple internet search based upon the extracts presented here reveals the posts online.

2.1.1. Inclusion criteria

Data was found via an online search using a well known internet search engine. The title of the article by Buckels et al. (2014) was used as the search query. The search was conducted on the 20th of March, 2014. Fifteen potential sources were returned in total. However, for this study data was only included if more than five comments were posted to an online newspapers comment section. These restrictions resulted in two sources being selected – the online British broadsheet newspaper *the Independent* and the online British technology-focused tabloid newspaper *the Register*.

Table one, below, shows the number of posters on each website, the number of posts made and the average number of posts for each user.

Activity	The Independent	The Register
n Posters	059	041
n Posts	128	070
M Posts-per-user:	2.16	1.71

Table 1: Average characteristics of the data

It is worth noting that the total number of posters to the Register may be higher than the 41 reported here. This is because posters to this website have the option to post anonymously under the generic username 'Anonymous Coward'. A total of 14 posts were made under the name Anonymous Coward. As such, the maximum number of posters which this comment thread could contain is 54.

Comments published on either site may be voted 'up' or 'down', affecting their placement on the final published webpage. For this study, comments have been analysed in the order in which they have been voted up-or-down on the relevant webpage, rather than in the order they were submitted.

Data was analysed from a discursive psychological perspective (Lamerichs & Te Molder, 2003; Potter, 2012).

3. Analysis

Posters to online fora do not necessarily treat 'trolls' as being anonymous . Rather, trolls are often presented as being easily identifiable. They are 'known individuals', recognised by other members of the online community.

Posters interact with each other either by username, by replying directly to each others comments, or by quoting previous posts. Table 02, below shows how often posters in the current dataset make novel posts, and how often they are responding to a post made by another community member.

Activity	The Independent	The Register
n Novel posts	038	024
n Replies (without quoting)	086	030
n Replies (quoting previous post)	004	016

Table 2: Breakdown of posts made to each comment thread

For each newspaper, the majority of posts are replies. This number reaches almost three quarters of posts being replies for the Independent. This implies that the majority of posts are of an interactional nature – posters responding to those above them. This in turn implies that there is mutual influence between posters.

It is worth noting that the Register has four times the number of replies with quotes when compared with the Independent, despite (at the time of data collection) having half the number of posts. This is likely due to individuals posting under the moniker 'Anonymous Coward'. Quoting with reply serves to indicate which Anonymous Coward posters are responding to. This in turn serves to individuate posters, to facilitate direct interaction with otherwise anonymous individuals, and to connect posts with sentiments expressed.

Quoting previous posts may be achieved in one of two ways. It may be done through the newspapers 'reply' function, whereby the site automatically attaches the

10

content of the previous message to the message currently being written. Alternatively, posters may manually cut-and-paste previous posts into their own to indicate the content they are replying to.

The analysis presented below is divided into four sections. These four sections demonstrate the inter-connectedness of users online experiences. Taken together, these patterns of online interaction are considered indicative of the existence of online communities.

3.1. Trolls are individuated

Imagined communities do not require their members to be known to each other. Rather, part of the conceit of imagined communities is precisely that not all of their members can be known to each other. Hence the community must be imagined, rather than actual. Nevertheless, members of the community should be able to recognise who is a member of the ingroup, and whom is not.

This first extract demonstrates that posters are able to recognise their online conspecifics, and that this recognition forms the basis of participants group memberships. Extract 01 comes from the Independent, a British broadsheet newspaper.

3.1.1. Extract 01 Arfur Sixpence, The Independent

1. In the good ol' days when the comments on this site were entered via the Disqus
2. system, there was a wonderfully embittered and sullen little troll calling itself
3. 'olympic'. No capital 'o' such was the troll's humility. Myself and many others
4. took great pleasure in baiting the troll to see if it would dance and, oh, how it
5. danced!

The above extract displays a number of features which indicate the poster may consider themselves to be part of a larger online community. The first of these indications comes at line 01, where Arfur refers back to 'the good old days'. This reference to a past history of the comment thread implies that there is a form of 'history' to the site, rather than it living in a perpetual present (thus satisfying one of the conditions required for a sense of community – McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Arfur also here invokes

11

a sense of nostalgia, thus associating these 'good old days' with something positive and desirable.

These lines also serve to imply, at least in the case of Arfur himself, that there is a continuity of membership – something which is important for establishing a 'virtual settlement' (Jones, 1997; Gruzd et al., 2011).

At line 02, Arfur mobilises a little dry humour in the form of irony. Irony is a form of humour in which the speaker expresses a given sentiment, with the intention that the receiver will understand the opposite of that sentiment to be true (Clark & Gerrig, 1984; Reyes et al., 2012). Arfur describes an individual he claims to be a troll being 'wonderfully embittered' (line 02) and 'humble' (line 03). Common understandings of the characteristics and attitudes of trolls contain neither humility, nor the notion that their embitterment should be wonderful. Rather, trolls are perceived to be a nuisance online, intent on disrupting communications (Bishop, 2012; Binns, 2012). The manner in which Arfur characterises the troll then is incongruous with the general, public understanding of the nature of trolls.

Between lines 03-05, Arfur describes the collective response of the comment thread to the presence of this troll. What is important here is that Arfur presents the action taken against the troll not as a single action undertaken by himself, but as a collective action taken by many of those who post to the comment thread ('myself and many others' – line 03). Thus, taking action against the troll here represents a form of collective action – a common struggle against a common enemy – a characteristic of imagined communities (Anderson, 2004).

Also worthy of note is Arfur's treatment of the troll in this account. The troll is not treated as an anonymous, faceless and unknown individual. Rather, the troll is personified and individualised. It is referred to by name (Olympic – line 03) and assigned personality traits and characteristics (sullenness, humility). The troll is neither anonymous, nor deindividuated. In relaying this account here, Arfur is ensuring that the troll is anthropomorphised, and added to the history of the website, becoming part of the shared history and tradition of this online community.

3.2. *Mutual influence*

Extract one demonstrated that posters to online newspaper threads can display a number of actions which suggest that they perceive themselves to be a part of an enduring online community. Arfur Sixpence has used irony, shared history and a sense of collective action to suggest that online communities can form even on newspaper comment threads. However, there are more markers present in these comment threads which demonstrate that posters are building imagined communities in this most unlikely of places. As is demonstrated below, posters across both newspapers demonstrate the ability to exert mutual influence over each other.

Extract 02 is once again drawn from the Independent.

3.2.1. *Extract 02: Fr, The Independent*

1. The trolling on DT political threads is as nothing when compared to the
2. viciousness seen on rugby union and cricket topics. The net is open to the entire
3. population of the world, and there are plenty of nasty people out there.

The poster in the above extract, Fr, explicitly orientates to other, salient (i.e. online) outgroups at lines 01-02. One group is mentioned ('DT' – another online newspaper), subdivided into three sections (political, rugby and cricket topics). In casually mentioning the rate and severity of trolling which occurs here, Fr may be understood to imply that trolling is an easily identifiable activity. Fr may also be taken to be implying that there is a hierarchy of severity of trolling, and that other online spaces suffer under a more severe form of trolling than does the Independent. This formulation serves to provide a number of outgroups and rhetorical others against which the Independent can favourably compare themselves.

FR broadens the scope of his comparison between lines 02-03. The population which online communities are able to draw from comprise the 'whole world'. Despite this, the population of the world does not all chose to frequent the same online spaces. Rather, they congregate in certain locations which allow individuals of a shared, common interest to interact with other individuals (the Independent or the DT). This may be seen as connecting with the definition of imagined communities as having arbitrary connections, as well as borders (Anderson, 2004).

13

Fr may be seen to seek to normalise trolling, to a degree through his assertion that the global population from which online fora draw their populations from has more than it's share of unpleasant individuals. The implication is that trolling is not a uniquely online problem. This will be discussed in more detail below.

The next extract is drawn from a British technology-focused tabloid newspaper. The extract presents three users interacting with each other directly, in order to collaboratively construct a specific point about the nature of trolling. In doing this, the posters also subtly alter the nature of trolling as it is posited by the first poster. As the extract represents three consecutive turns of 'talk', it has been split here into thee subsections.

3.2.2. Extract 03a: Anonymous Coward, the Register

1. Sad but true....

2. And as often as not they pretend to be Apple fanboys.

3. That way they take the piss out of everyone, fanboys included.

3.2.3. Extract 03b: Paddy, the Register

4. Re: Sad but true.... Mac havialism

5. So it seems I was not the only one to at first read the last of the bad traits as

6. Mac-havialism.

7. From: "... narcissism, and Machiavellianism"

3.2.4. Extract 03c: Keep Refrigerated, the Register

8. Re: Sad but true....

9. Yep... reading through that article I immediately thought of iTards/fanbois.

Taken together, the all parts of extract 03 demonstrate the nature of the imagined community which has formed on this newspaper comment thread. Here, posters are engaging in discussion with each other and singling out each others comments before response. The first lines of extracts 03b and 03c (lines 04 and 08) both begin with an automatic reiteration of the first line of extract 03a, indicating that these posts are direct responses to this post. As such, these posts can be understood as true 'conversational

14

turns'. These reiterations are necessary, as the poster who initiates this interaction does not provide a username. Instead, he takes the newspapers generic moniker 'Anonymous Coward'.

340   Extract 03a begins with an assessment of the nature of trolls, according to Anonymous Coward. Like the cuckoo, trolls masquerade as something they are not in order to infiltrate a given online community. Here, admirers of the technology company 'Apple' are cited as an example. The customer base for Apple is notoriously enthusiastic for the company's products (Roberts, 2005). This is something capitalised upon by trolls

345   and reflected in Anonymous Cowards assertion that trolls masquerade as 'fanboys' – a mildly derogatory term used to emphasis (and problemitise) the level of enthusiasm displayed for a given consumable. Having successfully passed as 'fanboys', trolls then proceed to aggravate everyone, including the group they are pretending to be members of (line 02).

350   Something interesting happens between extracts 03b and 03c however. Over several steps, 'fanboys' are gradually transformed into 'fanbois' – a more pejorative term. This transformation begins at lines 04 and 06 with a pun (Martin, 2010) transforming the personality trait of 'Machiavellianism' to 'Mac-havialism'. The pun here is based around 'having an (Apple) Mac (computer)', with the implication being that this brings

355   the individual a sense of (misplaced) superiority. The pun is reiterated once again at the end of the quote (line 07). This serves to underscore derogatory aspects of label, by assuring its association with the negative personality trait of Machiavellianism.

The escalation of the insult is completed in extract 03c. At line 09, 'fanboys' become 'iTards/fanbois'. The variant spelling of 'fanbois' here denotes a negative evalu-

360   ative judgement passed on to this group. This negative evaluation is reinforced by the concurrently applied label 'iTards'. The term 'iTards' contains a double-insult. Firstly, it is a play on the (outdated, pejorative) term 'retards', intended to imply that the Apple customer base is somewhat abnormal in its enthusiasm. Secondly, the typesetting of this insult follows that of the company itself, with a lower case 'i' preceding the

365   capitalised second letter of the word (in a manner akin to iPod's and iPhone's).

The level of interaction between posters described in this extract meets Jones (1997) criteria for a virtual settlement, showing as it does more than two participants not

15

only interacting on a thread, but working together to collaboratively construct meaning within their interaction (Condor, 2006). Users are able to influence each others understandings of the business at hand (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) , shaping and transforming the subject of the conversation. This is evident in the movement from the terms 'fanboy', to 'Mac havialism', 'iTard' and finally 'fanboi'.

At this point in the comment thread, posters are engaging in a locally situated discussion, constructing the meaning of the outgroup category 'Apple customer'. This construction shares many of the properties associated with the public construction of prejudice (Condor, 2006). Collaboration between speakers can be seen through the mutual influence posters exert upon each other, as they escalate their insults from 'fanboy' through to 'iTard'.

Anonymous Coward's initial point, that genuine fans of Apple suffer suffer too as they are not differentiated from trolls is seemingly not understood by the second poster, Paddy. Paddy seems instead to assume that the dark triad applies to Apple customers, rather than trolls masquerading as Apple customers.

The third poster, Keep Refrigerates escalates, rather than corrects this misunderstanding. Ironically, this may actually serve to underscore Anonymous Cowards assertion that Apple fans too suffer from this form of trolling, as they now share the negative traits displayed by the trolls as part of their craft.

Amongst the functions of public displays of prejudice is the marking of ones social identity, and the display of solidarity within the ingroup (Condor, 2006). Prejudice here is displayed against the outgroup (Apple) to solidify the ingroup.

This prejudice is displayed through the use of derogatory humour, reinforcing the distinction between the ingroup (readers of The Register) and the outgroup (Apple customers). Outgroup derogation promotes the positive social value of the ingroup (Cadinu & Reggiori, 2002), and is more likely when the outgroup is also from a relevant category (Branscombe & Wann, 1994). As the Register is a technology based tabloid, Apple consumers ('iTards') are a relevant outgroup against whom posters can compare (tacitly and favourably).

Finally for this extract, the use of the quotations (lines 04, 08) are necessary as initial poster does so anonymously. Quoting Anonymous Coward directly however

16

allows other thread members to identify which Anonymous Coward is being interacted with here, thus rescinds the users anonymity to a degree.

Extract 04, below, comes from the broadsheet newspaper Independent. In this extract, Opusfra is insinuating that another poster on the thread may be a troll. This is enacted cautiously, in order to allow plausible denial. The extract follows on directly from a comment made by Newsbot9.

3.2.5. Extract 04: Opusfra, the Independent

1. Newsbot9 I have seen your Disqus history and it is extremely unpleasant.
2. Does the article above not touch any of your nerve-endings?

Extract 04 once again shows a poster specifically interacting with another conversational partner (irrespective of the fact that this partner does not directly respond). Opusfra refers to their intended conversational partner by their user name – Newsbot9. Once again, this reference to a specific individual shows that they are not completely anonymous despite the fact that they do not post under their real name. As with Anonymous Coward in extract 03a, Newsbot9 is treated as an individual with their own personal accountability.

Extract 04 carries the implication of a shared community history being available through the 'Disqus' comment-hosting platform. This is important for the establishment of an imagined community, as it implies that not only does the online space endure over time, but so does membership of this online space, as Opusfra is able to review this shared history (Jones, 1997; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Gruzd et al., 2011).

Both Opusfra and Newsbot9 are aware of a shared history on the Independent's comment section, and are able to draw upon this shared history to develop common understandings. This shows an additional use of the shared history, when compared with extract 01. Whereas Arfur Sixpence was himself simply reminiscing about 'the good old days', Opusfra here mobilises the concept of a historical record, open to scrutiny so that others may also witness the history of the community.

In his evaluation of Newsbot9, Opusfra mobilises an Extreme Case Formulation (ECF) (Pomerantz, 1986). Typically, ECF's are used to legitimise a claim made by a speaker. Here, Opusfra claims that Newsbot9's comment history is as being 'extremely

17

unpleasant' (line 01). At line 02, this is used to insinuate that Newsbot9 themselves may be a troll.

What is interesting about this accusation of trolling is that it is presented very softly, in a manner which allows both posters plausible denial. Rather than mobilising a direct accusation, Opusfra instead provides an invitation for self-admission (one which is not taken up by Newsbot9).

Extracts 03 and 04 in particular serve to highlight the nature of interactions between posters in these imagined communities. Despite users real names not being known, posters are still singled out individually, and treated accordingly. In extract 03, posters use the ability to quote each other in order to differentiate this Anonymous Coward from any other Anonymous Coward who may be using the forum, with Keep Refrigerated in extract 03c quoting the subject line from extract 03a, even though he is replying to extract 03b. Opusfra, extract 04, has an easier time in singling out another poster as this poster (Newsbot9) has a unique username.

3.3. Humour

Humour is used to tie the communities together, through (for example) the creation and reinforcement of a shared emotional connection McMillan & Chavis (1986). The use of humour is rife in online spaces (see the use of irony in extract 01, and puns in extract 03). Humour may also derive from the presence of incongruity and unexpected outcomes – that which follows does not match that which precedes (Weaver, 2010). This form of humour is also present in the newspaper comment threads discussed here.

Humour need not derive from overt jokes. It may also derive from 'comicality' (Kotthoff, 1996). Comicality is humour derived from a context, situation, misunderstanding or other atypical set up. It is not necessarily dependent upon overt joke telling, and thus is not dependent upon their being a punchline for the payoff. This can be seen in extract 03, above, in the derogatory labels given to Apple fans – 'iTard'. This is a particularly good example as it follows Apple's capitalisation convention for the naming of its products with a lower case 'i' followed by an upper case letter. Unlike the pun on 'mac-havialism'. iTards does not rely on any overt features of traditional joke telling.

18

The following two extracts further demonstrate the use of humour in online newspaper threads, along with the manner in which posters tie this humour in with the history and sense of community of these online newspapers.

3.3.1. Extract 05: jandy sonviabison, the Independent

1. I don't remember you from the disqus days. We used to get our jocular racism
2. from a better class of poster back then.

Extract 05 displays a humorous acceptance of the presence of trolls in online spaces. As with extracts 01 and 04, it also includes an orientation to the common history of the newspaper comment thread. Indeed, as extract 05 is a reply to extract 01 (though separated from Arfur Sixpence by two other responses) it reinforces that posters to newspaper comment threads follow a common history. It also demonstrates that posters with a common history are capable of interacting with each other, reinforcing this common history between them.

A footing shift (Goffman, 1979) occurs immediately at line 01, as jandy sonviabison moves from stating that 'I' don't remember Arfur Sixpence to 'we' had a better class of racism. This shift from the singular to the collective serves to include both jandy sonviabison and Arfur Sixpence in his reminiscences. More pertinently, this shift also serves to distance jandy sonviabison from the accusation he makes of racism. It becomes a generic feature of the forum, rather than of this poster.

The manner in which jandy sonviabison describes this racism contains humour. There is an ironic incongruence between the terms 'jocular' and 'racism' at line 01 (Attardo, 2000). This jocular racism is a reference to the theme of disparagement of Canadians which reoccurs throughout this newspaper comment thread, as a feature of the nationality of the researchers (Buckels et al., 2014).

The use of the phrase 'jocular racism' juxtaposes the notion lighthearted joke-telling with the more serious notion of prejudice. Such mismatched juxtapositions are commonly regarded as humorous (Kotthoff, 1996). It is ambiguous however whether this should be understood to be mitigating the racism (using the softener 'jocular') or to be diminishing the humour (using the escalator 'racism')? Wherever the intentions of jandy sonviabison, the consequence here is that the racism is positioned as being

19

humorous rather than threatening. In turn, the trolling this racism represents is diminished.

Jandy sonviabison also makes reference to 'a better class of poster' (line 02). This serves to distance the notion of any posters necessarily being trolls, while also defending the 'jocular racism' from being interpreted as a form of trolling.

Extract 06 is seventh in a sequence of posts and replies. The first two lines flag this posts status as a response, repeating the title of the initial post to which Swarthy is responding (line 01), and a line from the comment posted immediately prior to this post (line 02).

3.3.2. Extract 06: Swarthy, the Register

1. Re: So, uhm...

2. *On a more serious note - this research is from the department of bleeding obvious*

3. Indeed. It has long been known that Trolls are the sadist people on t'Net. Even

4. sadder than the OS/2 developer community.

5. But trolling makes them into the happiest of sadists.

The quoted line (line 02) once again presents some irony, both in the original post it is taken from and in the post by Swarthy, presented here. The literal meaning of line 02 is to signal the end of humorous turns of conversation, and a return to serious business. However, the quoted poster does not adopt a serious turn of phrase following this statement, instead intimating that the article published by Buckels et al. (2014) is 'bleeding obvious'. Having quoted this, Swarthy himself goes on to tell a joke between lines 3-5.

Swarthy's comicality here is based upon deliberate misunderstanding. A wordplay is engaged in with the notions of being 'sad' (here meaning pathetic or unfashionable) and 'sadistic' (inflicting suffering on others) between lines 03-04. Swarthy frames their post as an agreement with prior discussions ('agreed'). The joke comes when 'sadist' is elaborated upon – even sadder than the OS/2 developer community.

This may be a particularly apt joke, as trolls do enjoy inflicting pain on others and indeed have been found to be sadists (Bishop, 2013b; Buckels et al., 2014). Trolls

20

explicit aim is to aggravate other internet users in order to disrupt online communications (Binns, 2012; Shachaf & Hara, 2010). Such an activity could also be seen as an unfashionable waste of time. More pertinent however is that the butt of this joke is once again Apple customers, as OS/2 is an Apple computer operating system. Taken in conjunction with extract 03, this reinforces Apple customers as a relevant outgroup for this technology-focused tabloid newspaper.

Swarthy finished the joke at line 05 with another incongruous juxtaposition. Having conflated sadness with sadism, Swarthy posits that internet trolls are the happiest of sadists, mobilising the incompatible mental states of happiness and sadness.

The joke then makes fun of a common, established outgroup. In doing so, it helps solidify the more positive identity of the ingroup through the interaction on the thread, and through a mutual, reoccurring dislike of the outgroup.

3.4. Online-offline

Posters to these newspaper comment threads make a distinction between online and offline behaviours. In doing so, they delineate and reinforce the border for their imagined community. It is not simply that there are different online spaces. One can, if one wishes, leave the internet entirely and with that cease to be a member of these social worlds. This was suggested in extract 02, and the analysis which follows further reinforces this point.

3.4.1. Extract 07: Simonsays, The Independent

1. Everyone is a troll. The odd ones out are those who can't handle anonymous

2. namecalling. Instead of crying about it, log off and get on with your life.

Extract 07 begins with a normalisation of trolling. Simonsays boldly asserts that 'everyone is a troll' at line 01. This may be compared with extract 02, taken from the same source, where Fr simply stated that there are a lot of 'nasty people out there'. From here, Simonsays states that what is unusual is not trolling, but rather being unable to cope with being trolled (lines 01-02). Trolling is also here reasserted as an anonymous activity, though as has been shown above, anonymity does not necessarily lead

21

to deindividuation, as individual posters are still orientated to by their user name, and imbued with personality traits and characteristics.

Interestingly, at line 02, the activity which trolls engage in is downgraded from 'trolling' to the much less contentious 'name calling'. This less serious activity may be invoked here in order to help Simonsays justify his claim that 'everyone is a troll', as a less serious and more broadly defined behaviour would have more inclusive boundaries.

Line 02 finishes with Simonsays proffering a solution – logging off and getting on with life, rather than crying about the trolling. Reducing the effects of trolling to simply 'crying about it' serves to trivialise the phenomenon, at the same time further downplaying the seriousness of the activity in a manner not consummate with current public understandings of the effects of trolling.

The solution posited is also simple. In logging off the internet, one will then be freed from the name calling, and will be able to get on with life. This may be contrasted with extract 02, where Fr implied that the undesirable elements of the internet were gathered from the world in general, and that as such were simply to be expected.

The final extract demonstrates one posters perception of the Internets ability to accentuate negative characteristics, leading to troll-like behaviours. The first two lines of the extract are taken from previous posters, signalling that this extract is a reply. This serves to frame the extract as a reply to previous posters, and thus as part of an ongoing interaction between posters. Interestingly, line 02 appears to have been edited or inserted by the poster, Fajensen.

3.4.2. Extract 08: Fajensen. The Register

1. *Re: To summarise ....*

2. *>>"the higher their scores for each Dark Tetrad trait except narcissism."*

3. Ah, but are such people simply more prone to post online a lot, or does spending

4. a lot of time engaging in discussions online increase those traits.

5. I think the latter. I believe I've become more vicious and Machiavellian from

6. spending a lot of time online last year. Hopefully reversible now I'm on the

7. Internet less again.

22

The quote at line 02 serves to contextualise Fajensen's post here. Fajensen is responding to the notion of the Dark Tetrad, and it's influence in encouraging individuals to post trollish material online. At line 03, Fajensen seeks to question the nature of cause-and-effect posited by the dark tetrad.

At line 05, Fajensen speculates that it is in fact the internet which causes negative personality traits, thus leading to trolling rather than negative personality traits causing trolling on the internet. This is accompanied by a shift in the tone of Fajensen's post. He no longer speaks in general terms, but rather adopts the personal pronoun, to indicate his own personal experience as the source of his claim. This experience is posited as a belief, rather than as something with the status of fact (in contrast with the position reported in the article by Buckels et al. 2014). In constructing this position as a belief, Fajensen closes it to rigorous scrutiny. It does not have to hold the credibility of a scientific position and while it can still be debated, it is not necessary to test the evidence.

It is Fajensen's stated belief that he has become more vicious and Machiavellian simply through his use of the internet. It is also his stated expectation that spending time offline will help to 'restore' his personality.

From this extract, we can see that it is not necessarily anonymity, but rather the internet per se which is cited as the cause of undesirable personality traits. Furthermore, this negativity can be cultivated through interaction online, and dissipated through reduction of online activity.

4. Discussion

Past research into online trolling has tended to focus on definitions, and on potential ways to reduce or control trolling. Typically, research has drawn upon forum users own perspectives when asked, as well as the perspectives of self-confessed trolls. The present paper is novel in that it draws its understanding of online behaviours from data collected in situ. Data has been harvested from websites not explicitly for research purposes, but rather based upon users own, naturally occurring interactions. This paper has sought not only to consider who is connected with whom, but also how this

communication occurs, and how meanings are constructed between speakers, and how communities arise in situ, in comment threads, through interactions between posters.

A discursive analysis of individuals who post to online newspaper comment threads has revealed complex patterns of interactions from users in each online newspaper looked at. Although it is not their avowed intention, online newspaper comment threads have been shown to provide fertile enough ground for the development of imagined communities. The conditions necessary for these communities to arise seem not to include a requirement for reciprocity in allowing users to follow and be followed, to friend or like each other. Rather, all that seems to be required is a means for users to interact with each other – to post and comment upon each others posts. Using this, posters are able to meet the criteria for imagined communities (Anderson, 2004), for virtual settlements (Jones, 1997), and the criteria for an SoC (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Individuals are able to orientate to such features as their continuity of membership (the same posters visiting and commenting on the site over time), and their shared history on the site (extracts 01; 04; 05).

In being able to interact with each other, individuals also display the ability to influence each other (extract 03). Posters to these newspaper threads communicate collaboratively, exerting influence over each other in order to make specific points about their own and other online groups (extracts 02; 03; 06).

Online newspaper comment threads may be considered one of the least likely places for imagined communities to form. From the outside, it would seem such online spaces lack any of the necessary elements for interaction. They lack even the asymmetric network building capabilities of microblogging platforms such as Twitter. The only individuals who are able to create original content for the sites are the journalists working for the newspaper. Other users can simply comment upon this content. There are no formal mechanisms for following, befriending or even acknowledging other users of the online space. Indeed, there is no formal mechanism for even interacting with other users of the online space. Individuals can post messages to the comments section below published articles, but they can only do so at the sufferance of the host newspaper. If their host decided the comments have outstayed their welcome, they may be

moderated, removed or on some articles, comments may not be allowed in the first place.

There is no way to establish a users 'profile' – to give biographical information on a given poster, such that other readers may know a little more about the individual, their interests, hobbies beliefs and opinions. Beyond their user name, posters are essentially anonymous. Yet despite not necessarily having to use their real names for their usernames, posters still orientate to each other as individuals, with motivations and personalities (extracts 01; 04). Posters also delineate borders, establishing the existence of ingroups and outgroups (extracts 02; 03; 06).

Despite the limitations of newspaper comment threads, posters still manage to forge imagined communities in these online spaces.

Posters do not treat each other as anonymous individuals. Even when all site users are posting under the username 'Anonymous Coward', posters interact with, and differentiate, each other through replying to each other and quoting liberally (table 02).

Posters to online newspaper comment threads then may be understood as being only pseudo-anonymous. Their real names may be unknown, unless the user chose their real name as their pseudonym. However, posters treat each username as belonging to a discrete individual with their own characteristics and traits.

Trolling has been associated with suicidal ideation and self-harm in off-line life (Bauman et al., 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Cyberbullying is increasingly a feature of social concern for the damage it can inflict. However, posters here have been shown to draw a distinction between online and offline activities, though this distinction seems the most problematic aspect of posters constructions.

Posters use of the distinction between online and offline behaviour seems inconsistent. Posters connect antisocial online activities with offline behaviours, suggesting that such behaviour is reflective of the viciousness of wide range of the 'nasty people' who exist in the world (extract 02). Yet these online activities are also presented as being less consequential than activities which occur offline. A suggested solution to those who are concerned at the trolling they receive online is to simply log off the internet (extract 07). Contradicting both of these extracts, it is also suggested that time spent on the internet aggravates a persons anti-social tendencies though time spent offline can

25

reverse these ill effects (extract 08).

5. Conclusion

The above analysis has show that, contrary to popular opinion, online interactions are not conducted in a truly anonymous fashion, and as such are unlikely to lead to deindividuation. This is the case even when there is no requirement for posters to use their real names online, as opposed to using pseudonyms, posters still orientate to each other as being individuals with unique personalities. This orientation allows imagined communities to arise naturally even on newspaper comment threads.

Mikal et al. (2015) reports that deindividuation is positively associated with group identification. The more deindivdiuated a person is, the more they identify with a given group. However, this data was collected from self-report surveys, rather than from an investigation of the actual behaviours exhibited by group members. The analysis users online interactions presented here suggests that the conditions in online spaces such as newspaper comment threads are not necessarily conducive for deindividuation to occur, as posters do not treat each other as if they are anonymous.

These imagined communities form around posters understanding of the presence of common ingroups and outgroups, and around shared notions of mutual influence and the common history of the online space. This has been demonstrated through the discursive analysis of posters interactions with each other.

The above analysis has demonstrated that through their interactions, posters do indeed seek to self-regulate their online communities. However, contrary to the suggestions by Binns (2012); Lampe et al. (2014), this behaviour may not serve to provide a social norm of acceptable behaviour. Extract 01 demonstrates that posters claim to engage in trolling the trolls, which may act to establish a norm of anti-social behaviour on the comment thread. Extract 04 also serves to highlight the difficulty in identifying whom trolls are in online contexts.

Nevertheless, online spaces have been shown to display a high sense of camaraderie and connectedness between users. Despite the difficulty exhibited in extract 04, posters orientate to trolls as being a social glue which holds online communities together by

26

giving posters something to rally around (see extract 01; 02; 04; 06; 07). These imagined communities show online members do not treat each other as being anonymous – even when posters real names and identities are unknown. As such, anonymity cannot be a causative factor of trolling behaviours.

The present paper advances the field of online communications by showing that even on online sites which lack the infrastructure to support the development of online communities, online communities form. The implication then is that online communities are important and desired and a more sustaining infrastructure should be put in place in online spaces such as newspaper websites. Creating such infrastructures may be instrumental in creating social norms of politeness. This might provide a more effective means of managing antisocial behaviour online. Extract 03 shows how a relatively straightforward misunderstanding can in fact lead to a fruitful communicative collaboration between posters. Extrapolating from this experience, if posters accept the discursive contributions of trolls on face value as genuine attempts to communicate an idea and respond in kind, then trolls attempts to draw users into fruitless debate will have resulted in meaningful debate instead. Trolls may thus find their purpose frustrated and thus cease their anti-social activities.

References

Acquisti, A., & Gross, R. (2006). Imagined communities: Awareness, information sharing, and privacy on the facebook. In *Privacy enhancing technologies* 6th International Workshop, PET 2006, Cambridge, UK, June 28-30, 2006, Revised Selected Papers (pp. 36–58). Springer. doi:10.1007/11957454_3.

Adams, A. (2015). *Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015 (15/63)*. URL: http://www.parliament.nz/en-nz/pb/legislation/bills/00DBHOH_BILL12843_1/harmful-digital-communications-bill.

Agichtein, E., Castillo, C., Donato, D., Gionis, A., & Mishne, G. (2008). Finding high-quality content in social media. In *Proceedings of the 2008 International Conference on Web Search and Data Mining* (pp. 183–194). ACM. doi:`10.1145/1341531.1341557`.

Anderson, B. (2004). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.

Attardo, S. (2000). Irony as relevant inappropriateness. *Journal of pragmatics*, *32*, 793–826. doi:`10.1016/S0378-2166(99)00070-3`.

Ayal, S., & Gino, F. (2012). Honest rationales for dishonest behavior. In M. Mikulincer, & P. R. A. Shaver (Eds.), *The social psychology of morality: Exploring the causes of good and evil* Herzliya series on personality and social psychology (pp. 149–166). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association. doi:`10.1037/13091-008`.

Bauman, S., Toomey, R. B., & Walker, J. L. (2013). Associations among bullying, cyberbullying, and suicide in high school students. *Journal of Adolescence*, *36*, 341–350. doi:`10.1016/j.adolescence.2012.12.001`.

Bergstrom, K. (2011). "dont feed the troll": Shutting down debate about community expectations on reddit. com. *First Monday*, *16*. URL: `http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/viewArticle/3498/3029`.

Binns, A. (2012). DON'T FEED THE TROLLS! Managing troublemakers in magazines' online communities. *Journalism Practice*, *6*, 547–562. doi:`10.1080/17512786.2011.648988`.

Bishop, J. (2012). The psychology of trolling and lurking: the role of defriending and gamification for increasing participation in online communities using seductive narratives. In H. Li (Ed.), *Virtual community participation and motivation: Cross-disciplinary theories* (pp. 160–176). Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference. doi:`10.4018/978-1-4666-0312-7.ch010`.

Bishop, J. (2013a). The art of trolling law enforcement: A review and model for implementing 'flame trolling' legislation enacted in Great Britain (1981–2012). *International Review of Law, Computers & Technology*, *27*, 301–318. doi:`10.1080/13600869.2013.796706`.

Bishop, J. (2013b). The effect of de-individuation of the internet troller on criminal procedure implementation: An interview with a hater. *International Journal of Cyber Criminology*, *7*, 28–48. URL: `www.cybercrimejournal.com/Bishop2013janijcc.pdf`.

Bishop, J. (2014). Representations of 'trolls' in mass media communication: a review of media-texts and moral panics relating to 'internet trolling'. *International Journal of Web Based Communities*, *10*, 7–24. doi:`10.1504/IJWBC.2014.058384`.

Branscombe, N. R., & Wann, D. L. (1994). Collective self-esteem consequences of outgroup derogation when a valued social identity is on trial. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *24*, 641–657. doi:`10.1002/ejsp.2420240603`.

Buckels, E. E., Trapnell, P. D., & Paulhus, D. L. (2014). Trolls just want to have fun. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *67*, 97–102. doi:`10.1016/j.paid.2014.01.016`.

Butler, D., Kift, S., & Campbell, M. (2009). Cyber bullying in schools and the law: Is there an effective means of addressing the power imbalance. *eLaw Journal: Murdoch University Electronic Journal of Law*, *16*, 84–114. URL: `http://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/elajrnl16&div=7&id=&page=`.

Cadinu, M., & Reggiori, C. (2002). Discrimination of a low-status outgroup: The role of ingroup threat. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *32*, 501–515. doi:`10.1002/ejsp.105`.

Cho, D., & Acquisti, A. (2013). The more social cues, the less trolling? An empirical study of online commenting behavior. In *Proceedings of the Twelfth Workshop on*

the Economics of Information Security (WEIS 2013). URL: `http://repository.cmu.edu/heinzworks/341/`.

Clark, H. H., & Gerrig, R. J. (1984). On the pretense theory of irony. *Journal of experimental Psychology*, *113*, 121–126. doi:`10.1037/0096-3445.113.1.121`.

Coles, B. A., & West, M. (In press). Trolling the trolls: Online forum users constructions of the nature and properties of trolling. *Computers in Human Behavior*, . doi:`10.1016/j.chb.2016.02.070`.

Condor, S. (2006). Public prejudice as collaborative accomplishment: Towards a dialogic social psychology of racism. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, *16*, 1–18. doi:`10.1002/casp.845`.

Dhar, V., & Chang, E. A. (2009). Does chatter matter? the impact of user-generated content on music sales. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *23*, 300–307. doi:`10.1016/j.intmar.2009.07.004`.

Ethics Committee of the British Psychological Society (2009). Code of ethics and conduct: Guidance published by the ethics committee of the British Psychological Society. URL: `http://www.bps.org.uk/what-we-do/ethics-standards/ethics-standards`.

Goffman, E. (1979). Footing. *Semiotica*, *25*, 1–30. doi:`10.1515/semi.1979.25.1-2.1`.

Griffin, C. (2007). Being dead and being there: research interviews, sharing hand cream and the preference for analysing 'naturally occurring data'. *Discourse Studies*, *9*, 246–269. doi:`10.1177/1461445607075340`.

Gruzd, A., Wellman, B., & Takhteyev, Y. (2011). Imagining twitter as an imagined community. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *55*, 1294–1318. doi:`10.1177/0002764211409378`.

Hermida, A., & Thurman, N. (2008). A clash of cultures: The integration of user-generated content within professional journalistic frameworks at british newspaper websites. *Journalism Practice*, *2*, 343–356. doi:`10.1080/17512780802054538`.

Hinduja, S., & Patchin, J. W. (2010). Bullying, cyberbullying, and suicide. *Archives of Suicide Research*, *14*, 206–221. doi:10.1080/13811118.2010.494133.

Hogg, M. A., Abrams, D., Otten, S., & Hinkle, S. (2004). The social identity perspective intergroup relations, self-conception, and small groups. *Small Group Research*, *35*, 246–276. doi:10.1177/1046496404263424.

Jones, Q. (1997). Virtual-communities, virtual settlements & cyber-archaeology: A theoretical outline. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *3*, 0. doi:10.1111/j.1083-6101.1997.tb00075.x.

Kim, J., & Park, H. S. (2011). The effect of uniform virtual appearance on conformity intention: Social identity model of deindividuation effects and optimal distinctiveness theory. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *27*, 1223–1230. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2011.01.002.

Kotthoff, H. (1996). Impoliteness and conversational joking: On relational politics. *Folia Linguistica*, *30*, 299–326. doi:10.1515/flin.1996.30.3-4.299.

Lamerichs, J., & Te Molder, H. F. (2003). Computer-mediated communication: From a cognitive to a discursive model. *New Media & Society*, *5*, 451–473. doi:10.1177/146144480354001.

Lampe, C., Zube, P., Lee, J., Park, C. H., & Johnston, E. (2014). Crowdsourcing civility: A natural experiment examining the effects of distributed moderation in online forums. *Government Information Quarterly*, *31*, 317–326. doi:10.1016/j.giq.2013.11.005.

MacKinnon, R., & Zuckerman, E. (2012). Dont feed the trolls. *Index on Censorship*, *41*, 14–24. doi:10.1177/0306422012467413.

Martin, R. A. (2010). *The psychology of humor: An integrative approach*. Burlington, MA: Elsevier Academic Press.

McMillan, D. W., & Chavis, D. M. (1986). Sense of community: A definition and theory. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *14*, 6–23. doi:10.1002/1520-6629(198601)14:1<6::AID-JCOP2290140103>3.0.CO;2-I.

31

Mikal, J. P., Rice, R. E., Kent, R. G., & Uchino, B. N. (2015). 100 million strong: A case study of group identification and deindividuation on imgur.com. *New Media & Society*, (p. 1461444815588766). doi:`10.1177/1461444815588766`.

O'Connor, P. (2008). User-generated content and travel: A case study on tripadvisor. com. In *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2008* Proceedings of the International Conference in Innsbruck, Austria, 2008 (pp. 47–58). Springer. doi:`10.1007/978-3-211-77280-5_5`.

Pomerantz, A. (1986). Extreme case formulations: A way of legitimizing claims. *Human Studies*, *9*, 219–229. doi:`10.1007/BF00148128`.

Potter, J. (2012). Discourse analysis and discursive psychology. In H. Cooper, P. M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K. J. Sher (Eds.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol 2: Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological* (pp. 119–138). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association. doi:`10.1037/13620-008`.

Potter, J., & Hepburn, A. (2007). Life is out there a comment on griffin. *Discourse Studies*, *9*, 276–282. doi:`10.1177/1461445607075348`.

Reyes, A., Rosso, P., & Buscaldi, D. (2012). From humor recognition to irony detection: The figurative language of social media. *Data & Knowledge Engineering*, *74*, 1–12. doi:`10.1016/j.datak.2012.02.005`.

Roberts, K. (2005). *Lovemarks: The future beyond brands*. New York: PowerHouse Books.

Select Committee on Communications, T. (2014). *Social media and criminal offences*. London: The Stationery Office Limited.

Shachaf, P., & Hara, N. (2010). Beyond vandalism: Wikipedia trolls. *Journal of Information Science*, *36*, 357–370. doi:`10.1177/0165551510365390`.

Shin, J. (2008). Morality and internet behavior: A study of the internet troll and its relation with morality on the internet. In *Society for Information Technology &*

32

Teacher Education International Conference (pp. 2834–2840). volume 2008. URL: http://www.editlib.org/noaccesspresent/27652/46654/.

Suler, J. (2004). The online disinhibition effect. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, *7*, 321–326. doi:10.1089/1094931041291295.

865 Thurman, N. (2008). Forums for citizen journalists? adoption of user generated content initiatives by online news media. *New Media & Society*, *10*, 139–157. doi:10.1177/1461444807085325.

Weaver, S. (2010). Developing a rhetorical analysis of racist humour: Examining anti-black jokes on the internet. *Social Semiotics*, *20*, 537–555. doi:10.1080/
870 10350330.2010.513188.