

**STICKS and STONES MAY BREAK MY BONES BUT WORDS WILL NEVER HURT
ME...UNTIL I SEE THEM: A QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF TROLLS in
RELATION to THE GRICEAN MAXIMS and (IM)POLITE VIRTUAL SPEECH ACTS**

by

Angelika C. Smith-Jones

Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Strategic Media

School of Communication and the Arts /Liberty University

2023

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ABSTRACT

The troll is one of the most obtrusive and disruptive bad actors on the internet. Unlike other bad actors, the troll interacts on a more personal and intimate level with other internet users. Social media platforms, online communities, comment boards, and chatroom forums provide them with this opportunity. What distinguishes these social provocateurs from other bad actors are their virtual speech acts and online behaviors. These acts aim to incite anger, shame, or frustration in others through the weaponization of words, phrases, and other rhetoric. Online trolls come in all forms and use various speech tactics to insult and demean their target audiences. The goal of this research is to investigate trolls' virtual speech acts and the impact of troll-like behaviors on online communities. Using Gricean maxims and politeness theory, this study seeks to identify common vernacular, word usage, and other language behaviors that trolls use to divert the conversation, insult others, and possibly affect fellow internet users' mental health and well-being.

Keywords: troll(s), bad actors online, social media, flaming, toxic rhetoric, online disinhibition, cyberbully, trolling, linguistic patterns, speech acts, communication tactics

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my seven grandchildren: Aaliyah, Azalea, Arrington, Selah, Kalyani, Zuri, and Zadok, as well as any that have not yet been born. One of my wildest aspirations was for each of you to have a family member who attained one of the highest educational milestones. Use this dissertation as motivation to excel in all your endeavors and achieve your highest educational, professional, and personal objectives. I would like to extend a heartfelt *"Thank You"* to my husband for bearing with my late nights, papers, books, research scattered all over the house and bed, and me typing throughout the night when I should have been sleeping. I would like to thank my baby sister Bern for keeping me sane throughout this process with her humor and being there for me when I thought I lost the first three chapters of my work. I extend my deepest appreciation and dedication to my mother, Mary F. Wilkinson. She introduced me to a world filled with awe-inspiring wonders, challenges, continued development, and her nuggets of wisdom regarding education and how to survive the journey of life. I would like to thank my sister-in-law, Lola, for keeping me balanced with brief shopping breaks and my closest confidante, Barbara for the late-night conversations that provided me with much comfort.

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Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my three children, Ariel, A.J., and Ashlei. I want this accomplishment to serve as a source of pride, encouragement, and a reminder that it is never too late to pursue your ambitions. The sky is the limit when it comes to your desires.

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List of Abbreviations

Aggressive Linguistic Patterns (AP)

Conversational Implicature(s) (CI)

Computer Mediated Communication (CMI)

Deceptive Linguistic Patterns (DeP)

Dismissive Linguistic Patterns (DiP)

Facebook (FB)

Face-negotiation theory (FNT)

Graphics Interchange Format (GIF)

Grice's Maxims (GM)

Hyperbolic Linguistic Patterns (HP)

Internet of Things (IoT)

In Real Life (IRL)

Non-Governmental Organization(s) (NGOs)

Personal Attack Linguistic Patterns (PA)

Social Networking Site (SNS)

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This qualitative content analysis investigates the escalating problem that trolls, a specific type of bad actor, poses in online communication. In online forums, trolls use language as a weapon, negatively impacting the civility of those forums and the emotional well-being of other participants. This insidious behavior threatens the future of mediated communication as technology advances toward virtual social networking becoming a norm. The objective of this study was to identify, extract, and comprehend the communication roles and behaviors of internet trolls from the perspectives of Gricean maxims and politeness theory. Grice's maxims of conversation are a collection of principles that illustrate how individuals communicate when they seek to be fully understood by others (Fahmi, 2018). The maxims are the guiding principles to make communication as effective as possible (Lindblom, 2001). Politeness theory holds that when interacting with others, tact and diplomacy should be used (Roos et al., 2022; Ye, 2019).

This research seeks to develop a better understanding of internet troll behavior and the strategies they use in socially mediated communication. Internet trolls use virtual speech acts to intimidate other users. These speech acts have the propensity to lead to extreme behaviors (D'cruz, 2019; Guadagno & Guttieri, 2021). The effects of these debilitating and manipulative communication strategies may extend beyond social media into courts of public opinion. Specifically, such communication can foster a sense of uncertainty, misinformation, and diminished human interaction (Mölder & Shiraev, 2021). A troll uses words, phrases, and atrocious online behaviors as ammunition to shock and demean. Such acts may prove detrimental to the human psyche. Words have tremendous power. They have the propensity to cure, devastate, save, uplift, deflate, and kill. Unconscious word priming influences both pro- and antisocial behaviors (Sapolsky, 2017). Identifying and analyzing these speech acts, as proposed

by this study, are the first steps toward resolving this online phenomenon. The first chapter of this research study provides an overview of bad actors on the internet. It focuses on how trolls communicate to conduct specific malevolent actions in addition to the historical context of this phenomenon. The chapter also discusses current academic research on internet trolls' communication styles in socially mediated settings. In the overview, the researcher summarizes the parallels between computer-mediated and socially mediated communication and the phenomena of bad actors on the internet. This section provides background regarding trolls, including their characteristics, online behaviors, and other relevant factors. The problem statement, purpose statement, research questions, and definitions conclude the first chapter.

Overview

As social and relational beings, humans have always needed to connect. Communication laid the foundation for developing a self-sufficient society as a conduit for achieving that goal. The evolution of mediated communication has proven to be an indispensable tool for forging new relationships and keeping humans abreast of one another. The features of mediated communication are essential to enhancing human ecology (Gambino et al., 2020).

Communication is critical to human ecology, which studies how individuals relate to each other due to differences in status, occupation, distance, time, or culture. Human ecology engages concepts, ideas, and techniques from the disciplines like anthropology, sociology, biology, economic history, and archaeology (Ingold, 2021; Sutton & Anderson, 2020). Mediated communication further enhances human interaction (Milton, 2020).

Person-to-person interaction is vital to promoting human ecology, and communication or communicative acts facilitate utility and functionality in human interaction (Altheide, 2020; Foth & Hearn, 2007; Lievrouw & Finn, 2019; Santarossa et al., 2018). The earliest cave etchings, the

first letters mailed, and the invention of the television demonstrate how mediated communications allows humans to connect regardless of geographical distance. It has been an ever-developing process, paving the way to becoming a globalized society. The term "mediated communication" refers to any face-to-face conversation in which a technical medium is introduced (Gambino et al., 2020). This includes interpersonal mediated communication, such as telephone conversations, letters, newspapers, informative publications, and e-mail; media-simulated interpersonal communication, which includes par asocial interactions and broadcast-teleparticipatory communication (radio talk shows and podcasts); personal-computer interpersonal communication; and *unicommunication* which entails t-shirt, bumper stickers, and yard signs (Cathcart & Gumpert, 2009). Without mediated communication, humankind would not have realized its fullest potential. Mediated communication seamlessly forged its way into the computerized pathways of web 1.0 technology development, thereby serving as the precursor to what is now known as computer-mediated communications beginning in the 1980s.

Web 1.0 to Web 3.0 and the Internet of Things

The expansion of mediated communications, facilitated by web 1.0 to 3.0, has positively and negatively affected society. Although these advanced technologies have yielded gains, their downsides continue to substantially impact the communication that fosters societal peace (Mansell & Tremblay, 2013; Kavanagh, 2019). Once the infrastructures were in place, the primary innovation of the internet as web 1.0 was enabling information and data to be sent and reproduced around the globe for little to no cost (Zrixes, 2021). The rapid growth of the internet and World Wide Web did not come without growing pains in human communication. To genuinely appreciate this growth, it is vital to comprehend how web 1.0 and succeeding

technologies evolved into the current internet of things (IoT), which provides many of the amenities and deficiencies in computer-mediated interactions that people enjoy or endure.

It is necessary to trace the evolution of web platform infrastructure from the First Wave, web 1.0, to the Third Wave, web. 3.0. Web 1.0 was a static information source in which users rarely interacted with web pages. Due to the restricted number of services and forums available to internet users, trolling was at an all-time low. During the initial decades of web 1.0's existence, its capabilities were limited but nonetheless exciting since society was in the preliminary stages of acceptance.

The newly connected world, on the cusp of global scale, was envisioned as an unrestricted civic forum: a place where divergent perspectives, ideas, and debates, albeit with limited reach, could constructively converge (Rainie et al., 2017). Growth was modest, but the future held immense promise. Towards the end of web 1.0, the continuously expanding communication technologies began to draw an increasing number of users. Alongside it, unanticipated problems began to emerge in online forums. Namely, increasing occurrences of impolite speech sparked civic unrest. Academics, industry leaders, and those in the burgeoning cyber security field grew concerned. Numerous experts have warned that incivility and manipulation on the internet will persist and potentially worsen (Cooke, 2019; Letter, 2012; Poje, 2011). They feared the fragmentation of social media into AI-monitored and regulated safe spaces and free-for-all zones (Gehl, 2011; Kynäslähti et al., 2008; Rainie et al., 2017; Yeo, 2015). Others were concerned that as Web 1.0 evolved into Web 2.0, the technology would be incapable of facilitating the free exchange of ideas and become a threat to one's privacy (Choudhary, 2022; Fuchs, 2010; Song, 2010).

Web 2.0, also known as the Second Wave of the internet, was a social and interactive network experience that promoted exponential user participation (Case, 2017). This development in computer-based human relationships shed light on an additional rising issue in web 2.0: the escalation of incivilities in rhetoric and online aggression. This civil turmoil took the form of online trolls and other malicious actors. Due to the novelty of Web 1.0 and the transition into Web 2.0, issues and challenges were inevitable. Case (2017) explains that Web 2.0 was about building on top of the internet. However, Web 2.0 had limitations, like any other emerging technology. Similar to its predecessor, Web 1.0, the development of Web 2.0 was overhyped in the short term but eventually underestimated (Nath, 2022; Ridley, 2017; Topholt, 2022). However, this is a normal process. It takes time, talent, and resources to develop innovative technologies and mature the industry toward their true potential (Lee et al., 2018; Oztemel & Gursev, 2018; Zrixes, 2021). In the interim, trolling in online discussion forums gained momentum and persisted well into the beginning of web 3.0.

Society is well into Web 3.0, and trolling has evolved into an even more prevailing problem. As the Internet and the Internet of Things (IoT) have improved human interaction, it has created countless opportunities for people to connect (Greengard, 2021). Because Web 3.0 gave people more ways to dialogue with each other, trolling was more likely to happen (Stoiciu, 2020). One group of scholars, however, suggests that the problem of trolling is not worsening because of increased ways to connect. Rather, they emphasize a lack of proactive or corrective measures to deter trolling during the Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 phase (McDonough Dolmaya & Del Mar Sánchez Ramos, 2020; Korpál & Scott, 2022; Tsekeris, 2019). Unfortunately, the shortcomings of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0, in conjunction with an increase in human connection, have exacerbated the emergence of trolling in the Web 3.0 age. Web 3.0 has changed how

websites are built and caused people to interact with them in a more immersive manner (Kerner & Gillis, 2022). Web 3.0 encompasses the IoT which made mediated communication more robust and functional to the end-users of these technologies. This evolution occurred at the height and growing adoption of computer-mediated communication and eventually to socially mediated communication (Nitsch et al., 2022; Reeves et al., 2021; Yasin, 2020). Due to the IoT's sophisticated expansion, the resilience of elements that promote rich human connection has grown (Sadiku et al., 2019). The internet has rapidly evolved from a static platform for merely receiving and disseminating information to one that now has extensive social networking capabilities. It has profoundly changed how people engage with one another.

On Computer-Mediated Communication

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is an umbrella term (Cleveland, 2020) that encompasses various forms of discourse that make communication visible to others by using networked computers (Treem et al., 2020). Since its inception, computer-mediated communication has taken the form of instant messaging, feed-style posting, or voice and video calls between individuals. Using networked computers, CMC was once facilitated by email, internet relay chats (IRC), text-based electronic communications, message boards, video conferencing, and chat rooms. Nonetheless, the ongoing innovation of mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets, has bolstered CMC more profoundly (Carr, 2020; Chilton & McHaney, 2017; Cleveland, 2020; Militello, 2021).

CMC involves synchronous or asynchronous communication channels that may be one-to-one, bi-directional, or multi-directional exchanges of text, audio, or video through networked computers (Lee & Oh, 2015). The increased adoption and use of personal computers, and the

evolution of mobile phones into smartphones in the 1980s facilitated the spread of computer-mediated communication systems in contemporary culture (Zhu et al., 2019).

CMC technologies catalyzed the further break down of geographical barriers, allowing for faster paced communication-based human collaboration regardless of the most extreme distances (Bleakley et al., 2021; Li, 2019; York, 2019). With the aid of technology, society has been able to share dialogue, store data, copy information, and instantaneously transmit data to one another at minimal or no cost for recreational, business, or educational purposes (Beattie et al., 2020; Holohan & Garg, 2005; Meyer, 2009). Due to this technological feat of CMC, individuals can exchange ideas globally, promote social justice, and strengthen relational bonds in society by cultivating and growing economic opportunities (Lin et al., 2019; Watkin & Conway, 2022).

In the transition from web 1.0 to web 2.0, society experienced a richer sense of connection as it moved away from exclusively relying on personal computers to obtain esoteric senses of relevance and immediacy. It moved toward establishing virtual presences and unique personas that could seamlessly transcend within the algorithms of the World Wide Web (Taylor et al., 2019; Wragg & Barnes, 2021). In what was then known as cyberspace, the creation of virtual identifiers and handles allowed people to materialize and stake out their claims in a virtual world (Freeman & Maloney, 2021; Michalkiewicz-Kadziela & Milczarek, 2021). It was during the Second Wave that social networking began to take shape.

Users began to forge identities and construct ideal personifications of themselves in a whole new world: the virtual one (Bauman & May, 2019; McNeil, 2020). The formation of online identities was made possible with early social networking sites (SNS), such as AOL chat rooms and online games like *Second Life*, which encouraged users to adopt distinctive

identifying handles for themselves (Hall, 2020; McNeil, 2020; Rowlett, 2019; Turkle, 2017). The invention of *handles* has significantly increased a user's reach in a virtual environment. This affordance is a complementary dynamic to the Internet-based endeavor to promote a more robust social tele-and-media presence in CMC (Lowenthal & Dennen, 2020; Noumeur & Idid, 2019; Xu & Liao, 2019; Zhou et al., 2021). The world has become more social because of digital media's emergence as a primary tool for fostering human connection, and absolute immersion in the technology options available to society to achieve this (Alinejad, 2019; DeNardis, 2020; Horst & Miller, 2020). For human connection to truly come to fruition, trolling must be eradicated.

The fundamental idea of social networks has grown thanks to the computer. The nexus of the phenomena of telepresence stemmed from the earliest usage of mediated communication to CMC (Maiorani, 2021). The idea of telepresence was made more achievable by using the computer as a channel for mediated communications (Fox Tree et al., 2021; Hilty et al., 2020; Mason & Carr, 2021). The advent of CMCs has significantly advanced on the Internet of Things, engagement platforms, the visualization of communication, and the ability to create an online presence (Bolander & Locher, 2020; DeNardis, 2020; Fussey & Roth, 2020). The computer has made long-distance communication possible by reducing the cost, time, and geographical limits of in-person communication.

A Whole New World: Telepresence in a Virtual World

One of the fundamental aspects of developing an online persona is the extent to which individuals feel connected to others via technology (Hacker et al., 2020; Wood & Smith, 2005; Xiao & Mou, 2019). Real-world or face-to-face stimuli necessitate the use of multiple senses, including sight, hearing, touch, and emotions, for a complete perception and appreciation of

reality. For humans to feel present in the mediated environment, they yearn to experience the same sensations, initially elicited by text-only messages, in the relational content evoked by the stimuli in virtual environments (Lim & Childs, 2020; Schultze, 2010). This concept is called telepresence, the establishment of euphoric continuity between the reality continuum and one's presence in a socially enabled virtual world (Ying et al., 2021).

Telepresence on conventional social platforms has been normalized because of CMC's technological advancements. In hindsight, social networking predates computer networks, as there are diverse kinds of social networks (Mitchell, 2020). For example, the intranet deployed by corporate entities served as a business network for its inside social infrastructures (Liebowitz, 2020; Xie & Wang, 2021). These smaller communities within a business network allowed stakeholders to communicate, form relationships, and establish intra-relational personas for the sake of conducting smooth business operations. In tandem, mainstream personal computer usage went from pulling information for consumption to creating handles to further establish one's personal personas while in the virtual world.

Using a computer is not always necessary to enjoy the rich telepresence social media yields today. The advent of fostering a more robust social telepresence in CMC via the internet now comprises of social media platforms, digitized networking forums, social networking apps, social networking services (SNS), video conferencing technology, cloud computing, and more advanced technologies such as immersive media (Dowling, 2019; Carr & Hayes, 2015; Mohammad, 2019; Xiang & Chae, 2022). These services can now be accessed on mobile phones, smartwatches, and devices like smart glasses and virtual reality headgear.

The Relevancy of CMC Today

Considering the sophisticated innovations in mediated communication, the development of social platforms, and the new tools bringing it to fruition, this paper's researcher questions if CMC has become an outdated term. This question is founded on the constantly growing Internet of Things (IoT), as extensive social networking relies on trustworthy digitalized cloud-enabled servers and storage systems to manage the sizable content databases and the high volume of traffic these sites generate.

At the onset of web 1.0, when the internet and the world wide web were still in their infancy, computer-mediated communication (CMC) was the buzzword (Garzone, 2020; Gomez-Mejia, 2022; Veszelszki, 2017). In his study, Carr (2020) argues that CMC scholarship should be realigned because the term "computer" and the processes and effects of communication technologies have expanded. As technologies have become more expansively applicable, there has been a greater emphasis on processes, roles, and complex mediation effects. Moreover, these rich media effects often do not require a computer. Communication tools are seamlessly advanced in their designs and capable of displaying discourse at a hyper-textualized and digital level.

Should CMC remain theorized as such or should it be referred to as digitally mediated communication due to continually refining and expanding internet technologies? This is something to consider when contemplating topics or research that encompass technology and determining what constitutes communication. As nearly all social activities could be, and are, mediated by forms of computing technology, Yao and Ling (2020) question, what should be the current focus of CMC research? Nevertheless, these technologies have not only facilitated communication but have also served as the backbone of social media platforms. The world has

become more social due to the emergence of social media as a primary interactive and immersive facilitator of human connection. These advanced technologies in mediated communications have alleviated what is regarded as the lack of friction-based communication (Cronin & Weingart, 2019; Sun et al., 2021; Tomalin, 2022). The development of technology has profoundly affected human communication and the evolution of civilization.

Communicative friction is the mechanism for the moment of hesitation one employs before sending or posting a message in public or an online community (Allen, 2015; Braddock, 2015; Park, 2008). In the case of virtual communication, it is an aggregate effect of considering the poise, maxims, and politeness of one's comments before making them public on a social platform (Sun, 2020). The practice of applying communicative frictions is what adds decorum to communication (Applebaum, 2020; Gray, 2019; Moseley, 2021). The lack of communication friction or frictionless communication has been exacerbated by the richness of social media. As society becomes more socially inclined through socially mediated communication, the reduction in friction in one's communicative styles becomes increasingly evident (Gray, 2019).

Frictionless communication via social media has made virtual discourse, regarding polite conversation, a slippery slope. As the socially mediated communication landscape continues to expand, frictionless communication will serve as the catalyst for nurturing and sustaining trolls and troll-like behaviors (Goodman, 2021). However, this study analyzes the cooperative principles of Gricean maxims more effectively to address troll-like conduct in online communities.

On Socially Mediated Communication

Numerous contemporary technologies and online networks focus on sustaining social cohesiveness, through communication, to maintain relationships and constructively create and

generate social capital (Le et al., 2022; Qiu et al., 2019; Tiwari et al., 2019; Williams, 2019). The novel concept of *socially mediated communication* promotes social cohesiveness that will build human relationships and continually create social capital in online spaces.

When conceptualizing *socially mediated communication*, this study focuses on Salmons & Wilson's (2009) compilation of research. They explored the socially mediated phenomenon of electronic collaboration and the steady flow of organizational communicative synergies within human social infrastructures. The term *socially mediated* is predicated on communicative interactions between organizations, users, developers, and agents in the twenty-first century's digitally interconnected environment. Communication realizes the socially mediated concept to cover large masses of other users in a simultaneous fashion (Cheng & Cameron, 2017).

Advanced communication technologies have not only considerably facilitated human social connections but have also broadened their use across and between academic disciplines for higher life utility. The technologies of socially mediated communication have brought to the forefront the capacity for more substantial human interaction. The remarkable outcomes of broadened human interaction today would not be possible without the innovative power of sophisticated communication technologies and extended research (Ishii et al., 2019; Stansberry et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2020). Innovation has taken shape in newer and enhanced ways for society to interact, network, gain, and share knowledge. Without it, people would not be exposed to the multitude of available opportunities. Social media and the robustness of technology development in communication have globally provided immense economic, educational, and social opportunities.

These broadened interactions, fostered by communication technology, have established a sense of being or presence in mediated spaces known as e-presence or telepresence (Liu et al.,

2022; Richardson & Milovidov, 2019). While both are indicative of generating an internet presence, the concept of e-presence is more abstract than the latter. E-presence is the online persona or e-personality that virtually represents a person while interacting on the internet or social media platforms (Aboujaoude, 2012; Majchrzyk, 2019; Nardino et al., 2021).

Telepresence broadens e-presence by using audiovisual aids to make online interactions more dynamic and immersive in the virtual world (Themelis, 2022). Telepresence has played a crucial role in the evolution of CMC technology over time. Established in the era of CMC, it has become a social media presence afforded by the rich networked technologies that extend communication and human interactions (Fadzli et al., 2020). Throughout this study, this networked social communication will be suitably referred to as *socially mediated communication*. This labeling is due to the multiple social networks and advanced technology utilized to digitally and virtually engage humans.

Socially mediated communication and CMC hold similar sentiments. However, users no longer have to solely rely on archaic means to socially participate in communication scenarios as they once did with bulky desktops, laptops, analog services, static emails, and bulletin boards (Carr, 2021; Comer, 2018). While CMC focuses on the channels for facilitating communication via a networked system, socially mediated communication focuses on the initial intent of the communication and how it is processed for interaction.

Previous research has supported the argument that computers are becoming increasingly less conducive to facilitating and maintaining social interactions (Aichner et al., 2021; Baym, 2012; Tang & Hew, 2020). Offshoots of CMC include the notion of contemporary tools that expedite discourse or enhance robust mediated spaces, channel venues, smartphones, geo-tagging, and communication platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram which are

exclusively for social networking (Baym, 2012; Carr, 2020; Holden & Wedman, 1993). These tools, platforms, and novel technologies, according to the aforementioned researchers, make socially mediated communication possible.

Over the past decade, technology has significantly improved human connectivity and demonstrated great promise for a progressive expansion in developing and nurturing virtual human relations. Mediated communication now incorporates social media platforms, networking forums, mobile applications (APPs) video conferencing technology, and more advanced technologies to further expand communication on a more social level (Faoliu, 2018). The integration of CMC and socially mediated communication will streamline communication research.

Similar to the principles of CMC (Walther, 2011), mass communication (*Understanding Media and Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication*, 2016), and the broad facilitation of social media platforms, communication researchers should consider these factors regarding mass-mediated communication studies:

- The communication originates in a social space for large masses to observe, such as a blog, message board, or group, even if the message is directed to an individual, subgroup, or as a message-at-large within the group itself.
- How information and knowledge are exchanged and negotiated among humans across these social platforms.
- How the unique characteristics of social media platforms influence and affect the dialogue of media users (*Understanding Media and Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication*, 2016).

These novel media platforms have significantly shaped communication and how humans interact with one another on them, from the inception of the World Wide Web to web 3.0 (Can & Alatas, 2019; Fuchs et al., 2010; Herring, 2019). Major innovations in mediated communication have paved the way for other advances in communication technology and human interactions. To comprehend the significant impact web 3.0 has had on communication, one must comprehend the breadth of adoption of these tools and services. Due to rapid expansions in technologies to promote services and social capital, the Internet of Things (IoT) concept began to give way during the web 3.0 era, giving way to a much broader concept, the *Internet of Everything* (Case, 2017). Due to the nexus of CMC, there exist extensive and continually expanding tools and services to facilitate socially mediated communication.

At the time of this research, five billion people worldwide actively used the internet (Statista, 2022a). More than 90% of internet users worldwide across the web use a mobile device (Ceci, 2022; Statista, 2022a). According to Statista, there are currently 6.648 billion smartphone users around the globe, which represents 83.37 percent of the global population (Turner, 2022). With over 10.57 billion users, the *Internet of Everything* now includes cellular connections via mobile devices using over nine billion subscriptions (Vernon, 2022; GSMA Intelligence, 2022; Turner, 2021), and 4.62 billion users are on social media (DataReportal, 2022; Smart Insights, 2022). Roughly, 63 percent of the global population are internet users (Statista, 2022b). With a growth of 2.9 percent in 2022, or almost 3.6 social networkers globally, internet usage is projected to significantly increase in the next three years (Yuen, 2022; Shromer, 2021). According to the data, the usage of social media and the means to participate in it will continue to increase.

Currently, 58.4 percent of the global population uses social media. This figure is an increase due to the 424 million new users who have come online in 2022 (Chaffey, 2022). Additionally, the average daily time spent on social media, per individual worldwide, is 2 hours and 27 minutes daily (Buchholz, 2022). In reference to age, the average media user between the ages of 16 and 64 spends six hours and 58 minutes per day online across all devices, according to the report, *Digital 2022 - Global Overview* (We are Social & Hootsuite, 2022). As for projections, in 2021, approximately 56 percent of the world's population were expected to use social media by the end of 2023 (Sharmin et al., 2021). By 2026, this proportion is estimated to reach 74 percent of the global population (Dixon, 2022).

Social media networking is one of the most popular internet-based activities worldwide (Chaffey, 2022; DataReportal, 2022; Statista, 2022c). With eight out of ten people utilizing the internet, social networking will be one of the most common online hobbies (Allpastimes, 2022; Cannon, 2019; Kathryn, 2019). As more platforms expand, the more conversations will occur. Thus, there will be more opportunities for trolls to exercise their disruptive activities. Some social media platforms are more popular than others. By far, Facebook is the most popular social network (Barnhart, 2022), but according to Insider Intelligence's first projection, TikTok is currently the third-largest global platform (Yuen, 2022). Users' consumption of the static nature of the World Wide Web has come a long way. Once employed for simple information gathering, it has since expanded to a global, socially connected, and interactive level. In short, the technical landscape has experienced a dramatic shift since web 1.0.

The continued evolution of communication technologies has advanced humans as social beings and opened new frontiers for seamlessly connecting with those near and far. Sophisticated communication-enabled tools have increased the convenience of immediate

accessibility, stimulated economic development, globalized life, fostered relationships, and facilitated access to a vast array of opportunities to better the human condition (Daramola, 2021; Guo et al., 2019; Rejeb et al., 2021).

However, the adoption of these communication technologies has not been devoid of unanticipated complications (Volpe, 2019). As advanced internet technologies have enhanced communication in numerous ways, such as through greater access to websites, devices, and social networking systems (SNS) and the subsequent expansion, so too has the emergence of issues (McLaughlin & Castro, 2019). As a communications scholar, it is essential to comprehend the broader landscape of communication, including the integration of CMC and socially mediated communication, the transition from Web 1.0 to Web 3.0, and the problems posed by developing newer technologies. This summary has helped identify and comprehend these obstacles in order to eliminate them. This research will focus primarily on one of those contemporary issues: the rising prevalence of internet trolls.

The problem of online bad actors, and notably internet trolls, does not lay entirely with communications technology but also with the users of those platforms (Clark & Claffy, 2021; Gedik & Cosar, 2020; Yang et al., 2019). Internet trolling pertains to a subset of bad actors who introduce conflict into online or virtual places to disrupt the communication process, cause harm, or seek to take advantage of other users.

The Emergence of the Bad Actor

The term *bad actor* derives from the medieval term malefactor, which referred to a person who has committed a crime or who intends to do harm on purpose (Fludernik, 2021; Green, 2020; Rabin, 2020). “Bad actor” has been the buzzword in governmental relations and cyber technology since the global age began (Goggin, 2012; Johnson, 2022; Johnson &

Marcellino, 2021; De Zeeuw & Tuters, 2020). The phrase refers to people or groups who employ intimidation and manipulation to control others, including face-to-face or in real-life (IRL) circumstances, across electronic wires, and in online communities for their self-serving interests, imposed causes, or ideologies (Halevey et al., 2022). There are a variety of reasons for bad actors to wield malice on a computer, network system, other individuals, or groups. In doing so, they assume an anonymous persona to have agency as a principled actor for a cause or ideology (Bancroft, 2019; Goldberg, 2019; Ong & Cabañes, 2019). Some bad actors may be motivated by monetary, criminal, or political reasons (Crockett, 2017; Fiske, 2013). The formulation of a bad actor involves analyzing the single individual—not the sum of their individual characteristics, but the personas they project (Frey, 1985). The book, *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century On-Line Pioneers* (Standage, 2014) covers the invention and evolution of the telegraph. It also details the misdeeds of individuals (the origins of bad actors in electronic mediated communication) who exploited the telegraph technology. “Ever since people have invented things, other people have found ways to put those things to criminal use” (Standage, 2014, p. 105). The telegraph provided new opportunities for fraud, theft, and deception. Its ability to eliminate distance allowed unscrupulous individuals to exploit communication imbalances in the network (Standage, 2014). Unfortunately, the emergence of bad actors would not stop with the invention of the telegraph. Rather, it may have been the gateway for future downsides to advanced technology.

Bad Actors on the Internet

The growth of the internet fostered countless benefits for humanity . However, there have also been significant drawbacks; as cyberspace developed, so did the proliferation of cybercrime with the emergence of highly sophisticated types of threat actors online (Pawlicka et al., 2021).

Bad actors on the internet are also known as cyber threat actors (CTA), threat actors, and malicious actors (Johnson, 2022). The term "bad actors on the internet" describes a broad class of internet users who are recognized and categorized (Haan, 2021; Kalantzis-Cope, 2020) as belonging to a single ideology based on their intention to deceive or manipulate their audience through diverse online content and online venues (Halevy et al., 2022). People, groups, or organizations that use the mediated spaces to spread disinformation, harass, threaten, or otherwise take advantage of internet users (for their own political, manipulative, or financial gain) are referred to as "bad actors" due to their strategic manipulation and exploitation of new media (Suiter & Culloty, 2021; Murray, 2020; Potter, 2021). The vitriol trolls spew can be detrimental to a group or any online forum.

Bad actors on the internet can include online scammers, ideologues, right-wing extremists' groups, state threat actors, state-or-government-sponsored trolls, hackers, and simply trolls. They all have the propensity to harm fellow internet users and affect how people interact online, thus shaping future public discourse (LaFrance, 2017; Silva, 2019). They seek to agitate, stalk, irritate, indoctrinate, polarize, steal from, or facilitate criminal activity (Bateman, 2020; Bressler & Bressler, 2019; Pozzar et al., 2020). These malicious internet users aim to sow discord, spread hate, instill fear, disrupt the flow of online communication, or commit criminal acts (Goerzen et al., 2021). Some actors are more reticent in their interaction and communication styles with other users while promoting terrorism or orchestrate divisive events for public scrutiny via misguided ideologies (Hoffman et al., 2019). In addition, some of the most dangerous online bad actors receive support from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

The Role of NGOs and Principled Behaviors of Bad Actors

Not all NGOs produce bad actors, but those that do can cause the most catastrophic destruction. These organizations employ far-reaching, mass-audience-oriented appeals in their ideologies. Non-state actors include NGOs, charitable organizations, political parties, lobbies, coalitions, the media, corporate interests, and multinational corporations. They also encompass super-empowered individuals known as 'oligarchs,' international crime syndicates, terrorist groups, diasporas, and organized ethnic minorities (Wijiniga et al., 2014).

NGOs rely on the theory of principled actor narrative, also known as the theory of principled narratives of behavior (Stoica, 2020). In today's globalized and multi-polarized world, non-state actors play a crucial role as devoted agents, representatives, and impersonators of the NGO (Santis, 2021). In the case of a negatively led NGO, the consequences could be catastrophic (Singh & Hoffman, 2021). Principled individuals consistently adhere to their principles, disregard tradeoffs or compromises, and pursue the principles for transcendental reasons, such as because they are "right," commanded by God, or part of an eternal debt to the emperor (Singh & Hoffman, 2022). Committed agents are trustworthy individuals to the NGO whose extreme psychology compels them to never deviate from a maxim (Lewis et al., 2020). To gain trust, imitators subconsciously masquerade as committed agents. Considering that observers can only determine whether a person is deeply committed based on their actions, impersonators should appear to never deviate from the maxim, and never consider deviating (Demir & Budur, 2019). Non-state bad actors pursue the maxim for similar reasons as committed agents but justify ambiguous or compromising decisions as conforming to the principle (Dolšák & Prakash, 2021).

With such a variety of actors, many of which are tied to state authorities, it becomes difficult to ascertain or even compare their impact on state authority (Abbott et al., 2021; Hsu et al., 2018). This fact could be overly concerning, as non-state actors could impact societal issues, quality of life, and politics, including matters of national security. Principled behavior consists of the actions of a handful of extreme individuals and others' deliberate attempts to impersonate them. However, the impact in online communities remains significant.

A Brief Taxonomy on Bad Actors Online

When interacting with others on the internet, bad actors may assume various roles as media manipulators to promote an ideologue, entertain the criminal element, or become social disruptors (Madison & DeJarnette, 2018). In doing so, some are more skilled in media manipulation than others, depending on their missions. Some of these roles overlap, as their final objectives may be similar, but their modes and methods of communication may vary (Baker & Edwards, 2018; Bartlett, 2021). For example, some ideologues may also fit into the broad role of committing online crimes or being a social disruptor in other groups to fulfill their primary purpose and vice versa (Mavroeidis et al., 2021). To achieve their goals, hackers, state threats, state-backed actors, and hate group members must infiltrate external groups. In doing so, these bad actors must utilize their communicative abilities and skills to assume their bad actor personas and commit online acts with possible criminal or harmful intent (Conti & Fanelli, 2019).

A diverse typology of online bad actors fit within broad categories. There are seven to eight distinct types of online bad actors, distinguished by their communication styles and behaviors. Numerous bad actors online exhibit overlapping roles within the categories of ideologues, criminals, state threat actors, and hackers. All have the potential to disrupt the social order of an online community. This research study identified over twenty distinct types of social

disruptors, including trolls, who are among the most aggressive. Due to the extensive taxonomy of bad actors that populate the internet (Agrafiotis et al., 2018), this study have found trolls' complex virtual speech acts to be the most definable in terms of the consequences of bad online behavior.

The Internet Troll

Internet trolls are a subset of the most daunting bad actors online. These social media manipulators choose to abuse and obstruct online dialogue (Addawood et al., 2019; Coles & West, 2016; Tomaiuolo et al., 2020). Trolls have the potential to ruin even the most enjoyable online experience for others (Sun & Shen, 2021). According to research, cyber trolls, or online trolling, have evolved into a mediated form of antisocial behavior intended to provoke or harm another individual or group of individuals or disrupt the conversational harmony of an entire group or online community (Alkharashi, 2021; Cook, 2021; Li et al., 2022; Noble, 2020).

These cyber saboteurs are infamous for their brazen and heinous behavior and proudly wear their negative, impolite, and unhappy reputation as a badge of honor (Helberg, 2021). Zannettou et al. (2019) shed light on a group of state-sponsored Russian and Iranian trolls who drove campaigns to manipulate American public opinion during the elections. They sockpuppeted accounts on four different platforms: Twitter, Reddit, 4chan's Politically Incorrect board (/pol/), and Gab. The trolls proudly explained how they pushed URLs to facilitate disinformation campaigns and contributed content to spur divisiveness in online communities. According to numerous scholarship, 4chan and Reddit house some of the most toxic and politically incorrect trolls who serve as echo chambers for aspiring trolls and the most notorious trolls of all time (Bergstrom, 2011; Mihailidis, 2018; Rieger et al., 2021). The Reddit platform is ideally suited for the emergence of echo chambers. It is also conducive to sustaining filter

bubbles because there is little to no filtering or admin involvement to mediate conversations that veer off course (Ashford et al., 2020; Morini et al., 2021). Filter bubbles or forums, like Reddit, enable bad actors, including trolls, to hone and exert their misguided ideologies, hate speech, and unfounded political commentary before venturing out into the virtual public arena for mass dissemination (Hagood, 2019; Krafft & Donovan; Rubin, 2020).

Trolls employ a style of speech, strategy, and tactics to accomplish these foul acts. Their weaponization of words, phrases, and the very tools used to express them represent an all-too-common method of harassing, frustrating, and subjecting fellow internet users to some of the worst online experiences. Trolls have chosen their modus operandi and communication style to annoy others consistently, offend, reprimand, insult, overcorrect, and relentlessly question fellow internet users ad nauseum in social settings (Hannan, 2018; Waling et al., 2020). These virtual speech acts are the premise behind this study.

Beyond trolling being a pervasive issue, the online host forums are also intriguing. Trolls frequently operate in online communities, public discussion boards, blogs, gaming sites, and private chat rooms. Some forums are more prone to trolling than others (Cook et al., 2019; Elmer et al., 2021; Graham, 2019). Social media sites, like Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit have become the platforms of choice for self-appointed people to provoke, insult, question others with a malicious ulterior motive, correct to a fault, or shamelessly annoy others through their online engagement (Case et al., 2019; Howard et al., 2019; Ortiz, 2020). According to research, 38 percent of online trolls target social media users, while 23 percent prefer YouTube and other video-sharing platforms (Statista, 2017).

Most research on trolls is influenced by common assumptions about them and their associated behavioral traits. Previous research focused on various definitions, personality traits,

the paradoxical quote of “not feeding the trolls,” and the causes of trolling phenomenon (Phillips, 2015). Additionally, due to the phenomenon’s emergence in the mid to late 1990s, a significant amount of the most notable research resulted from dissertation work (Donath, 1997; Phillips, 2015; Rockler, 1999). In terms of cybersecurity, commerce, and the expansion of the social sciences as it relates to the emerging discipline of cyberpsychology, more members of the scholarly community and other experts in the field are now conducting troll research.

At its height, between the late 1990s and mid-2000s, troll research significantly encouraged academic inquiry and growth regarding definitions and the causes of trolling. Back then, the most popular studies provided working definitions for a *troll*, investigated trolling behaviors, and addressed the psychological rationale behind trolling. The most significant scholarly contributions came from the fields of sociology, psychology, and information technology or cybersecurity. In contrast, research on internet trolls had received the least attention in the discipline of communication (Buckels et al., 2014; Herring et al., 2002; Kerr & Lee, 2019). Regarding this study, the field of communication and virtual speech acts yielded a dearth of research on trolls.

Background

The most prevalent types of bad actors today are online hecklers, individuals who stir ad hominem arguments, people who purposefully broadcast misinformation, and others who display *keyboard courage* by saying words they would never say to a person's face. Contemporary academics commonly refer to these types of individuals as trolls (Citron, 2019; Hilt et al., 2019). The phenomenon of internet trolls is so pervasive and may worsen as more social platforms develop and launch to facilitate seamless global communication networks. It is, thus, necessary to learn trolls' linguistic strategies to best propose workable answers. This process entails

recognizing virtual speech acts. Investigating the background and history of trolling is a necessary first step for comprehension. Without this inquiry, online trolling will remain a concern (Sucio, 2020).

Pre-Internet Trolling

The practice of trolling has existed since antiquity, even though it is an increasingly mainstream phenomenon in contemporary culture. Moreso, the act of trolling took on many forms long before the term or concept was even coined (Mantilla, 2015). In real life (IRL) examples of trolling include stalking, prank phone calls, meddling with, or physically harassing someone (Graham, 2019; Ley, 2012; Rudrum, 2023). Additionally, seemingly innocent child's play, like taunting and teasing, may represent a person's first instances of trolling (Alvarez, 2019; Kaplan, 2021; Nuccitelli, 2022a). Even in biblical literature, there exist many depictions of trolls and troll-like behaviors. According to some narratives, there were toxic rhetoric and galvanizing speech acts in the 18th and 19th centuries, which led to divisiveness, riots, and anti-Catholic uprisings in certain world regions (McGann, 2020). Moreover, toxic speech against speakers at crowded events model the most fundamental types of trolling (Cox, 2020). This example is especially true when crowd hecklers act at public events or demonstrations. Multiple researchers support this claim. In essence, trolls are the digital form of hecklers who existed pre-internet (Martinez, 2020). The only difference is that online heckling is conducted beneath a veil of anonymity, despite the perpetrator showing a purported internet identity.

In the past, real life trolling could cause the most harrowing and formidable communication experiences. Prime examples included a crowd member verbally assaulting a speaker in a public setting. In this scenario, the person committing the troll-like behavior, such as

heckling, did so within the confines of a crowd, where the number of surrounding people afforded them some anonymity. On the contrary, some IRL settings did not permit the troll's anonymity during their disruptive speech act; as a result, the violator's identity was frequently easy to determine. Also, in the past, IRL trolls were readily vulnerable to immediate feedback or, sometimes, violent repercussions from those who may have felt disrespected (Chin & Yi, 2021). It was evident that a heckle involved boldness and a degree of risk; the audience could see who was shouting (Adams, 2011). Current trolls hide behind computer screens to express what they would neither speak to a person's face nor want to be heard saying. In certain online forums, this cowardly conduct is referred to as *keyboard courage*.

History of Trolls and Trolling

Trolls and their disruptive or conniving communication strategies were problematic and uncomfortable phenomena before the advent of the internet. According to today's definitions of 'troll', the earliest types of trolls and trolling can be traced back to crowd hecklers, prank phone calls, and individuals who consistently posted propaganda, gossip, or scathing commentary about a person or issue (Guriev & Treisman, 2022, Waisbord, 2020). If written, this type of speech act was anonymously disseminated with a perpetrator distributing leaflets, handbills, or fliers in public areas (Cashmore et al., 2018; Coleman & Ross, 2015; Graham, 2019; Krishnamurthy, 2021). This method of trolling "by hand" was limited, but it was still considered trolling.

Trolling on the internet has become quite expansive, including just about any perceived negative online behavior. Widespread belief holds that online behaviors with the faintest whiff of mischief, oddity, or hostility are frequently classified as trolling (Phillips & Milner, 2018). With the introduction of social media and other improvements in communications technology, unintended consequences have evolved, such as online trolls and the harm they inflict or the

vitriol they spew against other internet users. Before discussing this issue, however, this paper poses the question, "What is an internet or cyber troll?" Previous research has generated a multitude of definitions for the term.

A Convergence of Definitions for Internet Trolls

Trolls and the act of trolling are routinely noticed on online communication platforms, yet they remain a mysterious phenomenon due to limited empirical study and a lack of scholarly consensus over their definitions (Komaç & Çağıltay, 2019). Until recently, business and marketing researchers paid little attention to trolling's inconsequential nature. However, trolling now profoundly impacts the business world, especially where branding is concerned (Dineva & Breitsohl, 2021). The term "trolling" has only recently entered the marketing industry with its noted danger to both customers and corporations (Demsar et al., 2021; Warke et al., 2022). Still, a dearth of empirical study and a focus on undiscernible "trolls" and their behaviors limit existing understandings of trolling. As a result, the term "trolling" has come to mean virtually any online misbehavior (Demsar et al., 2021). This study disagrees with this premise, as trolling must be deliberate and consistent. Some misdeeds are unintentional, and occasionally, individuals commit isolated transgressions.

Previous research with multiple definitions have created a muddled picture of trolling. In fact, the overarching definition is a subject of scholarly debate across disciplines. Some scholars argue that trolling is so complicated that a single description would be too broad to encompass the specific online behaviors of trolls (Coles & West, 2016; Synnott et al., 2017). In other instances, internet trolls have been defined by their aimless online behaviors. As cited in several scholarly articles, online trolling is the practice of behaving dishonestly, destructively, or disruptively in a social setting on the internet with no perceptible instrumental purpose (Buckels

et al., 2014; Mukhudwana, 2022; Navarro-Carrillo et al., 2021; Orsolini et al., 2022; Papapicco & Quatera, 2019). Others contend that the terms “troll” and “trolling” can have precise definitions and be subdivided into areas, like in the discipline of education (Buckels et al., 2014; Cruz et al., 2018; Graham, 2019; Sanfilippo et al., 2018; Tomaiuolo et al., 2020).

Based on a literature review, the following definitions have come to the forefront. A troll is someone who publishes intentionally incendiary and spiteful comments to agitate and anger others (Cheng et al., 2017; Machová & Kolesár, 2019). Fichman and Sanfilippo (2014) defined trolling as "deviant and antisocial online activity in which the deviant user acts provocatively and outside of the normative standards of a given community" (p. 163). While Fichman and Sanfilippo's definition was expansive in scope, other researchers have provided a narrower perspective on what a troll is and does.

There is a stark contrast to how other researchers define trolling. The numerous definitions of a troll should not be confused with the reasons for trolling. As in many cases where trolls are defined by their behavior, the standards used by researchers to identify trolls and provide explanations for why they act or communicate in certain ways vary (Dray, 2020; March & Marrington, 2019). In addition, the same speech acts are at the disposal of anyone with the possibility of being used in their dialogue at any moment. The lack of frequency or routine in issuing such speech acts would indicate that they are not necessarily trolls.

In *Trolls Just Want to Have Fun*, Buckels et al. (2014) narrowed the definition of a troll to a person who frequently behaves in a spiteful, harmful, dishonest, or disorderly way in an online social environment for no apparent reason. The Buckels research team coined this as *disruptive incivility*, where a troll is distinguished from other users by their habitual use of

offensive, derogatory, or impolite language in virtual communities. This paper argues that this explanation encompasses all fluid and viable definitions cited in previous studies.

Trolling is the act of actively provoking or antagonizing individuals in an online environment to achieve an often desirable and sometimes predictable result for the troll (Thacker & Griffiths, 2012). Thacker & Griffith (2012) pair their definition of trolling with reasons for the behavior. Even if the reasons are minute or trivial, they enhance an understanding of the phenomenon.

Diverse rationales have added to the definitions of trolling, hence expanding the range, sequence, and applicability of relevant research. One perspective contends that a troll must exhibit a pattern of online incivility over time, which includes purposely provoking others and disrupting the flow of communication (Alfonzo, 2021; Coles & West, 2016; Dineva & Breitsohl, 2021). This qualification appears to identify trolls by synthesizing prior research and linking it to contemporary studies.

Nevertheless, trolling is a deceitful and disruptive online behavior that typically involves publishing incendiary and abusive comments to provoke and anger others (March, 2017). There are numerous definitions of trolls across the literature. Some definitions are much more simplistic and offer an even more concise summary. Many descriptions are so imprecise that they neither diminish the havoc trolls cause nor impede the methodological value used to evaluate the phenomenon. However, all the working definitions include the persistent characteristics of trolls as a troublesome nuisance in online communities.

The Virtual Speech Acts of Trolls

There is a common denominator across the numerous definitions of trolls. Each definition defines trolls by their speech acts in online communication. According to Polak and Trotter

(2020) and Reynard (2020), trolls' virtual speech acts can be categorized into two distinct groups: political speech acts and commercial speech acts. According to Reynard (2020), this classification, based on both intent and outcomes, reveals two overarching categories: constructive and prosocial or destructive and abusive. Positive and negative virtual speech acts are both possible in online conversation. Because they encourage civility in discourse and, when necessary, politely and effectively address interpersonal conflict, constructive and prosocial speech acts may be seen as positive communication (Nelson, 2019; Pukallus, 2021). Destructive and abusive speech acts are seen as negative communication and are classified as verbal aggressions delivered by the sender (Andersen, 2021; Petit et al., 2021). Aggressive speech acts are damaging verbal or written communication that target the self-concept of the receiving audience with the aim of inflicting psychological harm (Bojsen-Møller et al., 2020; Kienpointner, 2021). In the case of trolls, productive and prosocial discourse is stifled, whereas destructive and abusive rhetoric is utilized.

In Real Life (IRL) Trolling

As previously stated, earlier kinds of trolling occurred *in real life* (IRL), such as hecklers in a crowd, stalker situations, when mob mentality took hold, or when furious group members under the impression of plausible deniability for anonymity converged on others or targets to intimidate or express their sentiments (Mitchell, 2013; Popova, 2017). As evidenced *in real life* (IRL) trolling, neither distance nor the affordance of anonymity acted as deterrents to trolling (Cook et al., 2021). In contrast to online trolls, who consistently maintained their behavior fueled and facilitated by distance, IRL trolls exposed themselves to heightened reactions due to physical proximity. In certain instances, IRL trolls faced an immediate risk of damaging their reputation or even encountering physical harm. However, trolling in real life (IRL) has proven to be equally

damaging to human discourse as its online counterpart. Some of the most heinous IRL acts of trolling have occurred in the past, with devastating results.

The McCarthy Era

Based on the definitions of a troll, U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy (1908-1957) could be considered one of the earliest known formal trolls who communicated through mediated channels (Perlstein, 2021). Similar to many trolls today, McCarthy sought to silence his opponents by issuing false claims and damaging libelous accusations which fueled public opinion on American infrastructure and international affairs (Parry-Giles, 2021). During the era of the Cold War and heightened fear of communism, the late Senator McCarthy emerged as an American demagogue with devastating effects on citizens in the American public (Jacobson, 2022). In the 1950s, McCarthy's troll-like behavior drew national attention. He waged a massive disinformation campaign known as *redballing* where he alleged having an extensive list of communists and Soviet spies and sympathizers who infiltrated the United States federal government, universities, film industry, and elsewhere (Barbas, 2018). When he began releasing the names on the alleged list, McCarthy ruined the lives of numerous individuals in the political, journalism, athletic, business, civic action, and entertainment arenas (Gustainis, 2009; Kaiser, 2020; Luthin, 2020; McNally, 2022). With the help of mediated communications, like newspapers, radio, and television, McCarthy's disinformation campaign became amplified thus hitting the masses quickly (Weisberg, 2019). The *trollish* behaviors of McCarthy spilled out into the courts of public opinion, soon becoming kitchen-table talk. Everyday people discussed suspected communists who purportedly lived amongst the American public, thus instilling a frenzied pandemic of fear.

Subsequently, the smear tactics led to McCarthy's censure by the U.S. Senate. Yet he had already caused irreparable harm to numerous individuals, businesses, and organizations.

Academics have extensively explored McCarthy's troll-like activities, which embodied deception, the creation of fake news, and the use of mediated instruments to promote such actions (Giblin, 2009; Miller Center, 2020; Sibley, 2021; Sternberg, 2021; Whitfield, 2008). If not for use as a case study for the improvement of journalism (Feighery, 2021), the McCarthy era may serve as an example of the far-reaching effects trolling could have on society (Byerly, 2021; Carpenter, 2022; Ferber, 2018).

From IRL Trolling to Mediated Trolling

As a gateway to mediated trolling, individuals used multiple platforms for troll-like communication and behaviors. These mediums included newspaper comment sections, radio call-in shows, and messages left on the phone answering lines of television networks. While McCarthy was able to troll IRL, he also executed mediated trolling through the airwaves, newsprint, and radio. Trolls and their trolling behaviors have not spared television networks. Daily, television network comment boards or telephone lines have been inundated with vicious remarks about their content and broadcast choices. Television executives and networks that aired controversial episodes, questionable ad campaigns, or carried shows which flubbed family values (like *Married with Children*, *Beavis and Butt-Head*, and *Dark Shadows*) had been subjected to trolling long before the internet came to fruition (Craig, 2001; Francisco, 2022). Acts of lobbying or protests for corrective change in the entertainment industry and public policy may have driven people desiring to take extreme action. Trolls may have taken advantage of letter-writing campaigns or blended in with legitimate irate viewers who took to the phone lines to speak with network or advertising executives to leave insults, condemning messages, or threaten boycotts of

broadcasts or advertising sponsors regarding their dissatisfaction with a program's content (Fahey, 1991; Richards & Murphy, 1996). While these were considered as acts of advocacy and resulted in adjustments to television programming, in the name of protecting the youth audience, significant trolling and troll-like behavior occurred as an unintended consequence of the impending problem.

In addition, mediated trolling has occurred due to the affordances of editorial sections in local newspapers and shock-jock personas from controversial radio programs, like Morton Downey Jr., Howard Stern, the late Don Imus, Wendy Williams, Wolfman Jack, and comedian Andrew Dice Clay's short-lived radio stint (Butler, 2018; O'Shansky, 2020). These entertainment personas trolled the public and fellow celebrities well before the terms *shock jock* or *trolls* were used to characterize their actions. Even the controversial daytime broadcast, *The Jerry Springer Show*, allowed studio audience members to IRL troll the show's guests, near the end of each episode, with the most disgusting, vile, and insulting comments (Arthurs & Little., 2016).

The internet has advanced and placed an undue burden on the newspaper and television network industry due to the rise of negative user commentary (Martens et al., 2018; Scott, 2005). Initially, newspaper comment sections had always been considered an integral part of the internet experience (Adum et al., 2019). In past years, online newspaper comment sections have become notorious for the hostile environments created by attention-seeking trolls who frequently submitted controversial comments for their own amusement (Knustad, 2020). As a result, many forums have disabled their comment sections, and rightly so.

The Birth of the Cyber Troll

With the advent of the World Wide Web and advanced communication technologies in the 20th century, IRL trolling made an immersive shift into the internet, thus transforming into

cyber or internet trolling (Gudmanian et al., 2019; Sidorkina et al., 2021). As society adopted more robust communication-enhanced technologies, the emergence of cyber trolls in user groups and other virtual spaces became more prevalent and commonplace (Gomez-Mejia, 2022; Miller & Vaccari, 2020). According to a consensus among academics (Cook et al., 2018; Goolsby, 2019; Graham 2019; Zvereva, 2020), internet trolls and trolling started in the late 1980s or early 1990s in Multi-User Dungeons (MUDs) or Usenet discussion groups for gamers, as well as other user-group bulletin board platforms such as 4chan (Lambach 2019; Peeples et al., 2018).

The First Recorded Internet Troll

It is believed that Dr. Adam Steele, an associate professor of computer science at DePaul University in Chicago, was one of the first internet trolls in the early 1990s, when he was a promising graduate student at Concordia University of Montréal in Canada (True Story Documentary Channel, 2020). At that time, there were over fourteen million internet users compared to the five billion users who are on the internet today (Austin, 2019; Statista, 2022b).

According to Steele (2020), while the internet was still in the initial stages of demonstrating its future potential, he was connected to other students from a small network of colleges and universities via the internet. The student-users used quasi-bulletin boards, called the *News Network*, to communicate with one another.

Beginning with scholarly discourse and general politeness, the bulletin board participants' conversations were initially mutually engaging. Eventually, sub-boards were created based on the specific interests of individual members. For example, a sub-forum such as *rec.humor* was created to trade jokes. On *rec.humor* and similar sub-boards, however, the conversations among a small number of participants soon shifted. The language on these message boards began to contain excessive obscene language and humor that offended fellow Internet users.

As a result, the shunned netizens, who are now considered denizens, created additional subgroups within the network, one of which was “*alt.tasteless*.” As *alt.tasteless* grew in popularity among denizens who enjoyed tasteless conversational fare, so did the vulgarities and offensive language in the groups. The denizens of *tasteless.alt* entertained themselves for a time, but this soon became tedious. Group members felt compelled to spread their hostile and abusive language to unwitting user newsgroups outside their alternative community. For shock value and to provoke fellow internet users, the denizens or newly emerging trolls sought alternative methods to reach and offend the masses. Soon after, members of *alt.tasteless* decided to coordinate stealth attacks by invading other newsgroups.

In the summer of 1993, the first target was a group of cat lovers. Steele contributed significantly to this troll campaign. First, he created a fake online identity. He then composed a disingenuous story, a form of astroturfing, about his ownership of cats and his concerns regarding their digestive and reproductive ailments. The narrative included troubling descriptions of his cat's predicament and dubious methods for medically treating the cats. He hoped that making such a bizarre story plausible would elicit genuine responses from concerned cat lovers. His fabricated account elicited a multitude of responses offering helpful advice. Even *Wired* magazine picked up the story, due to the disturbing nature of the back-and-forth banter, which included many offensive suggestions and language (Quittner, 1994; White, 2020).

When the true purpose of the story was revealed, the cat lovers who believed the story hook, line, and sinker were understandably outraged. In the end, Steele and his comrades achieved their goal and became the first known internet trolls, thereby paving the way for a subset of modern-day bad actors.

Cyberbullying vs. Internet Trolling

Trolling and cyberbullying are commonly used interchangeably; however, they are distinguishable (Swensen-Lepper & Kerby, 2019). While these concepts are different, the distinction may appear immaterial to their online victims (Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017). Trolls are those who post offensive comments in public comment sections. Whether they are commenting on blog postings or online news sites, they want to attract the attention of other users and divert the conversation away from the page's content (Zezulka & Seigried-Spellar, 2016). These bad actors write hateful, racist, sexist, or vulgar comments. Trolls may direct their fiery comments against the content, the author, or other commenters (Komac & Cagiltay, 2019). Trolls want to agitate online communities and draw attention to themselves, whereas cyberbullies wish to harm their victims over the Internet (Lizut, 2022).

Cyberbullies attack individuals, as opposed to online communities, which are the primary target of trolls. Instead of posting broadly incendiary words, cyberbullies publish terrible things about a single individual with the intent of embarrassing or intimidating them (March & Marrington, 2019). Cyberbullying may take the form of malicious messages, the exploitation of private images or videos of the targeted victim, or both. They could post the information publicly or send it only to their target as a form of taunting (Nicol, 2012).

However, some experts debate whether trolling constitutes a type of cyberbullying (Cruz et al., 2018; Gylfason et al., 2021; Lohmann, 2014). A troll is a completely different kind of bad actor that can utilize the same virtual speech acts to offend tens, hundreds, or even thousands of people at once, as opposed to cyberbullies who target specific persons to abuse or constantly stalk with unpleasant language or toxic discourse (Manuoğlu, 2020). In essence, trolls are indiscriminate nuisances to online communities whereas cyberbullies target individuals. With no

specific target in mind, trolling comments are displayed for everyone to view in public.

According to certain troll study experts, cyberbullying occurs when someone receives abusive, hostile, or mean texts privately or directly (Aydin et al., 2022; Jeffrey et al., 2020; Sanfillipo et al., 2017).

The Characteristics of Internet Trolls

Most trolls hide their identities (Guo & Caine, 2021). Anonymity is a key factor behind many online trolling incidents (Fichman & Peters, 2019). In digital attacks, anonymity is a psychological characteristic of trolls. It is bolstered by the ease of creating multiple accounts on one platform, known as sockpuppeting (Lou & Hancock, 2020; Reynard, 2020). Being able to hide behind a keyboard and hurl insults, with technology that enables concealed identities, enhances the psychological dimensions of anonymity for those who frequently practice sockpuppetry (Cotton, 2021; Kim et al., 2019).

Sockpuppetry occurs because of the anonymity afforded on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Reddit, and YouTube, which allow users to continuously assume false identities. Select platforms make it relatively easy for a user to sockpuppet and achieve an increased sense of anonymity. Sockpuppetry is easy to conduct on social media sites because it simplifies creating a new identity profile without having to provide legal identification (Gross et al., 2005; Hinds & Johnson, 2020). An individual only needs to type in their name of choice. They do not necessarily have to supply a photo as their profile picture, thus ensuring more anonymity. The person can be whomever, regarding name, gender, and the option to provide a photo. These are all the ingredients needed to create a new persona whenever creating a new profile.

Anonymity is a commodity in cyberspace that enables malicious persons to engage in sockpuppetry against unwitting members of online communities (Rawat et al., 2021). Due to the

increased perception of anonymity, some media users assume they can engage in the most offensive and irresponsible behavior in cyberspace (Broinowski, 2021). As a benefit, a person can create limitless sockpuppet accounts, if desired, thus hiding under the cloak of anonymity.

In addition to perceived anonymity, trolls are infamous for disrupting conversations by often posting irrelevant comments or needlessly disputing the opinions of others (Di Pietro et al., 2021; Paakki et al., 2021). Trolls are also known to launch profanity-laced tirades, known as "flaming," to add drama (Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017). Some derive great satisfaction from tormenting others at their lowest points in life, body shaming them, or focusing on any other flaws they can find (Navarro-Carrillo et al., 2021; Schlüter et al., 2021). These perpetrators utilize negative and disruptive communication tactics to purposely aggravate other users (Jamison et al., 2019).

The Impetus of Internet Trolling...Trash Talking

The earliest origins of online trolling, as it is known today, first began as a form of play-by-play communication between gamers known as '*trash-talking*' (Hilvert-Bruce & Neill, 2020). Trash talking in the gamer's realm is the accepted social norm. Boastful and insulting language is bolstered with choice words and borderline insults to demoralize but foster an enemy-ally relationship between group members (Kniffin & Palacio, 2018). In this environment, trash talk closely mirrors another troll communication method, known as flaming or flame-baiting (Komaç & Çağıltay, 2019; Maerz & Puschmann, 2020).

Flaming: A Troll's Way of Welcome, Initiation, and Wrath

Trolls and their behaviors emerged alongside flaming or flame-baiting, a unique method of negative online engagement. Typically, a flame post is passionate, offensive, and abusive, questioning the value or validity of a group or individual or the opinions they espouse (Lange,

2014; Milgate, 1998). Flaming refers to posting or sending offensive messages over the internet. Most instances of flaming occur in online discussion forums or social media groups (Ito, 2021). Also referred to as “e-bile” in media text, flaming has become dishearteningly a pervasive aspect of contemporary culture, especially concerning chauvinism toward women's experiences in online environments (Jane, 2012; March & Marrington, 2019; Weber & Davis, 2019).

Flaming or flame-baiting gradually evolved into a way to informally initiate newcomers into a group by asking a ridiculous question within a conversation thread (Berghel & Berleant, 2018; Reagle, 2014). When an unknowing visitor or the *mark* attempted to answer it, they received a barrage of insults and expletives because everyone except the newcomer knew the inside joke (Phillips, 2015). Flaming is the deliberate, intentional publishing of an incendiary comment or message online, typically on message boards, forums, or newsgroups meant to broker a disconnect in the online community (Hopkinson, 2013). Flames may be deliverable via email and instant messaging applications, in addition to online discussion forums, social networking sites, and message boards (Hooffacker, 2022; Rachmatan, 2018). The goal is to agitate and provoke other group members into heated debates about a subject or issue at the troll's whim and for their amusement (Graham, 2019; Harmer & Lumsden, 2019; Morgan, 2022). In an emotionally charged situation, trolls have used flaming to threaten conduct that can be detrimental or even psychologically destructive to other group members (Andersen, 2021). Flame insults exchanged between forum members is not limited to two individuals but can involve multiple users at once, resulting in an all-out flame war (Kirk & Schill, 2021). Trolls are multifaceted, with varying objectives, and differ in their communication styles. A vast majority of flame-throwing trolls are primarily social disruptors and nothing more. However, not all trolls

resort to flames or employ flame-baiting to communicate. Today, some trolling is more politically charged and state-sponsored by the concerted efforts of intrusive outside governments.

Political and State Actor Threat Trolls

According to the current social context and era, trolling has become highly political (Koiranen et al., 2021; Penney, 2019). The behaviors of trolls have impacted presidential elections, world affairs, and human interaction in virtual environments (Cosentino, 2020; Luceri et al., 2021). Russian trolls are not the only threat to American politics, but domestic American trolls are also a growing force. On social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter, political trolls attempt to suppress voter turnout (Deb et al., 2019), confuse or anger voters, or spread false rumors (Metaxas & Finn, 2017). Such troll-like actions have solidified online, thus having the propensity to sway close races or undermine confidence in election results (Scola, 2018). The lingering impacts of IRL trolling extend to online forums and are bolstered by echo chambers or filter bubbles, thereby affecting individuals across all spectrums.

Stewart et al., in their 2018 study, examined the relationship between political homophily and organized trolling efforts. According to their findings, troll accounts contributed content to polarized information networks, presumably amplifying disagreement and fostering division. Other findings point to the growing prominence of troll accounts in domestic conversations, suggesting media manipulation that exploits the crowdsourcing nature of social media.

Troll-like acts have not only impacted presidential elections but also civilities between nations. Since being discovered, Russian trolls' interference in the 2016 US Presidential elections has been monitored and analyzed (Chun et al., 2019). During the 2016 U.S. presidential election, state-backed troll Twitter accounts were widely believed to spread millions of tweets containing misinformation and inflammatory political content. It is still uncertain whether these

social media campaigns of alleged "troll" accounts successfully manipulated public opinion (Salamanos et al., 2019). Homeland threats, nation-states, and their proxies are conceiving new forms of digitally enabled manipulation by combining virtual hate mobs, surveillance, misinformation campaigns, anonymous threats, and the invasion of victims' privacy (Johnson & Schmitt, 2021; MaClellan, 2019; Venkiteswaran, 2017). There are documented instances where authoritarian dictators have hired trolls as virtual hate mobs to attack, vilify, propagate lies, and ruin the names of others to undermine their support networks (Doyo, 2021). A study by Schirch (2021) mapped out how authoritarian governments previously hired troll armies from existing cyber brigades or digital militia to run mass propaganda operations. Another study delved into a few examples of cybermob sponsorships that were used to polarize public opinion and mobilize targeted demographics into toxic debates about a range of relevant subjects (Mukhudwana, 2022). A third study focused on the monetization of trolling. Researchers from a security threat tracking firm discovered businesses' selling capabilities for disinformation campaigns. These actions were comparable to those of Russian "troll factories" throughout the course of the 2016 US presidential campaign (Gallagher, 2019). In conjunction with other state-sponsored information operations, some companies have fashioned their online campaigns after Russian bad actor escapades to conduct negative takedown campaigns and slander opponents via hired trolls (Masood et al., 2022; McCombie et al., 2019).

The detection of these culprits can be difficult, as they are not always identifiable while conducting cyber warfare. Bad actors of states and political parties from around the world have developed difficult-to-detect and -counteract playbooks for online trolls (Riley et al., 2018). While some nation-state leaders may dismiss their tactics as internet trolling, some experts contend their end game is part of a pattern of internet diplomacy. They argue that this trend is

becoming more prevalent worldwide in response to the rise of populist rhetoric. Moreover, governments seeking to appease their most vocal domestic political constituencies are becoming increasingly cavalier in their online communications with foreign nations (Breland, 2018). On the international front, these actions could lead to far more serious issues than mere trolling to instantaneously upset others.

How Trolls Impact Online Arenas

On commercial platforms like SNSs, trolling victims frequently feel helpless to defend their reputations; in addition, there may be limited legal recourses available for remedy (Reynard, 2020). Trolls also have a significant impact on online communities through their ability to induce spirals of silence among community members. Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1997) originally theorized the *spiral of silence*, a phenomenon in the study of human communication. This concept addresses the unwillingness of an individual or group to participate in public discourse and the causes of self-censorship. In this study, the spiral of silence, which bears on mental well-being, examined the digital realm of self-censorship in online communities. It is a theoretical premise for the study of human communication and comprehension of how public opinion may be inhibited, thus impacting overall mental health. Some trolling behaviors discourage others from participating in online discussions for fear of being ostracized, threatened, or harassed for holding unpopular opinions (Bodrunova et al., 2021). Individuals and groups are reluctant to express their opinions on contentious public issues when primarily influenced by these subconscious perceptions of being popular or unpopular (Carter Olson & LaPoe, 2018).

The Beyhive, Stans, and Fandom Trolls

A fan base can be so devoted to an individual, ideal, or entity that it resembles idolatry. The follower's support may be prone to chaotic moments in public settings, spurred by the overzealous support of the fan base. These types of fans are known as "stans." A *stan* is a portmanteau of "stalker" and "fan" that refers to an even more obsessive fandom of someone or something (Foley & Gagliano, 2021).

A prime example of this phenomenon is the overly devoted and extreme fanbase, or stans, of pop star Beyonce: *The Beyhive*. It is a self-appointed institution of trolling made up of unaffiliated individuals who form a fandom (Gaunt, 2019). This loose constellation of fans or stans has no discernible leader, nor do these types of troll armies require one to execute their vengeance (Jaffe, 2020; Sundahl, 2022). The mere mention of Beyoncé's name, prompted by social media algorithms, brings to light this loose configuration of ardent fans who quickly gather to defend her character, craft, and honor (Hanna et al. 2017).

This type of highly aggressive online activity, conducted by groups or individuals in the name of a public figure or celebrity, is known as fandom trolling. In fandom trolling, the fans support the idea of the celebrity to a fault (Golf-Papez & Veer, 2022; Goswami, 2019). Beyonce's fandom, when morphed into a troll army to defend her honor, has made newsworthy headlines. The Beyhive has attacked celebs and other notables such as Kid Rock, Keri Hilson, and Wendy Williams for taking digs at their pop icon (Sanders, 2018).

Fandoms can also work in reverse, which is known as anti-fandoms (Click, 2019). A study at the University of Tulsa examined the theoretical concept of anti-fandom: a theory of why people relish despising certain shows, celebrities, and public figures (Contois, 2021). Occasionally, some internet users choose to not see celebrities in a favorable light for no

apparent reason (Jones, 2016; Theodoropoulou, 2022). They relentlessly troll their targets to stay abreast of their news stories and daily lives, only to pass moral judgment, tear them down, or even destroy their careers (Brennan, 2019; Stich, 2021).

Anti-fandom trolling is typically based on cancel culture and makes for even bigger news stories because the antics are generally political, extremely judgmental, or involve some moral compass to raise attention to issues (The University of Tulsa, 2021). Cancel culture has been the rallying cry of trolls against many celebrities and public figures, but it has also had other implications (Dershowitz, 2020). One celebrity, Steve Harvey, retired from stand-up comedy because of anti-fandoms who increasingly invoked calls-to-action to cancel fellow celebrities (McCarthy, 2022; Ng, 2022).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Limited research deeply explored the communicative strategies of trolls in relation to their frequented social media platforms. Since the inception of the internet's Web 2.0, trolls have been a concern. Their major objective is to exploit media platforms to victimize other Internet users (Bottomley, 2020; Seel, 2022). In the field of communication, it is imperative to ascertain the linguistic strategies of trolls. This step may help determine if a typology can effectively identify trolls' communication styles and address their disruptive and impolite speech in online forums. With their toxic speech acts, trolls induce spirals of silence and frustration. Troll-like behaviors can devastatingly affect fellow media users who feel their freedom of expression and constructive thought being stifled. In this study, the term "troll" will be broadly defined as an online bad actor who intentionally disrupts virtual communication flow and persistently irritates other media users.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

Due to potential disruption outside social media, severe causes for concern include trolls, the echo chambers they emanate from, and other dubious online behaviors (Ashford et al., 2020). These issues encourage a deeper understanding of virtual speech acts associated with trolls' disruptive online behavior and ways to identify them. The communication tradition guiding this study is the sociopsychological tradition. Kurt Lewin, the father of modern psychology and pioneer in social psychology cultivated this framework (Ridgeway, 2022). His seminal work on group communication dynamics and mass communication theory has enabled predecessors and communication scholars to develop further, expand, or guide and inform their studies (Hodgetts et al., 2020).

This paper analyzes the text-based communication behaviors of internet trolls in order to answer the research questions. Primarily, this study focuses on how internet trolls observed, disregarded, and violated online communities' conversational maxims. The formal description of the aforementioned communicative strategies was presented within the underpinned framework of flouting conversational maxims and paying particular attention to the anticipated virtual speech acts leading to the typology of troll speech acts. In essence, this paper aims to better understand the communicative interaction between trolls and their flouting of maxims. It will analyze internet trolls via the fundamental categories of politeness theory and their dispensation of impoliteness while employing communication styles.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The significance of this study is threefold. It first offers a comprehensive definition of a troll and how this actor communicates. Additionally, this study examines how troll-like behavior impacts online communities in current-day discourse. A plethora of troll research exists in other

related fields and disciplines. This scholarship lends credibility, as trolls are as complex as academics of the topic. Researchers can discover how to mitigate disinformation, prevent online aggression, and relearn the fundamentals of polite interaction in online forums, contributing to a more constructive and harmonious digital environment.

Though trolls differ in motivation and purpose, they share commonalities, such as manipulating language to achieve their goals. In addition, their communicative strategies pose consequences for the online communities they frequent, which warrants responses at varying levels.

Since society has adapted to the third wave of the Internet (web 3.0), much previous research and working definitions are converging with current research and discoveries. This intertwining helps communication scholars and researchers to better address research gaps and provide amenable solutions to the problem bots, trolls, and other bad actors (Goldsmiths Media, 2022; Khodadadi et al., 2016; Kollányi, 2021). This paper seeks to notably contribute to scholarship on trolls in the communication field. The following section will present four research questions that guide this study.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Is there evidence of a troll typology based on their speech acts?

RQ2: What communication tactics do trolls utilize when they post online?

RQ3: In the observed online community, how did page followers react to the virtual speech acts of trolls?

RQ4: How does the Facebook environment facilitate trolling?

Definition of Terms

Content analysis of internet trolls' communicative behaviors and strategies requires an understanding relevant terms and concepts. The following terminology is pertinent to this study and defined for the benefit of the reading audience.

1. Ad Hominem - This phrase refers to inciting an argument, attack, or reaction directed against a person rather than the position they are maintaining (Sheng et al., 2021).
2. Astroturfing - Astroturfing is the dishonest technique of disguising a planned marketing, political topic campaigns, disingenuous narrative, or public relations operation to generate unsolicited remarks from the general population (Howard, 2020).
3. Bad actors on the internet - Bad actors on the internet are a person, persons, or an organization that aims to bring harm, subvert, breach security, or call into question the integrity of an organization. Bad actors may blatantly insult fellow users, impose upon an individual, or disrupt the harmony of an online community (Blackwell et al., 2018; Hilt et al., 2019).
4. Bots - A computer program known as a "bot," also known as an "internet bot," acts as an agent for an internet user or secondary program that simulates human interaction in online communities (Lutkevich & Gillis, 2022).
5. computer-mediated-communication (CMC) - Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is a general term that refers to the many ways in which people can communicate with each other using networked computers. These exchanges can be

one-to-one, one-to-many, or many-to-many and contain text, audio, or video messages (Lee & Oh, 2015).

6. Cyberbully - Cyberbullying and trolling are commonly mistaken. A person, with malicious intentions, who persistently stalks a particular individual online is a cyberbully. Trolls routinely attack the institution of conversation or group in online communities and spaces (Aydin et al., 2021).
7. Denizens - A netizen, seen in an unfavorable light by fellow online community members due to their behavior or negative conversational style, is referred to as a denizen (NetLingo, 2022).
8. Doxing - This term describes the act of searching for and publishing private or identifiable information about a specific individual via the internet with malevolent intent (Anguita, 2021).
9. Echo chambers - In a digital or social media environment, this term refers to a pervasive phenomenon in which beliefs one already agree with are amplified. Sentiments or ideations are reinforced through repeated communication within a closed system impervious to argument (Dubois & Blank, 2018; Morini et al., 2021).
10. E-personality - An individual's electronic identity is known as their e-personality. It is unrestricted by traditional social norms, etiquette, or netiquette. Compared to being in real life, the e-personality is less constrained, a little bit darker, and more seductive (Aboujaoude, 2012).
11. Flame/flame-baiting- A flame or flaming is the act of posting to a newsgroup, mailing list, or online forum with the purpose of attacking specific individuals or

groups of people on open message boards or private online communities to elicit ire or hostile responses (Wilson et al., 2022).

12. Flame wars - This concept, sometimes known as a pie fight or firestorm, describes an extended exchange of furious or abusive remarks between users of an online forum or other discussion area (Dictionary.com, 2022).

13. Handle - One's handle is the username that identifies their online persona, particularly while on social media platforms (Turkle, 1999).

14. Internet Forum - An online or internet forum is a type of web application for posting user-generated material to encourage discussion. The posts made to online forums create conversation threads and include both text and video content (Morzy, 2011).

15. Internet of Things (IoT) - This term refers to the overall network of interconnected devices and technology that makes it possible for objects to communicate with one another and the cloud (Lombardi et al., 2021). With the optimization of new media, the expandingly novel capabilities of IoT are gradually making socially mediated communications more robust, realistic, and immediate than ever, thus enhancing human interactions and the potentiality of associated problems (Colley & Crabtree, 2018; Memos et al., 2018; Turner et al. 2021).

16. Meme - Memes, a global phenomenon in society, are becoming a key component of dialogue, viral marketing, and social interaction. A *meme* is an image or video that captures the opinions and sentiments of a person or a particular group of people. Most memes are humorously captioned pictures. However, some may be mean-spirited (Sproutsocial, 2022).

17. Netizen - This term describes the virtual representation of a person in cyberspace or internet forums.
18. Polarized/polarizing language - A characteristic of communicative impoliteness is polarizing language. This term refers to dialogue that presents individuals, concepts, or situations as polar opposites. Polarizing language exaggerates differences and excessively generalizes. Situations and subjects are not binary, right, or wrong, or good or bad (Andersen, 2013; Bryson, 2020).
19. Red pill/red pilling/red pill remark(s) - This concept is a metaphorical description of networked online groups whose members or followers convene to locate or uncover supposed truth. This intent unfolds in echo chambers based on internet users' beliefs in codified hate. Red pill remarks are laden with toxic beliefs to incite threats of violence. Red pilling is a virtual speech act of developing, elaborating, and publishing conspiracy theories on race relations, gender, world affairs, the system, politics, or a combination thereof, with the intention of indoctrinating or angering those outside of one's group (Stern, 2020; Waśniewska, 2020).
20. Socially mediated communication - Socially mediated communication is a derivative of socially mediated crisis communication and an off-shoot of CMC. It is the conceptual idea of CMC platforms and technologies designed for the sole purpose of enabling social media (USAID, 2016).
21. Sockpuppet- A sockpuppet is a false name or identity created by an online user to dispute, bully, escalate or challenge issues or topics as another person or entity (Silva, 2019; Techopedia, 2013).

22. State-sponsored/state-backed troll - State-sponsored or state-backed trolls are people that foreign government recruit to foment online animosity and support harassment campaigns both inside and outside the United States. Their strategies include intimidating or silencing large numbers of government critics. State-sponsored trolls typically operate as collectives and work on troll farms (Monaco & Nyst, 2022; Riley et al., 2018).
23. Troll - A troll is a person or group of individuals that have exhibited a pattern of disruptive incivilities to provoke others, insult, or derail dialogue in virtual communities over a period of time (Alfonzo, 2021; Buckels, 2014; Paaki et al., 2021).
24. Troll bait/mark- A troll bait or a mark is the anticipated victim(s) or target(s) of a troll or troll army.
25. Troll farm/troll army- A troll farm or troll army is a group of bad actors in computer-mediated communication (CMC) settings who may or may not be paid or compensated to post certain information, propaganda, or opinions online (Jansson & Casselryd, 2017). However, a troll farm may not necessarily consist of only real-life individuals. Bots may make up troll farms as well.
26. Trolling- Trolling is the purposeful act of a troll or an internet user that posts random, unwanted, and/or contentious or sarcastic remarks on various internet forums. The intention is to provoke an emotional knee-jerk reaction from unwary readers to engage in a debate or to alarm. One need not necessarily be a troll to engage in these behaviors, unless they do so on a consistent basis or intentionally (Kaplan, 2021; Urban Dictionary, API, 2021).

27. Web 3.0- The third generation of web technology is known as the *Third Wave* or Web 3.0. Web 3.0 has changed both how websites are built and how people interact with them in a more immersive manner. The promise of future expansion is also evident. Web 3.0 is characterized by the increased use of AI, crypto-currency enabled features, and robust social media platforms (Kerner & Gillis, 2022).

SUMMARY

The first chapter introduced the problems of internet trolls and the impacts of their communicative strategies on fellow internet users. Trolls and troll-like conduct were discussed, as well as the phenomenon's historical background. One major issue with online trolls and their actions is their serious psychological and emotional injury toward targets. Their communicative behaviors immediately and negatively impact online communities and group settings (Jeffrey et al., 2020). If this problem is not urgently resolved, trolls' existence and activity will unavoidably threaten society's mental hygiene. Moreover, their persistent disruptive communication will have a crippling effect on the future of mediated communication. The second chapter is a literature review that examines relevant communication traditions, communication theories, and other connected literature.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This literature review elaborates on concepts covered in the first chapter. Given the increasing prevalence of disruptive online communication, including trolling, there are advanced academic analyses of the causes and impacts of troll-like behavior. Earlier research on trolling also helped reveal knowledge gaps. Online communication, which trolls strategically manipulate, is a proven fertile ground for some of the most antisocial and egregious online actions (Gehl & Lawson, 2022). The success of a troll depends on systems of communication breakdowns that work to their advantage, usually to the annoyance of other internet users.

The trivial act of trolling can significantly impede the complex process of communication (Britt, 2019; Dahlberg, 2006). Communication is an interdisciplinary process with many moving components. It facilitates inner workings across disciplines by completing the never-ending phenomena of message creation, transmission, reception, synthesis, and reaction (Yesnazer et al., 2020; Boxman-Shabtai, 2020). A troll can disrupt this delicate process in online forums by limiting the interchange of ideas, the sharing of information, polite discourse, and the constant flow of knowledge (Abdualiyevich, 2021; Jenks, 2019). By manipulating words, a troll can potentially wield enormous power in virtual communities, regardless of how trivial their actions may appear.

In the facilitation of human ecology, clear and efficient communication is crucial for fostering relationships and generating social capital. A compromise in communication can be the misuse of terms, absence of face and other visual cues, tone, or other manipulative acts. It induces conflict, causes misinterpretation, and impedes progress. Communication without compromise is essential for cognitive development, action facilitation, transformation, and

knowledge acquisition (Pooley, 2021). Uncompromised communication is devoid of the noise that impedes discourse between a speaker and an audience (Shannon & Weaver, 1949), thereby supporting the development of interdisciplinary intellectual thought and flow of everyday conversation (Louden & Frank, 2021). Constructively and strategically communicating advances society by being a compass for all disciplines and facilitating education, self-sufficiency, and social welfare (Zhu & Fu, 2019). Owing to the complexity of communication, language, and message interpretation, theories and theorizing are more suited to elucidate this multifaceted process's internal dynamics (Beligh & Willems, 2021; Lehr, 2020). Using offensive, incomprehensive, and unjustified jargon can easily interfere with the delicate process of communication. These extraneous elements pose unnecessary challenges to communicating in person and online.

Trolls add unnecessary noise to this already complicated process (Ewing, 2008; Hardaker, 2013; Ahmed & Tomlinson, 2020). Various theories can aid in comprehending the complex nature of communication. It can be useful and nuanced to study and apply the process of sending, encoding, receiving, interpreting, decoding, cyclical interaction, or transmitting feedback on messages, whether linear, circular, or transactional (Barnlund, 1970; Berlo, 1960; Schramm, 1954a, 1963b; Shannon & Weaver, 1949). The reciprocating dynamics, which the various models of communication show, are vital to communication scholars. They broaden the scope of past, present, and future studies to make connections and strengthen communication theory research to build adequate theoretical frameworks (Heath & Bryant, 2013; Hulland, 2020; Lindlof & Taylor, 2017; Palmatier et al., 2013; Swaminathan et al., 2020).

The subsequent sections will examine the theoretical foundations of this research and troll speech acts. They will also trace the impact online trolls have on online environments and society. This chapter concludes with a discussion of literature gaps.

Situation to Communication Tradition

This literature review examines communication scholars' and related professionals' research on internet trolls. Specifically, it analyzes scholarship on communication styles in online environments and the consequences of troll-like behaviors. The range of studies explored explain the intricate communication process and its shortcomings due to refraction-causing factors impacting effective discourse. In turn, the highlighted academic works illuminate what facilitates or hinders the communication process. They are based on extensive theory development in the communication discipline and related behavioral sciences. These communication theories explain various aspects of the human communication process and generate explorable hypotheses that can be further developed to construct theoretical frameworks for future research (Braithwaite & Schrod, 2021; Mowlana, 2019).

Numerous communication theories explain how humans process, manipulate, and develop constructs to validate their behaviors and beliefs (Halevy et al., 2022; Vraga et al., 2021). Philosophical inquiry and frameworks have evolved in parallel with social and technological changes. As technology progresses, simultaneous theory development facilitates the application and comprehension of communication concepts, thereby providing new modalities and perspectives of communication (Guzman & Lewis, 2019; Lewis et al., 2019; Murungi & Hirschheim, 2021; Waisbord, 2020).

Robert T. Craig, a renowned communications theorist, published a general canon of knowledge, entitled *Communication Theory as a Field*, in 1999. Believing that communication

would soon become a recognized field, Craig saw communication as a practical rather than scientific approach (Kulczyck, 2014; Scharp & Thomas, 2019; Simmons & Brisini, 2020).

In his seminal work, Craig (1999) argued that communication theorists could become unified in dialogue by charting what he termed the "dialogical dialectical field" (p. 124). By "dialogical dialectical field," Craig argued for widespread awareness of specific integration and tensions between distinct types of communication theory (Apuke, 2018; Kazakevičiūtė, 2020). He posited that theorists, educators, researchers, and practitioners in academia need awareness of the similarities and differences in their understanding of communication rather than focusing on their operations in separate domains. Craig created a framework to bring theories into better dialogue with each other. Known as the *Seven Traditions of Communication*, his framework is a structured family of communicative elements that aid in establishing a methodological perspective for communication (Craig & Xiong, 2021).

These traditions provide an explanatory lens dependent upon the context in which an individual interacts (Craig, 2019). Conceptually, communications scholars must remember that a theory is a philosophical construction of amalgamated facts or experiences that explain and broaden a subject to simplify the communication process and make it more manageable in the thought process, as in Craig's traditions (D'Angelo et al., 2019; Craig, 2019; Craig & Xiong, 2021; Quiroga, 2021).

The seven traditions of communication are a metadiscourse founded on the ideas of a constitutive communication model, where communication theories constitute communication as an object of study (Craig, 1999). Through these seven traditions, the phenomenon of troll research can be examined and comprehended in at least seven distinct ways. Craig identifies this meta-theoretical model of the seven traditions as semiotic, phenomenological, cybernetic,

sociopsychological, sociocultural, critical, and rhetorical traditions of communication (Craig, 1999). The conceptualization of each communication tradition are as follows:

- semiotic Tradition - the study of communicative signs and symbols
- phenomenological tradition - emphasizes the significance of the individual in communication
- cybernetic tradition - involves the interconnected systems of physical, biological, and behavioral processes that interact in the communication process
- sociopsychological tradition - focuses on behavioral science theories that influence people's behavior in communication situations
- sociocultural tradition - examines the production and reproduction of culture through communication
- critical tradition - uses a critical lens to theorize and comprehend social systems, power structures, beliefs, and ideologies
- rhetorical tradition - the use of discourse to facilitate persuasive communication

Although these seven traditions provide an overview of each area of expertise, they are interconnected. None can adequately explain all aspects of communication on its own (Craig, 2019b). Generally, the seven traditions of communication cannot legitimately develop in complete isolation from one another and must be conducive to academic discourse (Apuke, 2018; Graves, 2019; Craig & Xiong, 2021). Certain traditions oppose one another (semiotic and cybernetic) while others cooperate and help explain one another (cybernetic and sociopsychological). However, they all form an enigma to explain what communication all is about (Craig, 1999).

By introducing the seven areas or traditions of communication, Craig's seminal work introduced temporal dimensions to discourse and interpretation. It covered communication in a typological sense. Overall, the seven traditions apply to comprehending human-to-human interactions depending on circumstances.

Theoretical Framework

The phenomenon of being a troll or exhibiting troll-like behavior is a negating human behavior that has a detrimental impact on communication situations. Trolling can inhibit dialogue and be quite damaging in groups. Effective communication is the first step toward building solid interpersonal relationships. Through meaningful human connections, misunderstandings can be clarified, respect is cultivated, social capital is generated, and a shared commitment to coexistence is strengthened. In society, communication is useful for acquiring information, preserving humanity, and exerting influence. This process is undeniably psychological with societal precedents, which makes communication a complex and intricate operation. Individuals in groups can influence one another based on the assumption that humans are relational beings. That communication reflects an individual's personality, biases, belief systems, attitudes, and prejudices (Craig, 1999). Considering the above discussion, the sociopsychological communication tradition will serve as the foundation for this research, drawing from Craig's seven communication traditions.

Sociopsychological Tradition

The sociopsychological tradition adds foundational strength to this study. This tradition is regarded as one of the most firmly established lenses for using and comprehending the socio-emotional sphere of the human psyche in social scientific communication research (Literat, 2019; Norboevich, 2020). Trolls, a faction of bad actors on the internet with destructive

communication tactics, significantly impact others' psychological well-being in public forums and online communities on social media (Fox & McEwan, 2019). This communication tradition is relevant since a troll must undergo a psychological process to carry out their specific speech act devoid of shame in a social situation (Guadagno & Guttieri, 2021; Xiong et al., 2021). Troll-like behaviors result from underlying behaviors that eventually impede meaningful communication (Eberwein & Porlezza, 2016; Krotz, 2019; Ottmann et al., 2020). Moreover, a troll's action may affect the psychological well-being of targeted individuals in diverse ways, thus simultaneously impacting the dynamic nature of the whole group (Page, 2022; Phelps et al., 2021; Saha et al., 2019). Individuals vary in dimensions in regard to information processing and communicative strategy.

Trait theory is one of the most suitable approaches to better understand the sociopsychological aspects behind individuals' differing dimensions of information processing and communicative strategy. Trait theory (Allport, 1936; Cattell, 1943; Ewen, 2003) is situated within the sociopsychological tradition, which is grounded in the study of the individual (Woodward, 2020). As a primary focus, trait theory investigates attitude and the relationship between personality and communication (Han & Xu, 2020). According to trait theorists, an individual's personality can be understood with the approach that all persons have specific traits, or characteristic ways of behaving.

Studying the relationship between attitude, personality, and communication (the foundation for the development of the sociopsychological tradition) would not be conceivable without the contributions of prominent scientists in psychology and social psychology (Perloff, 2016; Rogala & Bialowas, 2016; Singh, 2019).

Key Contributors to the Genesis of the Sociopsychological Tradition

Key contributors to the tradition's foundational genesis are Kurt Lewin, Fritz Heider, Muzafer Sherif, Solomon Eliot Asch, Carl Hovland, Leon Festinger, Roger Brown, Stanley Milgram, and Gordon Allport (Ochieng, 2011; Summers, 2017). Later, the theories of 20th century social scientists, like Alfred Adler, Eric Fromm, Karen Horney, and Harry Stack-Sullivan, would question and reject Freud's psychoanalytic theory while simultaneously codifying and developing the sociopsychological legacy (Conci, 2012; Sabates, 2020). Their Neo-Freudian theories set the foundation for the sociopsychological tradition to be further developed within communication studies (Groark, 2019; Yarlykova & Xunda, 2019).

Kurt Lewin (1890-1947) is known as the father of modern psychology and a pioneer in social psychology (Burnes, 2021; Muldoon, 2020). His expert areas were experiential learning, group dynamics, and action research (Ramage & Shipp, 2020). While not a communication scholar, Lewin significantly advanced mass communication theories through his research (Roberts, 2018). In psychology, theories strongly emphasize the individual as a socialized organism within a system that provided the earliest foundation for the sociopsychological tradition of communication (Spear, 2019). Through frequent communication with his peers and subjects, Lewin based his studies on understanding how a person physically, mentally, and socially made sense of his world. He synthesized the relationship between their attitudes and behavior as an individual or in group settings (Hodgetts et al., 2020; Lewin, 1947; Morosoli, 2019). His work contributed significantly to understanding how attitudes, personality, and behavior exerted influence over the communication processes of groups and individuals (Burnes & Cooke, 2012; Wallis et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2021).

In 1944, Lewin established the Research Center for Group Dynamics, where he focused on "field theory" or group dynamics (Kulich et al., 2020; Muldoon, 2020). Group dynamics is the study of how an individual's behavior may fluctuate, dependent on his or her relationships with or within a group (Reis, 2019; Lindorfer, 2021). Several hypotheses are attributable to communications study today due to the scholarship of Kurt Lewin (Cohen & McWilliams, 2021; Oliver et al., 2020; Sellnow & Seeger, 2021). It was Lewin who coined the term *gatekeeping* (Zulkifli et al., 2019). A gatekeeper, according to Lewin, was a person who made decisions for the good of a group whether it be work-related, organizational, or family (Marling, 2021). The gatekeeping theory was the theoretical framework of one of Lewin's seminal works, the 'sweetbreads' research (Adubato et al., 2020). This experimental study had the wartime objective of increasing domestic consumption of secondary beef cuts so that priority cuts would be allocated to the military (Lewin, 1978). It investigated whether one-way mass communication techniques, such as lectures to Iowa homemakers to increase household consumption of sweetmeats, significantly influenced and changed their shopping behavior (Boghossian & Lindsay, 2019; Reiter-Palmon & Leone, 2019). This communication study by Lewin revealed that homemakers are crucial gatekeepers who determine which food products and other items enter their households (Knotek et al., 2020). The versatility of gatekeeping theory's use across fields has been established since its inception. This fact is particularly demonstrated in journalism, digital arts, social media, and other technologies used in public communication. The gatekeeping theory is the nexus point where two undisputed facts converge: only a small fraction of the billions of events in the world daily make the news, and two, gatekeepers control the flow of that information to and within their networks. In journalism, the role of a gatekeeper is crucial in the current media environment. Gatekeepers eventually oversee and direct the public's

information flow, thus establishing the social reality and perspective of the broader public (Elsawah & Howard, 2020; Napoli, 2019; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; Wallace, 2018).

Initially utilized extensively in the field of psychology, the gatekeeper theory is now one of the fundamental theories in the field of communication (Vos, 2019; Vraga et al., 2021). This theory is applicable since anyone can become a gatekeeper. Also, as communication technology advances, the number of self-proclaimed gatekeepers, such as trolls, will also increase. As these trolls continue to increase, group administrators and social media managers will be required to function as gatekeepers who eradicate trolling in their governed forums.

The following researchers have significantly contributed to the development of the sociopsychological notion, which grew from a sociology and psychology-based framework. They paved the way for countless successors in psychology, sociology, linguistics, and communication to continue the sociological heritage in communication theory development. They also established one of the traditions in which to locate these theories. The following scholars are the major contributors to sociopsychological traditions.

Fritz Heider (1896-1988) was a Gestalt psychologist renowned for his Commonsense Psychology theory. Additionally, he was a close associate of Kurt Lewin. Heider's 1958 book, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*, popularized the Attribution Theory. This theory asserts that people attribute the behavior of others to their perceptions as acquired in specific situations and in accordance with their long-held beliefs. In other words, Heider argues that dispositions such as motives, attitudes, and personality traits can explain behavior.

Heider developed the balance theory, which emphasized sentimental relationships between individuals (Rawlings, 2020). His intent was to comprehend the relationship between three factors: the perceiver, another person, and an object. According to this theory, two people

in a dyadic relationship should share similar feelings to achieve harmony (Lee et al., 2020). Either they must like or dislike one another. It is the prerogative of the individual to choose his interpersonal relationships, and any change in emotions creates tension or force that affects the formation of equilibrium (Petriglieri & Louise Petriglieri, 2022). Situations, such as external pressures, social norms, peer pressure, acts of God, chance, and accidents, can also influence behavior. Heider deserves praise for developing many significant theories that have impacted social perception. His theories are based on fundamentals directed by people's perceptions of physical objects.

Another contributor, Muzafer Sherif (1906-1988), was a pioneering scholar in Social Psychology and a key figure in the discipline's development. His primary areas of interest were group dynamics and the influence of social norms on group conflict. In response to Einstein and Infeld's 1942 book, *The Evolution of Physics*, Sherif developed his Realistic Conflict Theory. This theory focuses on inner group conflict, negative prejudices, and stereotypes as the basis for competition for group resources. Sherif argued that groups' realities depend on the resources available to them. When resources are scarce, there is competition that tends to engender antagonistic relationships. Cooperation and reciprocal interactions are essential to fostering positive relationships. If resources are limited, intergroup relations tend to deteriorate.

The scholarly community in communication also lauds Sherif for his contribution to learning theories, such as the Social Judgment Theory, which investigates the effects of persuasive messages. He argued that evaluating a message's position to alternative messages influences attitude as expressed by acceptance, rejection, and noncommitment latitudes.

Solomon Eliot Asch (1907-1996) was a pioneering scholar in social psychology and Gestalt psychology. His experiments on group conformity served as a means for him to illustrate

the power of social influence. His experiments on group conformity demonstrated the potency of social influence (Westney, 2021). While a student of Stanley Milgram, his research on obedience significantly impacted him. Asch showed that a peer's influence may negatively impact social behavior, even though people are generally respectful toward one another.

Carl Hovland (1912-1961) is highly revered because he made one of the most salient contributions to the social communication field. Hovland was a faculty member in the Psychology department at Yale University in 1939 (Wijsen et al., 2019). From 1942 until 1945, he evaluated the army's media training program using films as instructional materials for attitude formation (Aitken, 2019; McGowan, 2021). His research focused on human learning, attitude shifts, and the acquisition of innovative ideas focused on experimental, social, and cognitive psychology branches (Aechtner, 2020; Liu, 2019). In the study, he discovered the "recency effect," when people remember the largest and most important objectives presented in training materials (Applbaum & Anatol, 2020).

Later, Hovland returned to Yale and started the *Yale Communication and Attitude Change* program (McGuire, 2013; Hurley & Hogan, 2017). Within the program's framework, he investigated how the most efficient verbal representation of information can influence the opinions and beliefs of the person receiving it. In the studies, Hovland observed and manipulated a person's previous position on an issue, self-esteem, source credibility, position extremeness, and argument order (Demirdöğen, 2010; Gervais, 2020). The effect that one-sided and two-sided messages have on the feelings of individuals was another variable taken into consideration (Xu & Petty, 2021). Communication researchers have examined the impact of two-sided talks on views for many years. Even though it has been hypothesized that two-sided interactions lead to

more favorable results, there is still no evidence to support this assertion when examining the emotions of the interactants at the time of the encounter (Yao, 2021).

Leon Festinger (1919-1989) was one of Kurt Lewin's colleagues. He is famous for pioneering the field of group dynamics research, which led to creating some of the earliest non-parametric tests in the field (Cornelissen, 2019; Fan et al., 2020). Prior to his seminal work at the Michigan Institute of Technology, Festinger was a member of the University of Michigan's Group Dynamic Center (GDC). He participated in classes that primarily centered on various aspects of communication and social influence. Festinger was one of the first scholars to study the effects of group dynamics. He drafted sociometric questions to query students on whom they see the most on a social level which served as the impetus for the studies because they were used to poll participants. The findings showed that people who are socio-metrically close to one another share similar attitudes. Those who had aberrant worldviews lived in social isolation. Festinger's findings served as the impetus for developing experimental laboratory research programs, which eventually gave rise to the field of *Systematic Experimental Social Psychology* (Toby, 2014; Westoff et al., 2022). Festinger and his research students manipulated social variables, including affection, social cohesion, group structure, and deviance. They established the effects that these manipulations had on influence, exertion, acceptance, and communication. He is considered one of the "balance" theorists due to his research on the effects of forced compliance.

Roger Brown (1925-1997), a renowned social psychology educator at Harvard University, authored the course text *Social Psychology*. In 1957, Brown wrote his first synthesis between the uses of language and thought. He demonstrated the relationship between people's

use of phonemes with symbolic connotations. He went on to investigate the role those unscripted conversations between a mother and her child play in the process of language acquisition.

In his book titled *The Man Who Shocked the World*, Dr. Stanley Milgram (1933-1984) describes twenty experiments he designed to understand how people comply with authority (Blass, 2009). He sought to comprehend how Germans, during the time of the Nazis, conducted the directives received from their superiors. He desired to ascertain the number of individuals who would administer punishments to others per superiors' instructions. Stanley discovered that people of varying backgrounds and nationalities, regardless of male or female, had an innate need to obey authority. These observations were accurate regardless of their culture or nationality. He also discovered that people were inclined to comply with the demands of authority, although they had little knowledge about the motivations of their superiors. Milgram continued his investigation into the impact that consensus among a group has on conformity. His goal was to understand the extent to which the viewpoint of an existing group influences the viewpoint of new members. Milgram also developed the concept of "Six Degrees of Separation." This idea shows that everyone on earth is interrelated with one another through at least six people who stand in the way of direct communication.

Lastly, Gordon Allport (1945-1970) is acclaimed as the father of Personality Theory (Feeney, 2020). Because he believed in the uniqueness of the individual, he studied the characteristics and consistency of personalities. His studies identified various initiative-taking personality traits, including individual, cardinal, central, motivational, secondary, and stylistic traits (Dash, 2021). Allport asserted that people are considered psychologically healthy and develop personalities if they are consciously motivated to reduce internal tension (Allport, 1955; Bleidorn et al., 2020).

Allport's research was titled *Individual Morphogenic Science*, (Allport, 1962) a standard method for studying groups. According to Allport (1961), personality is the dynamic organization of psychological systems that determines an individual's character, behavior, and thought (Beck & Jackson, 2021). He demonstrated that individuals tend to have decomposition levels that overlap. To develop a theory of motivation, Allport asserted that as people mature, motivations serve as drivers for their present needs and desires (Allport, 1958). Allport was attempting to develop a theory of motivation while asserting that people shape their environment to suit their needs (Afanasyev et al., 2019; Feeney, 2020). To maintain psychological health, individuals must generate tension that enables them to shape their environment. Allport is also well-known for his controversial Theory of Functional Autonomy (1937), which posits that what motivates humans is independent of the initial motivation for a particular behavior (Rashid, 2021). According to Allport, the pursuit of proactive rather than reactive methods of maintaining psychological health should always occur. Consequently, a psychologically healthy individual will have a sense of self-extension. They will tend to have warm relationships with others and exhibit emotional stability and self-acceptance. Allport further argued that the individual is unique and capable of proactively influencing his psychological health (Bleidorn et al., 2020; Paolini et al., 2021; Wertz, 2015/ 2018). They will have insight, a sense of humor, and a unified philosophy of life. Allport was one of the first researchers to utilize self-reports as a data collection method.

Allport introduced to Social Psychology the necessity of studying human beings as rational, proactive, and purposeful individuals and not merely as members of groups (Cikara, 2021). According to Allport, social psychology was "The study of the individual's behavior insofar as it is stimulated or stimulated by the behavior of others. It describes the individual's

consciousness as a consciousness of social objects and social interactions, which have sparked controversy and criticism” (Allport, 1926; Bernard, 2010). Over seven decades ago, Gordon Allport asserted that the attitude concept was essential in social psychology. The study of attitudes continues to be at the forefront of social psychological research and theory (Fishman et al., 2021; Hodgetts et al., 2020).

The Sociocultural Tradition

Sociocultural tradition is another appropriate tradition for informing this research inquiry. In the early twentieth century, two American sociologists, Charles H. Cooley and George Mead made significant contributions to this tradition (Craig & Muller, 2007; Mead 2000). The sociocultural tradition has its roots in anthropological and sociological principles (Barnard, 2021). In contrast to sociopsychological tradition, sociocultural tradition focuses on one's overall relationship with a culture rather than individual characteristics (Biserova & Shagivaleeva, 2019). Unlike the sociopsychological tradition, which emphasizes individual difference or a person's function in a system, the sociocultural tradition focuses on one's overall interaction with a culture rather than individual distinctions (Magut, 2016; Otto & Smith, 2020; Rudick et al., 2019).

This tradition is also relevant to synthesizing research that investigates people's language habits and linguistic relativity in communal contexts, whether real or virtual (Koerner, 1992; Mascolo & Kallio, 2019). The sociocultural tradition can also be applied to social research on trolls and the implementation of troll-like acts according to the subtleties of social media climate, from paradigm to data analysis and narrative interpretations (Ebner, 2019; Ramkumar & Sadath, 2019; Utemissova et al., 2021). In many cases, due to multicultural differences, a person can be mistaken for being a troll or exhibiting troll-like behavior in their online conversations (Cook et

al., 2021). In the past, psycholinguistic research on trolls or troll-like behaviors has focused on the sociocultural factors that may have contributed to misinterpretations during the communication process (Paakki et al., 2021). While both traditions provide a strong framework for this research, this paper will take a sociopsychological approach. This study's theoretical framework will include the sociopsychological tradition of communication, Grice's maxims, face-threatening act (a component of politeness theory), and the theory of planned behavior.

Grice's Maxims (GM)

Communication is a complex phenomenon in linguistics (Shaykhislamov & Makhmudov, 2020). Different forms of utterances are used to convey intended meaning to make sense in the world between co-present people (Barnes & Bloch, 2018). The following section describes the application of Gricean conversational implicature to the daily interaction of social media and other mediated places where trolls or trolling are concerned. Since speech acts, whether polite or impolite, are consistent with the context, this section will cover the linguistic phenomena that online trolls perform and the utterances that occur in online troll interactions. Therefore, troll discourse will be the focus of data collected and analyzed in this literature review.

In 1975, British philosopher H. Paul Grice developed Grice's conversational maxims (Grice, 1975). Grice's maxims, often known as Gricean maxims, came from natural language pragmatics (Rubio-Fernandez, 2019). In his theory of Conversational Implicature (CI), Grice claimed that communication partners are steered by the Cooperative Principle, which specifies how language facilitates rational communication with optimum efficiency and effectiveness (Al-Hindawi & Kamil, 2017). Grice's cooperative principle and related maxims are an attempt to show how people can imply more than what they say (Awwad et al., 2019). It was Grice's assumption that anyone who engaged in meaningful communication would follow four maxims

and assume others would follow within the same line of communication (Behera, 2021). The maxims based on his cooperative principle state:

Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged,' and is so called because listeners and speakers must speak cooperatively and mutually accept one another to be understood in a particular way (Grice, 1975, p. 26).

Grice (1975) classified conversational maxims into four categories: Maxim of Quality, Maxim of Quantity, Maxim of Relevance, and Maxim of Manner (Fahmi, 2018). Following the Maxim of Quality entails avoiding lying on purpose. When adhering to the Maxim of Quantity, it is critical not to withhold information during communication that is required to keep the dialogue going. However, one must be careful not to overwhelm our listeners with irrelevant material (Hansson, 2015). Following the Maxim of Relevance keeps interactions on track and prevents them from becoming disjointed. This maxim also aids us in comprehending utterances and literary devices in discussions that are not immediately apparent (Richter & Leuthold, 2022). The Maxim of Manner is mainly concerned with the words one uses (Pramelia & Mulatsih, 2021).

While the Gricean maxims provide an objectives-based framework for fluid speech free of impediments or misunderstandings, they have sparked significant speculation because of their perceived restrictions (Fedorova & Salnikiva, 2019; Hossain, 2021; Khayrallah & Sedoc, 2021; Martinich, 1980). The argument that cooperative conversation, concerning most social behaviors, is culturally driven has been made against Grice's thesis numerous times (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2016). Therefore, the Grice adage of maxims and the principle of cooperation cannot be universally applied to multicultural differences (Abualadas, 2020). There have been significant studies that examined whether the Gricean maxims affected autistic children's communicative

perceptions (Asada et al., 2002; Surian, 1996; Wahyunianto et al., 2020). One study's findings supported the theory that a selective deficiency causes communication difficulties in autism, specifically in representing propositional attitudes (Surian, 1996). Robert E. Frederking (1996) argued in *"Grice's Maxims: Do the Right Thing"* about the vagueness of the maxims and the possible harms they could incur by forming a misleading taxonomy. As a consolation, Grice did not presume that everyone should always adhere to his proposed communication maxims (Frederking, 1996; Al-Qaderi & Alduais, 2019; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 2008). It is possible to deliberately or unconsciously violate a maxim, thereby conveying a different meaning than the literal meaning. Gricean maxims can easily be misinterpreted as linear in applying etiquette guidelines by instructing speakers to be moral and polite conversationalists (Krauss & Fussell, 2019; Thomas et al., 2021a). However, Gricean maxims can be weaponized into word warfare in the name of sarcasm, ridicule, blue humor, and politics among other things, due to the sender's intent being known only to him and tone being absent from the written conversation (Hodges, 2019; Nuessel, 2022).

Failures and Violations of Maxims

Failure to follow a maxim, whether by purpose or by accident, occurs in five separate ways according to previous troll research (Zaidi et al., 2022). The five violations of the maxims are violating, infringing, opting out, suspending, or flouting, with the last being the most frequently used (Yeboah, 2021). It is crucial to remember that not all cases of flouting are malicious or motivated by a negative motive (Cappelen & Devers, 2019; Kreuz, 2020). The flouting of a maxim is commonly seen in comedies, as well as in dark humor, for parody and unfortunately to purposely insult another (Apriyani & Sembodo, 2021; Aristyanti et al., 2020; Hirsch, 2019; Lestari, 2019; Putra et al., 2018). Those who willfully flout a maxim, on the other

hand, usually do so to enable the receiver to comprehend the underlying meaning of their message, and in the case of the troll, for far more nefarious motives (Kaplan, 2021). According to studies, undesirable actors on the internet, such as trolls, can boost their hate speech while minimizing their hostile language by flouting conversational maxims. This act allows them to avoid social media filters and go unnoticed (Alexander, 2019; Balogh & Veszelszki, 2020; Paakki et al., 2021; Riza, 2013; Santos, 2019). Hate, political attacks, sexist hate speech, the targeting of individuals and marginalized groups are examples of verbal and written communication where maxims have been flouted, according to troll studies (Bączkowska, 2021; Keller & Askanius, 2020). Paaki et al. (2021) conducted a study in which the maxim of quantity was breached in asymmetric trolling when bad actors used deceptive language to detract other users from conversations. Ignoring fellow users' expectations for common grounding, the trolls in this study subverted other users' desire for clarification and explanations in conversations by prolonging meaningless futile conversations, avoiding turn-taking, and mismatching topic responses. The research team discovered that Grice's maxims frequently fail in conversations with troll-like participants. Trolling-like behavior violates the maxims of quantity (in ignoring), relevance (in mismatching), and manner, as demonstrated by the authors' theoretical application of the Gricean cooperative principle to their findings (in challenging). When trolling-like behavior was perceived as an attempt to deceive other users, all these strategies violated the maxim of quality, which states that what is said must be accurate. Overall, the actions of the troll-like participants in the discussions demonstrated a strategic lack of cooperation.

Trolls flouting the conversational maxims placed actress Susan Sarandon on both sides of the hate speech and sexist insults continuum after she explicitly stated her views on the 2016 Presidential election (Santos, 2019). Using a dataset of n=659 tweets posted by the Iranian

Foreign Minister over a ten-year period, researchers focused on the flouting of linguistic impoliteness to examine perceived offenses and how Twitter helped shape the context in which offenses could employ strategic diplomatic conversation (Altahmazi, 2022). Sarcasm is easily misinterpreted as a form of trolling (Coles & West, 2016; Greene, 2019; Mihailova, 2020). A study sought to investigate this gap by quantitatively analyzing the influence of sociocultural variables, including gender, age, county, and English language origin, on the impact of sarcastic communication online (Oprea & Magdy, 2020). This study found that age, English language origin, and country significantly influenced perceptions of what a troll is or being able to identify what one might consider troll-like behavior. The findings further implied the need for more research into related phenomena with sarcasm or the development of future analysis tools that directly study sarcasm.

Politeness Theory, Face, and Face-Threatening Act (FTA)

Politeness Theory

In 1978, Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson introduced the politeness theory. It is a pragmatic approach to employing tactics of appropriate civility in dialogue (Brown, 2022; Gumartifa, 2022). The purpose of implementing politeness theory is to reduce face threats induced by face-threatening variables to prevent conflict or misunderstanding. Drawing on Goffman's concepts of face theory, Brown & Levinson (1978-1987) advanced his research by developing politeness theory.

Politeness theory assumes that speakers are concerned with maintaining *face*, thus projecting and preserving their desired public image (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This assumption has been referenced in other studies. Through the lens of politeness theory, one study examined phubbing or the act of snubbing amongst friends by using a cell phone in each other's

presence. The researchers found that a higher perception of face-threatening behavior was associated with a greater likelihood of responding with politeness strategies. However, no particular strategy emerged as the preferred response (Kelly et al., 2019).

Face Theory

American sociologist, Erving Goffman, developed face theory in the late 1960s. *Face* is a term used in the context of interpersonal communication. Goffman provided the following definition of the term *face*: "the social construct of a person that is reflective of the respect, regard, or confidence that others have in them and of which the person in question is conscious or mindful of himself or herself" (Goffman, 1972, p. 5). It relates to the expression, nonverbal cues, outward manifestations of one's actual self (Hargie, 2021), and body language presented during in-person conversations. When a person communicates with another, his or her words, actions, and conduct will typically be consistent with the picture that that person has of himself or herself. Individuals have a natural tendency to put on a public face or a social front to prevent their audience viewing them as deviant(s). Therefore, face is the self-image that an individual creates in relation to how positively or negatively other people (Qi, 2017) regard them. When individuals deploy public face and social fronts, there is a decreased likelihood that they will participate in deliberate speech acts or actions that are demeaning or egregious in the presence of other people (Fox, 2020). This display of face, in public, sheds light on the individual identities of those communicating. Face-work is a mechanism that promotes social order and encourages self-discipline in individuals.

However, there are situations, occurrences, or other factors which threaten face, thus hindering or convoluting the process of social interaction. Such threats or acts to face can call into question or weaken relationships due to the conflicts incurred. Smooth development of any

social interaction is essential to understanding how individuals negotiate meaning within their relationships. Thus, the sociological concept of face is relevant (Rudick & McGeough, 2019; Tavory & Fine, 2020). The biggest barriers to preserving face in the present day are due to the advancements of modern-day communication technologies such as social media. As such, a conflict frequently has the potential to contradict a person's idealized face.

Currently, the primary concern is how individuals negotiate face during CMC social interaction (Hall, 2020). As technology advances in mediated communications, face-threatening acts are becoming ever more prevalent. The absence of visual cues and tone amongst other variables are impacting the smooth flow of communication across available platforms . Politeness in communication appears to be losing its luster in socially mediated spaces. Online trolls thrive in the absence of face-to-face interaction, as it provides fuel for their impolite discourse. Thus, the behavior of face plays a decisive role in politeness theory.

Face-Threatening Act (FTA)

Due to the absence of face or the perpetrator's ability to save face, trolling can flourish on the internet (Kozyreva et al., 2020). A face-threatening act is a negative behavior that spoils the face of the addressee or the speaker by acting against his or her wishes or desires (Yadav, 2022). Under the cloak of anonymity and the assurance that their self-reflection of identity is not revealed to those they are addressing, a troll exploits such for their own benefit (Forest, 2021; Houe, 2020; Jemielniak & Przegalinska, 2020).

Xia and Wang (2022) led a content analysis (CA) study examining novel interpretations of online *Gangjing*, which is designated as trolling discourse in a Chinese online forum. Collecting data from interactional threads in Baidu Post Bar, the CA-informed study investigated what communicative actions netizens perform in using the term. They also assessed what

responsive behaviors were triggered when face was preserved or the perception of face was perceived to be compromised. The research team discovered that when insults and highly toxic comments were made in participant groups, more face-threatening behavior was detected. In a netnography (Raish, 2019), keyword searches were used in a collection of community discussion forums to assess the extent to which face-threatening acts were used to exploit the diplomatic climate of specific groups, as well as to amplify or permit criticism.

Speech Acts

Coined by John L. Austin (1962), a speech act is an utterance that is viewed as an action, especially in terms of its aim, purpose, or effect (Corredor, 2020; Green, 2021; Hanna & Richards, 2019). Based on Bertrand Russell's (1905) theory of descriptions, Austin expanded on Russell's work in his book *How to do things with Words* (1962). He provided a framework for communicating in a richer, multidimensional environment. Austin developed the distinctive characteristics of speech acts during the *Ordinary Language movement*, a time when the philosophical debate centered on how societal problems stemmed from misunderstandings of language, how the human expression should be equated with its use, and the desire to transcend traditional philosophical complexities (Austin, 1962; Harris & McKinney, 2021). Speakers or original posters (OPs) can convey physical action merely through words and phrases using speech acts. The words spoken are fundamental to the actions carried out (Hidayat, 2016). The speech acts encompass three categories of operations: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary (Sbisà, 2020).

The locutionary speech act is simply an expression of what is stated or communicated to an audience (Hanna & Richards, 2019; Pasaribu & Silalahi, 2019). It is the fundamental production of meaningful speech. However, this action is heavily dependent on the recipient of

the message. If the listener cannot comprehend what the speaker is saying, the speaker has failed to perform a locutionary act. Essentially, one must have a definite goal in mind when uttering a sentence or word (Liddicoat, 2021; Opayemi et al., 2019; Petherbridge, 2021). In speech act theory, the terminology illocutionary act pertains to the use of a statement to convey an attitude with a certain function or "impulse," known as an illocutionary force. This function varies from locutionary because they carry a sense of urgency and appeal to the speaker's purpose and direction. Even though illocutionary activities are frequently made explicit using performative verbs such as "guarantee" and "ask," they are sometimes imprecise (Deputatova et al., 2021; Gatti & Yeboah, 2019; Notess, 2021). The perlocutionary act affects or influences the listener's or reader's feelings, ideas, behaviors, thoughts, or actions. It is what a speaker or OP does when making a comment or remark to significantly affect the listener and others. Whether deliberate or unintentional, the utterance(s) will significantly impact the audience (Provenzano, 2021; Uche, 2019; Van Berkum, 2019). In essence, illocutionary force evokes the response or call to action the speaker desires to elicit from the audience. Within a system of social conventions, the audience must interpret the illocutionary point of the speech act for the response of call-to-action to be completed (Huang, 2012). Recent innovations in communication aids, however, have made illocutionary force more instantaneous and simpler to process.

As a result of the advancement of communication technologies, communication has become more dynamic. Non-linguistic information is now more frequently conveyed through emoticons while conversing online. Emoticons, short for emotion icons (Yuan & Li, 2019), are global representations of facial expressions created by various combinations of keyboard characters used to reflect a user's emotions or intended tone on the internet (Teh & Lim, 2022). Also termed as non-dialogic communication, individuals can use the same elements to repeatedly

intimidate, insult, and derail online conversations, which is then known as non-dialogic trolling (Britt, 2019). The use of emoticons instead of dialogue frankly speaks to the intent or illocutionary force of the internet user. The decision, justification, and time required to select the emoticon in a dialogue interaction make it deliberate and focused. These visual cues, like discourse, can have the same effect on a person's emotional state, whether it is favorable or unfavorable (Amaghlobeli, 2012; Ge & Gretzel, 2018). Dresner and Herring (2010) investigated the interpretation of emoticons as markers of illocutionary force. Dresner and Herring argued that emoticons did not contribute to the propositional content (the locution) of the language utilized, nor were they merely an extra-linguistic communication route for expressing emotion. Rather, they helped transmit an essential part of the language expression to which they were attached: the user's original and implied intent when typing. They concluded that, in many cases, emoticons are used to convey more than just emotion. They also help convey the speech act performed through the production of the utterance.

While speech acts in online or mediated spaces may be limiting for regular users due to the absence of fundamental aspects such as *face* and the complexity of conceiving the categories as a result, it provides online trolls with a significant advantage in facilitating their goals. Throughout the past few years, a faction of research has shifted regarding how speech acts in real life (IRL) parallel in functionality with speech acts in mediated spaces (Ambroise, 2015; Carr et al., 2012; Carretero et al., 2015; Simpson, 2017). The research has yielded some significant insights; however, it has been sporadic and indicative of gaps as communication technology advances. There are inherent challenges in studying internet speech, especially where it concerns trolling. These obstacles result from not only attempting to explore the anticipated commonalities evident in the phenomenon, but also assessing the tools needed to identify the

complexities in the realms of subculture trolling (Morgan, 2022). Possibly, greater emphasis on trolls' speech acts will broaden academic study on this phenomena.

The Speech Acts of Trolls

There exists a common denominator among the definitions of trolls in the literature review: their distinguishing virtual speech acts. Based on intent and material purpose, virtual speech acts, broadcast via the internet, often fall into one of two categories: political speech acts or commercial speech acts (Polak & Trottier, 2020; Reynard, 2020). Based on intent and outcomes concerning speech acts, both types of online communication on social media sites are classifiable as either constructive and prosocial or destructive and abusive (Reynard, 2020). In the case of trolls, productive and prosocial discourse is stifled, whereas destructive and abusive rhetoric is utilized.

In prior research, trolls have been characterized as some of the worst online provocateurs solely due to their speech acts. Provocateurs are defined as individuals who provoke, agitate, rabble-rouse, or serve as demagogues to spread an idea to targeted audiences in hopes of radicalizing (Abdullina et al., 2018; Spear, 2011). In some cases, trolling has grown so out of control that there have been legal ramifications. A study by Hardaker (2020) analyzed corpus and forensic linguistics to identify and help legal professionals understand troll speech acts to inform legal arguments and apply them to court proceedings. This study responded to the increasing conviction rates of trolls in some countries. Cyber or online trolling pales in comparison to the playful trolling that took place in the early 1980s. Current trolls are extremely more sinister and toxic in their online behavior. Buckels et al. (2019) conducted a comparative study that investigated how online trolling was substantially connected with internet users who displayed sadistic personality traits. They concluded that the sadistic tendencies of internet trolls

connected to the irrational and sadistic pleasures of individuals who departed from the norms of politeness theory and anchored normal actions.

Troll-like behavior has become more insidious in nature, as trolls are now defined by toxic online behaviors. Communication literature defines internet trolling as a malicious online behavior characterized by the aggressive and deliberate provocation of others to upset and harm them through speech acts in the form of inflammatory messages and posts (Brubaker et al., 2021; Craker & March, 2016; Fichman & Sanfilippo, 2016; Golf-Papez, 2018; Hardaker, 2013). Trolls are distinguished by their behaviors, which are symptomatic of their online communication methods (Fichman & Sanfilippo, 2016). These online culprits are characterized as antisocial internet users (Paakki et al., 202) whose behaviors are extremely diverse in tactics, motivation, and impact (Sanfilippo et al., 2017) and lead to speech vitriolic acts (Mason, 2021). The language of trolls can take many forms, such as insults, profanity-laced tirades, sarcasm, mocking words, misinformation distribution, destructive calls to action, and other forms of impolite conversation in the public sphere (Bormann et al, 2021; Graham, 2019; Miller et al., 2022; Syndor, 2019).

One strategy that trolls employ to destabilize an online community is the use of degrading speech acts, one of which is dismissive incomprehension. Matthew J. Cull (2019) identified dismissive incomprehension as an epistemically degrading speech action. It is comprised of a receiver in a perceived privileged epistemic position (falsely) expressing ignorance or lack of understanding of some information. Its sole objective is to show the material as ludicrous or useless to discredit the original source of the information in the eyes of an audience (SERRC, 2019). Dismissive incomprehension is a speech act by individual *B* who suggests ignorance of the meaning of words made by speaker *A*. Such a speech act has the planned perlocutionary

impact of discrediting certain utterances of *A* to discredit *A* more generally in the view of those in audience *C* (Cull 2019, p. 264). The preceding discussion makes evident that trolling is a deliberate behavior. The utilization of virtual speaking acts has a utility. Online trolls seek to cause chaos in online communities and to provoke people to take whatever actions the troll sees fit, all at the troll's whim. However, it is also necessary to consider the communication tactics and linguistic patterns that trolls use to fulfill these speech acts.

Communication Tactics

To effectively communicate a speech act in ordinary dialogue, one must use appropriate language, including words, tone, and context (Grice, 1975; Kang & Kermad, 2019; Kadirjanovna, 2021). Communication Tactics entail how those the communicator delivers utterances (Wijana, 2021). They are the specific strategies used to convey speech acts, such as making direct or indirect requests, utilizing persuasion, or employing humor (Nasser, 2022). The situation, audience, and the speech act's desired outcome may influence the communication strategy choice (Khranchenko, 2019). Communicators' use of body language, nonverbal cues, tone of voice, logical argumentation, and persuasive strategies to generate emotional appeals all contribute to their verbal behaviors (Chomsky & Skinner, 1959) and ultimately to their communication tactics (Bruns & Ganapati, 2019; Chen et al., 2019; Sen, 2022). Communication tactics are closely related to speech acts, which are the specific strategies communicators employ to achieve their intended goals or outcomes from conversations or interactions.

Unfortunately, in the trolling realm, communication tactics are used oppositely regarding appropriate language, tact, tone, and context (Badrov et al., 2021; Duskaeva, (2020); Sen, 2022). Trolls' common speech acts include body shaming (Schlüter et al., 2021); verbiage to cause emotional distress (Berghel & Berleant, 2018; Blackman, 2022; Park et al., 2021), provoke

(Andersen, 2021), create hostile environments (Knustad, 2020), and other forms of personal assaults to assassinate one's character (Reynard, 2020). .

Another communication tactic is known as *concern trolling* (DiFranco, 2020; Womack & Mathiesen, 2019). It is a communication strategy in which trolls express insincere concern in order to criticize or undermine a person, group, or idea (Murray, 2020). According to Scott (2022), this strategy appears reasonable on the surface but has ulterior motives.

Tone, according to research by Dynel & Poppi (2019) and Zakharov et al. (2021), is a common communication tactic. It includes the use of sarcasm, patronizing language, threats, or humor to produce a dishonest effect in conversations. Trolls also employ the communication tactic of *gaslighting*, which involves targeting others to make them doubt their own beliefs or recollections and deny past events (López, 2022; Shane et al., 2022).

Trolls are also infamous for publishing irrelevant or off-topic comments, where individuals construct and publish comments that are unrelated to the original post or conversation (Labrecque et al., 2022). This strategy disrupts conversations and diverts attention away from the original topic or post (Paaki et al., 2021). The dissemination of false information, misinformation, and disinformation is another tactic employed as cyberbullying (Wu et al., 2019). This process includes the manipulation of images and videos, the dissemination of conspiracy theories, and the creation of false profiles (Levitskaya & Fedorov, 2020; Westerlund, 2019).

The use of name-calling, labeling, and profanity is another tactic employed in trolling, where dehumanizing names or labels are used to alienate the target (Allison, 2020; Fichman & Rathi, 2023). This act includes communicating racist, misogynistic, ableist, and homophobic epithets and language (Bell, 2021). In trolling, strawman arguments are used to misrepresent or

attack the target's argument by using a weakened or distorted version of their position (Goldberg & Vandenberg, 2021; Kord & Thornton, 2021; Prasad & Ioannidis, 2022).

Trolls use these various communication tactics to disrupt conversations, undermine group dynamics, and target specific individuals. The following figure, Table 1, was created during this study's observation period.

Table 1

A Synopsis of Popular Communication Tactics Used by Online Trolls

Communication Tactic	Description of Strategy
Appearance/Body-Shaming or Pointing out handicaps/ disabilities	A faction of the population in society in general is affected by this act in one way or another as a personal attack. It is based on appearance, disabilities, or perceived shortcomings.
Concern trolling	This tactic makes insincere or fake expressions of concern in order to criticize or undermine a person, group, or idea. It appears to be reasonable, but the user ultimately has a hidden agenda.
Effect	Deliberate communication tactics and words trolls use to manipulate emotions or tone of online discourse. The effect on language usage.
False information/ misinformation/ misrepresentation	This act provides false information, misinformation, and disinformation. It can include doctored images, videos, spreading conspiracy theories, using fake profiles, etc.
Gaslighting	This tactic targets others to doubt their own beliefs or memories, denying events in the past.
Off-topic/irrelevant comments	This act involves creating and posting off-topic or irrelevant comments to disrupt conversations and draw attention away from the original post (OP) or main topic.
Personal attacks/insults/ Character assassination or Vilifying	These acts include words and language to provoke their targets and create a hostile, toxic environment. They may be directed at target's appearance, opinions,

	intelligence or personal characteristics.
Provocation	This tactic is a deliberate attempt to elicit an emotional response from others in order to disrupt or divert a conversation.
Name-calling/labeling	This act uses derogatory names or labels and dehumanizes targets via racist, sexist, ableist, homophobic slurs and language. It makes targets feel like they do not belong.
Phishing	Phishing is a cyber-attack in which hackers/trolls use deception to steal passwords, credit card numbers, and personal data.
Profanity and Vulgarities	Curse words, indecent language not fit for public conversation.
Spam/Spamming	Spam is the mass posting of uninvited, irrelevant, or improper communications, usually online.
Strawman arguments	These arguments misrepresent their targets' argument, attacking a weaker or distorted version on their position.
Tone	The overall tone or effects placed on a conversation can use sarcasm and speech acts (patronizing, threatening or humorous), which are disingenuous.

Linguistic Patterns

Linguistic patterns are a natural aspect of human communication as they are not unique to trolls (Holler & Levinson, 2019). However, a troll's linguistic pattern in communication tactics can be used to identify their perceived trolling behaviors (Addaood et al., 2019; Sanfilippo et al., 2018). Coles and West (2016), Mazza et al. (2022), and Sharevski et al. (2021) have conducted research supporting the assumption that trolls can be distinguished from other online communicators by their frequent use of certain communication tactics. These patterns make it possible to identify trolls based on their distinct communication style. Linguistic patterns are not to be confused with speech acts (Holler & Levinson, 2019; Fichman & Peters, 2019). Although

they are related, speech acts refer to the function of the intention of an utterance (Prihodko, 2019). Linguistic patterns coincide with a style of language that is easily observable based on the recurrences of vocabulary, syntax, and discourse structure (Fowler & Kress, 2018). If one pays enough attention to trolls, they often communicate in recognizable linguistic patterns (Eberl, 2019; Fichman & Peters, 2019).

After a lengthy review of the literature, the researcher found evidence that trolls lend greater linguistic authority to comments and remarks containing aggression (Cao et al., 2012), dismissal (Cao et al., 2021), deception (Klyueva, 2019; Mbazirra et al., 2022), hyperbolic utterances (MacDermott et al., 2022), and personal attacks (Koufakou & Scott, 2020; Sun & Shen, 2021). The linguistic patterns found to be the most utilized in this literature review are as follows:

- **Aggressive Patterns (AP):** According to previous research, aggressive linguistic patterns (which included the use of threats, confrontations, harassment, intimidation, sexually explicit language, racially charged discourse, vulgarities, and expletives) have been examined in depth (Andersen, 2021; Marshall, 2020).
- **Deceptive Patterns (DeP):** Several studies have discovered that trolls frequently use deceptive language to delude and manipulate their audience (Addawood et al., 2019; Pennycook & Rand, 2021; Pop, 2022). Some trolls use false profiles to conceal their identity and avoid detection while trolling (Shafiei & Dadlani, 2021). Other research has examined how trolls use manipulative communication techniques, such as emotive appeals and logical fallacies, to sway public opinion or advance their own agendas (Wanless & Berk, 2020). Astroturfing is another communication strategy that can become a pattern for individuals or organizations to manipulate online forums. This

practice creates artificial grassroots support for a particular viewpoint (Stephens et al., 2023). It is frequently used to polarize audiences and sway public opinion.

- **Dismissive Patterns (DiP):** Gaslighting, sarcasm, and ridiculing a target are examples of dismissive patterns in linguistic styles (Fichman & Dainas, 2019; Kaplan, 2021; Sun & Fichman, 2019). In one study, Kenny (2022) investigated the dismissive patterns of trolls regarding making broad generalizations and diminishing an individual's character. Other dismissive linguistic patterns of trolls that are limited in context but not exhaustive include ridiculing, spamming, and derailing conversations with off-topic comments, as well as attempting to commandeer online forum conversations (Britt, 2019; Graham, 2019; Risch & Krestel, 2020).
- **Hyperbolic Patterns (HP):** Hyperbolic dialogue involves exaggerated speech tactics often used to provoke emotional responses from a target or receiving audience (Abbas, 2019; Jane, 2020). In prior research on trolls' speech acts, the following tactics have been studied as linguistic patterns that online trolls commonly used to achieve their goals: *over-the-top comments, indignation, shock talk, and accusations.*

Claire Hardaker (2013)'s study explores the linguistic features of trolling language behaviors by focusing on the use of hyperbole, insults, and off-topic remarks as predominant strategies to elicit emotional reactions and derail conversations. Hardaker's study found that trolls frequently used over-the-top comments to shock talk, halt, and create chaos in online forums. Fichman & Sanfilippo (2016) and Paaki et al. (2021) deeply examined individuals' trolling behaviors and how their linguistic patterns caused discord and influenced other forum users' emotional responses. According to their research, trolls' use of exaggerated comments, indignation, shocking language, and accusations provoked negative emotions, such as anger,

frustration, and offense in their targets, resulting in conflicts and disruptions in online communities.

- **Personal Attack Patterns (PAP):** Character assassination or the vilification of others has become a common linguistic pattern among trolls. These bad actors frequently use disparagement, insults, ad hominem attacks, and name-calling to accomplish their objectives in online interactions (Samiolenko, 2021). It is important to also note the frequent use of the same communication tactics can emerge into patterns. This reality makes trolls even more discernable.

The most popular tactics in the category of PAP are name-calling and insults (Clarke, 2019; Fichman & Dainas, 2019; Fichman & Vaughn, 2021). These studies highlighted the harmful impact of trolls' slander, insults, and ad hominem attacks in online interactions and underscored the need for effective strategies to discourage these types of language. Table 2 depicts a compilation of linguistic patterns garnered from this section of the literature review. It is intended for use in further comparisons and validation of the results of this study.

Table 2*Most Detectable Linguistic Patterns of Trolls*

Aggressive Patterns (AP)	Dismissive Patterns (DiP)	Deceptive Patterns (DeP)	Hyperbolic Patterns (HP)	Personal Attack Patterns (PAP)
Threats/Threatening Confrontations harassment Intimidation Sexual explicitness Racially charged talk Vulgarity Expletives ~not limited to~	Gaslighting Reducing a person Sweeping generalizations Sarcasm Mocking Derailment Spamming ~not limited to~	Misleading Manipulation False claims Fake profiles Fake profile name for nefarious reasons Astroturfing ~not limited to~	Exaggerated speech Over-the-Top Comments Talk to provoke emotional responses Shock talk Indignation Accusations ~not limited to~	Character assassination Disparagement Vilification Insults Ad hominem attacks Name-calling ~not limited to~

Theory of Planned Behavior

In 1985, Icek Ajzen developed the theory of planned behavior (TPB) as an extension of special case theory to its predecessor, the theory of reasoned action (TRA) (Sok et al, 2020). According to Ajzen (1985; 1991), TPB is an established sociopsychological model of human behavior. Badcock et al. (2019) extends the validity of Ajzen's TPB by adding three branches: 1) behavioral; 2) cognitive; and 3) biological. Ajzen created this theory due to emerging gaps found in TRA research. At the request of the research community, Ajzen, one half of the development team who created the first theory, added controlled variables to the TRA model, resulting in the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen & Kruglanski, 2019; Hagger, 2019). While TRA and TPB appear similar in design, TPB included behavioral control as an additional determinant of intentions behavior (Tornikoski & Maalaoui, 2019). According to Haddock et el. (2020), Ajzen found reason to enhance the former TRA by clarifying how subjective norms and perceived behavioral controls (PBC) are active ingredients shaping attitudes and influencing behavioral intentions. With Ajzen's addition of perceived behavioral controls, TPB can predict a wide variety of outcomes in anticipated human behaviors.

TPB is predicated on the idea of persuasion or persuasive acts that come from inferences in speech acts. Persuasion is a volatile agent in the communication process that affects behaviors and attitudes. Persuasion is a complicated and delicate process. The attempt to persuade must conform to the values, norms, and goals of the target population at the right time and space (Efferson et al., 2020). This is because of the dual roles that persuasion plays in the communication arts and social sciences. Persuasion is both an art and a science (Luong et al, 2019; Galperti, 2019). It involves the sender strategically using the most efficacious string of words and symbols for a receiver to decode them and follow through on a desired action or

outcome. It is an art because it thrives on the creative use of orality and literacy. Moreover, persuasion is a science because it quantifies the intent of a persuasive message in a communication campaign. Persuasion is used in the theory and applicability of how the human mind internalizes the thought process that affects behavior (Panda, 2018). Accordingly, the act of persuasion requires the convergence of the communication arts and the integration of the social sciences, such as psychology, to change one's mind on an issue or to fulfill a call-to-action. In the case of the troll and trolling, the objective or call-to-action is to elicit anger, frustration, or responses from other users.

TPB involves the complex psychological process of how human thinking uses attitude to become the hegemony of behavior and how such behavior manifests into the individual's speech acts (Hodgetts et al, 2020; Kirshner & Whitson, 2021; Wynn et al., 2021). Attitude, subjective standards, and perceived behavioral controls greatly influence persuasion. These factors occur during the implementation of transformative behavioral campaigns in health, marketing, education, and other corporate enterprises, as well as in interpersonal contact.

TPB helps communication strategists design and implement interventions to address and change targeted behaviors in individuals or groups (Besley et al., 2019). Using a transtheoretical approach, TPB is usually integrated into the I-Change Model, further explaining motivational and behavioral change. Albert Bandura (1986) supported this supposition by integrating TPB with the I-Change model in his works. Similarly, Prochaska and DiClemente (2005) combined TPB with the transtheoretical model. Today, TPB is still exclusively engaged as a part of the health belief model, using attitude, social influence, and self-efficacy to explain a motivational and behavioral change in health-related matters (Kasten et al., 2019). Its applicability and use have progressed in the fields of communication, consumer engagement, and in the research of

politics, marketing, public relations, and advertising (Ramasubramanian & Banjo, 2020). A growing body of literature supports the effectiveness of TPB when used alone or extended by other theories. It has been successfully implicated in change behavior across various research fields, such as general medicine, health promotion, psychology, and pedagogy (Chichirez & Purcărea, 2018). One of the most profound applications of TPB is in the field of health prevention, specifically regarding the addictive behavior of smoking. Tapera et al. (2020)'s study applied the theory of planned behavior to examine the prevalence of smoking among adolescents in Botswana. The researchers confirmed that all three of TPB's variables (attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control) significantly impacted changing smoking behaviors. Another investigation, focusing on youth alcohol consumption, adds to the body of research and parallels the Tapera study. Willis et al. (2020) explored social identity as driving TPB constructs relative to student binge drinking behaviors. Their study revealed that the interplay between group identification and the perceived importance of the group's identity regarding drinking significantly predicted the subjects' attitudes toward binge drinking.

According to research, the theory of planned behavior still needs to be improved in its inability to account for environmental and economic influences (LaMorte, 2019). Ajzen (1985) himself recognized and addressed some issues of applicability and perceived limitations during a discussion in 2020. While Ajzen (2020) welcomed additional theoretical frameworks to be paired with TPB, he was confident that the model was capable of independently predicting intentions in any given situation, especially when using the health belief model. However, a number of researchers and theorists have argued against this point. Any theory, even if widely accepted, still has limitations, and the theory of planned behavior is no exception (Yuriev et al., 2020). For one, scholars have expressed that TPB does not factor in other intrinsic variables,

such as mood, background experience, or the perception of threats or fear in the decision-making process which occurs (Miao et al., 2021; Prochaska, 2020). Mata et al. (2018) posited that personality, assessing risks, and how others are perceived when making decisions factor into the ultimate decision. Ma & Ma (2021) made another argument, with the contention that TPB does not address a given timeframe between “intent” and the individual’s “behavioral” action. They further claim that just because there is a prediction, and it may be valid, does not guarantee that a decision will immediately be made. The greatest challenge is that there is no guarantee when an intention will be fulfilled (Bagheri et al., 2019; Sun, 2019). While TPB is a sound predictor of behavioral outcomes, that outcome could result in immediate action or latent decision-making (Fu, 2020). Harsh critics of the theory believed that the model left too much room to infer cognitive variables in the decision-making process (Chang, 2012; Gourlan et al., 2019; Hagger, 2019; Randall & Gibson, 1991). Other scholars have argued that TPB does not consider a person’s needs prior to engaging in interventive actions designed to change their behaviors (Reed & Lloyd, 2018). In short, the efficient and adequate use of the theory has been under scrutiny in recent years.

TPB provides a powerful framework to the art and study of persuasion (Ajzen & Schmidt, 2020; Apau & Koranteng, 2019). When applied, it can effectively predict human behavioral intentions. It can stand alone as a theoretical framework or be extended with other theories to maximize its effectiveness. Health initiatives, business, advertising, and politics all benefit from the application of TPB. In parallel, whether knowingly or unknowingly, bad actors on the internet, particularly trolls, apply and utilize the theory of TPB to achieve their goals in online communities (Gylfason et al., 2021; Parker et al., 1995). With their communication strategies, they anticipate fellow users becoming riled-up, firing back, or even retreating from

being called out. Since 2020, the theory of planned behavior has continued to increase in empirical testing, making it one of the most used theories in social and behavioral sciences (Kim, 2011; Tan et al., 2017; Ulker-Demirel & Ciftci, 2020). Regarding trolls, TPB unfortunately can be maximized in the wrong hands. The foundation of trolling is premised on mood and toxic calls to action (Cheng, 2017; George, 2021). In the context of trolls and trolling, the goal or call-to-action is to provoke anger, frustration, or defensive responses from other users.

Related Literature

Increasing research has uncovered a wide range of information about the phenomenon of trolls. Researchers have generated an assortment of definitions for the term "troll" (Hardaker, 2010; Jenks, 2019; Paavola et al., 2017). The history of trolling (Donath, 2002; Phillips, 2012), what they do (Buckels et al., 2014), characteristics of trolls (Cook, 2021; Fichman & Sanfillippo, 2016), psychological factors contributing to trolling (Brubaker et al., 2021; Nuccitelli, 2022a), and how to recognize trolls with potential solutions (Binns, 2012; Sobkowicz & Sobkowicz, 2011; Daskal et al., 2019) have also been examined. Despite the diversity of research, there is consensus that internet trolls are problematic and social disruptors in the online environment (Schlegel, 2021; Wolfgang, 2021). Trolls disrupt the harmony of online experiences or communities (Barnes, 2018) by posting aggressive, vile, and harmful messages in such spaces (Andersen, 2021; DeGroot & Carmack, 2020) as a part of the regular routine (Howard et al., 2019). A wealth of research espouses the mentality of those who troll. Multiple studies elaborate on the dark tetrad, the big five personality factors, and explore the dark world of *schadenfreude*, which perceives that some individuals take pleasure in seeing others suffer. However, these studies have not revealed how to identify trolls' speech acts.

The subsequent section will review related literature on the speech acts of trolls, as well as examine possible typologies of troll classifications. It will also examine the impact trolls have on their online communities. Lastly, the section will discuss the ongoing debate over if online trolls should face legal consequences for their communicative behaviors.

The Weaponization of Language: A Troll Strategy

Trolls weaponize words to harass, intimidate, or insult other online users or groups online (Wu, 2020). The communication behaviors of trolls, including verbal slurs, demeaning behavior, sexist jokes, and a plethora of politicized radicalization activities, are becoming increasingly accepted as socially legitimate acts of discrimination (Banaji & Bhat, 2022). Regarding trolls, online hate speech, insults, and threatening behavior are considered commonplace. Borderline obscene language, sometimes known as "blue humor," is also a matter of concern, considering that a sizable percentage of online users are minors and there is no effective way to determine the age of chat participants (Clarke, 2019; Hennefeld & Sammond, 2020).

The Psychological Element Behind Troll Speech Acts

Psychologists refer to trolling as the online disinhibition effect (Suler, 2004), in which elements like anonymity, invisibility, a lack of accountability, moral disengagement, and not communicating in real-time peel away the social norms that have been developed over millennia (Li et al., 2022; Marín-López et al., 2019; Stein, 2016). It is common knowledge that people will say and take actions online that they would not normally say or do in real world, face-to-face situations (Wang, 2018). They become more at ease, have a greater sense of liberation, and express themselves with less restraint. The term that scientists use to describe this phenomenon is the "disinhibition effect" (Suler, 2004). These effects are primary contributors to the

proliferation of cyberaggression, cyberbullying, and other forms of online deviant conduct, like trolling (Cheung et al., 2020).

The Different Types of Trolls

The growth of internet trolls has produced two distinct classes: the classic internet troll and the predatory internet troll. From these two categories, more than 130 troll subtypes populate the internet (Nuccitelli, 2014). Michael Nuccitelli (2016, 2021, 2022b), a psychologist and cyberpsychology researcher has conducted extensive work about bad actors on the internet. His particular focus is on trolls and their two categories.

Classic Trolls

Classic trolls are motivated by power, recognition, peer approval, and control (Rosamond, 2019). Their major objective is to enrage their victim. After achieving this goal, they often move on to another aim. As cyberbullying has a far more specific definition, classic trolls rarely engage in persistent or severe defamation, slander, flaming or libel of one target (Clark & Horsley, 2020). Their target's wrath, irritation, and worry serve as the troll's source of satisfaction (Golf-Papez & Veer, 2022; Quandt et al., 2022). Classic trolls target a single online user as a one-off or the overall group's disruption, often seeking to provoke emotional reactions or spark contentious discussions (Peck, 2020). Classic trolls include flammers, race baiting trolls, R.I.P. trolls, and trolls who enjoy astroturfing. Although classic trolls will always exist, predatory trolls are surpassing them (March, 2022). However, this does not lessen the impact that classic trolls have on individuals and their damage to online communities.

Predatory Trolls

Predatory trolls are a breed of internet trolls that evolved from the classic troll. They are internet users who randomly and deliberately target other users for a specific purpose (Wilson &

Seigfried-Spellar, 2022). Moreover, they could be recognized or unknown users. As a result of echo chambers, bandwagoners, and troll farms, predatory trolls collaborate more frequently (Graham, 2019). As with all trolls, predatory trolls are motivated by a desire for power, notoriety, social influence, control, or even short-lived internet fame (Krohn & Farmer, 2020; Radford, 2022).

In contrast to traditional trolls, predatory trolls primarily seek to damage the reputation, online presence, and credibility of an online user (Moor & Anderson, 2019; Prier, 2020). With the evolution of information and communication technology (ICT), corporations and governments may employ predatory trolls in covert operations to threaten or damage the target's reputation (Jensen et al., 2020). Traditional trolls routinely engage in criminal, defamation, cancel culture, slander, libel, and misinformation campaigns. In addition to being subjected to wrath, stressful moments, and anxiety, the troll's target may also experience substantial debilitation or even financial devastation (Martin & Schell, 2020). Some victims are significantly traumatized and may develop psychological disorders, depending on the severity of the attacks (Shirayev & Makhovskaya, 2019). As the New Media Age advances, predatory trolls will pose an increasing threat to all sectors of society (Hopf et al., 2019; Nucclitelli, 2022; Weimann & Masri, 2020; Westerlund, 2019; Zhang & Chen, 2022).

Nucclitelli (2014) may have identified over 130+ troll typologies, but the impetus of such research began with Hardaker (2010a). This researcher classified six perceived trolling styles. Hardaker created her classification by analyzing two massive corpora of USENET discussion from horse-breeding and football-related groups. She qualitatively determined the classification by limiting her search to instances containing the word "troll" or its variants. She

identified overt, easily observable trolling styles as well as covert (i.e., hidden or non-obvious) trolling styles (Paakki et. al. 2021).

Observed Consequences & Responses to Trolling

The effects of internet trolls on online communities and individuals include spirals of silence; the closure of online communities, message, or chat boards by certain corporate business brand networks; and increasing group moderation (Gibson, 2019; Quereshi et al., 2022; Nelson et al., 2021). The study "The Hidden Costs of Connectivity: Nature and Effects of Scholars' Online Harassment" (Gosse et al., 2021) reported on the variables and triggers associated with participant-scholars' interactions of being subjected to cyber harassment. It also examined the environments where spirals of silence occurred and the effects it had on their personal and professional relationships. The research team designed a questionnaire with thirty-eight questions, which included multiple-choice questions, matrix tables, text entry, a Likert scale, and slider scales. The poll was influenced by Jane's (2018) definition of economic vandalism and other research in this field (Blizard, 2016; Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2014; Vitak, Chadha, & Steiner, 2017, as cited by Gosse et al., 2021). Their findings determined that online harassment has a significant, detrimental effect on the ability and motivation of academics to complete their work. Concerningly, 55.5 percent of their sample reported that subjects lost confidence in academic or scholarly activities (such as teaching, research, and service). 51.1 percent experienced a loss of productivity at work or school, 44 percent did not want to go to work or school, 35.2 percent considered quitting their job or leaving their program, 34.1 percent reported reputational damage, and 32.4 percent lost confidence in their ability to cope.

In recent years, disruptions to online communities (OCs), bulletin boards, and discussion forums of large corporations have escalated (Alkharashi, 2021; Yan et al., 2019). The observed

consequences have been the suspension of the OCs and comment or message boards. On occasion, platforms such as Reddit closed specific OCs due to dangerous content (Murphy, 2020). National Public Radio (NPR) argued that there were more effective approaches to achieving high-quality community dialogues without the impact of trolls (Fox et al., 2020; Horowitz et al., 2022). *The Atlantic* explained that its comment sections had become home to some of the most vile and destructive arguments left by users (Edic, 2018). Other media outlets, including National Public Radio (NPR), Popular Science, *The Atlantic*, and *Reuters*, have disabled the social and comments features on their websites (Karanasios & Zorino, 2022; Nelson et al., 2021). Reasons included the cost of moderation to prevent divisive comments and fights, the presence of poisonous content, and the absence of community cohesion (Jensen, 2016; Owens, 2020; Stagg, 2018).

Karanasios and Zorina (2022) examined what happened when an online community (OC) platform was shut down. This qualitative study consisted of 12 months of harvesting social media comments relating to the closure of an OC platform. The team identified and discussed trolls' disruptive socio-emotional information roles. They presented a model of the trolls' relationships to various aspects of platform closures. Karanasios and Zorina made theoretical connections between troll behaviors, user reactions, and the actual closures of OCs. Their research yielded two important contributions. They identified and explored the socio-emotional information roles manifested through negative online behaviors and constructed a model of these behaviors' connection to various parts of the closure. Theoretically, the team linked the concept of socio-emotional information roles to the literature on information behavior and practice as well as expanding research on community and participant roles. Their model attempted to link

these three components. The concept of information roles is presented as a significant, previously unstudied theoretical concept, in the information or dialogical sciences.

As user comments became one of the most prominent forms of engagement on internet platforms, sophisticated alternatives were required to filter this so-called dark participation. In other words, tactics were needed to address comments that violated conventions of politeness or candor for malicious purposes. User comments can have both direct and indirect effects on the public (comment readers) via multipliers such as media professionals and relevant public actors, like politicians and corporate executive leadership (Engelke, 2019; Liu & McLeod, 2019; Ziegele & Jost, 2016).

Trolling-like actions have given group or community managers a new degree of authority to supervise and delegate other users to administer groups for avoiding their negative effects (Caelin, 2022; Malinen, 2021). Community managers are required to keep watch over their comment sections, disentangling true thoughts from manufactured remarks with the obvious risk of restricting genuine speech or allowing potentially damaging situations to fall through the cracks (Friess et al., 2021). This paper's literature review process revealed a paucity of empirical studies on how online administrators and group creators saw and responded to this challenge, particularly considering trolls' never-ending chaotic efforts to disrupt online communities. One reviewed study was based on a series of guided interviews (N = 25). In the study, researchers investigated the experiences of community managers with dark participation on German newspaper websites. A qualitative analysis of the interview content revealed four kinds of comment section supervisors, ranging from indifferent gatekeepers and calm gate watchers to worried guards and struggling combatants (Frischlich et al., 2019). In this micro-level influenced study, the researchers discovered that comment sections have been an overwhelmingly popular

target of dark involvement, resulting in the creation of various community management practices. Also, the researchers discovered that an exceptionally high proportion of women in the two ‘problematizing’ groups showed more considerable variability in their judgments than their male counterparts. When evaluating norm-transgressing content, women were perceived as less severe in moderating online communities. In response, the researchers advocated for further research into gender’s role in evaluating norm-transgressing user comments.

Furthermore, when users identify by toxic-inspired usernames, it is an indication that trolling behavior will follow (Mihaylov & Nakov, 2019). Group and webmasters can predict trolling behaviors in their group by noting usernames in many instances (Goldberg & Amber, 2019). Toxic behavior is more prevalent among users with contentious usernames than those with neutral usernames (Nakov, 2019). Urbaniak et al. (2022) found that users with malicious nametags generated more impolite content in online communities and spaces than neutral nametagged counterparts. With mean difference expected to grow with activity, the researchers observed and documented 1.9 versus 1.4 toxic remarks per week for users with regular activity. On the contrary, they noticed 5.6 versus 4 toxic remarks for the top 5 percent of active users in the same timeframes. Users with toxic nametags were approximately 2.2 times more prone to have moderators suspend their accounts. In addition, there was a 3.2 percent versus 1.5 percent probability of suspension for regular users and 4.5 percent versus 2 percent probability of suspension for top 5% users. Specific results varied based on username toxicity and toxic behavior types. Consequently, online community moderators may assess username toxicity to forecast toxic conduct and increase user safety.

Summary

In the present literature, the extent of the long-term effects of trolls and troll-like actions is still unknown. Although there is speculation on the impact of trolls and trolling, much more empirical evidence is needed to solidify emerging academic and social science presuppositions. Furthermore, there is scant research on how their communication strategies are not only harmful but also have also unforeseen societal effects. Most work within this literature review defined trolls and how to identify their behaviors. Other texts analyzed the motivations and activities of trolls. However, most studies did not analyze trolling within the context of theories about communicative implicature and routine speech acts. This paper's study aims to fill this gap in the literature. Other scholarly gaps include the anticipated long-term impacts of trolling, observational research, and the moderating practices of groups that trolls and their activities have significantly harmed.

Research demonstrates that online harassment negatively affects individuals' mental health, relationships, and desire to speak freely in online environments. Yet there is still not a clear understanding of these behaviors' long-term impact the social and mental hygiene of society. Internet harassment causes harm that is extensive in scope and intensity and may be detrimental, if not addressed immediately (Thomas et al., 2021b; Vidgen et al., 2019). There has been a significant lack in immersive and non-participant studies on online trolls. In many instances, the repercussions of online harassment are difficult to explain, requiring many academics to use established standard or non-conductive frameworks and concepts. Frequently, researchers have been obliged to rely on data with self-reporting mechanisms. Findings were based on the recall of subjects as opposed to the rich, thick descriptions that could be acquired through observations and text retrieval.

Another unaddressed research topic is community managers' moderation strategies. To attempt preventing discord in online communities, why do they choose certain strategies over others when evaluating and deleting comments? According to Frischlich et al. (2019), numerous studies have examined non-strategic forms of dark participation, such as "spontaneous rage" in response to insults. However, few studies have investigated how strategic forms of dark participation have altered community managers' perceptions and responses to such tactics. Future researchers may be able to directly interact with former members of defunct online communities. Perhaps, they could build upon these findings for a more promising future in online communications.

Conclusion

This literature review examined the characteristics of a troll and the act of trolling as anticipated observation in online communities. Sociopsychological communication tradition was examined to develop this study's theoretical framework. The researcher addressed the virtual speech acts of trolls regarding Grice's maxims and the nonimplication of face-threatening acts that enable trolling. Politeness theory and the theory of planned behavior serve as the underpinning of this study. The basics of building a troll typology, communication tactics, and characteristics of trolls' linguistic styles were covered. This review, therefore, established critical context for answering the research questions and analyzing online trolling in two observed online communities. Chapter Three will outline the methodology of this research.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter focuses on the research methodology, approach, and design for this qualitative study. Data gathering consisted of monitoring the online interactions of perceived trolls in a specific, natural online community setting. Using the content analysis design, the researcher detailed this study's procedures to collect data on virtual speech acts and online trolls' tactics. This study aimed to investigate the communicative intent of trolls and their impact on contemporary online communities.

The collected data explored how troll-like behaviors and communication tactics affect fellow internet users and the flow of communication in groups. Through qualitative content analysis, the researcher examined and supported how the theoretical framework informs this study. Helping to guide future research, the gathered data was instrumental in creating a typology based on trolls' communication practices.

This paper provides an explanation of the qualitative methodology, approach, and the purpose of adopting the content analysis design. The researcher used their chosen methodology to identify, document, and code commonalities observed in troll communication styles within an online community. The following section covers the method and design, the researcher's role, data collection and analysis, data trustworthiness, and ethical considerations pertinent to the researcher. A summary concludes the chapter.

RESEARCH METHOD and DESIGN

A well-crafted qualitative research design supports the development of definitive insights to examine the virtual speech acts of trolls. Trolling is a complex phenomenon, and qualitative research is a significantly more adaptable approach to gain new insights on online communities.

In addition, qualitative research provides researchers with various methodologies and procedures to gather required data for answering driving questions. Qualitative research permits researchers to acquire data through observations, interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, and shared experiences in the natural world with participants (Busetto et al., 2020). In this study, the researcher solely collected data by observation and triangulated the results using peer-reviewed publications, grey literature, and supplementary data such as pop culture documentation and informational videos.

The qualitative methodology can be supported with digital and non-digital data, such as written text, scholarly works, physical items, verbal accounts, and other published artifacts (Billups, 2019; Lupton & Watson, 2020). Using coding, theme analysis, and content analysis, qualitative researchers validate their findings prior to drafting their final report, which may have been inspired by a question, hypothesis, or research topic. Academics can provide readers with a richer understanding of global social reality by carefully evaluating these tools of scientific inquiry as provided by qualitative approaches.

Approaches in Qualitative Research

In qualitative inquiry, the general plan and procedure for conducting a study may fall into three categorical approaches: deductive approach, inductive approach, and abductive approach (Borgstede & Scholz, 2021). While the inductive approach aids in the creation of innovative ideas and generalizations, the deductive approach examines the veracity of the assumptions, theories, or hypotheses at hand. Contrarily, abductive research begins with "surprising facts" or "puzzles," and the study process is committed to explaining them (Akullo, 2018; Sofute, 2017; Mitchell, 2018). However, the inductive approach comprehensively seeks to derive meanings

from the data sets to spot trends and connections essential for developing new theories and expanding on existing ones (Hannigan et al., 2019).

As a non-participatory observational study (Liu & Maitlis, 2015), the researcher employed an inductive strategy by conducting comprehensive observations in a select online community. The researcher characterized a non-participatory study as not engaging study participants to obtain pertinent data. It was strictly observational and did not employ the use of interviews, surveys, written correspondence, or verbal discourse between the researcher and the subjects.

As a fully objective approach to gathering data, nonparticipant observation is used extensively in case study research. The researcher enters a social system to observe events, activities, and interactions with the aim of directly understanding a phenomenon in its natural context. (Liu & Maitlis, 2015, p. 610)

In its most extreme form, the nonparticipant observer has no interaction with the researched but watches and records occurrences through one-way mirrors, video recordings, or as a silent observer in their natural environments (Ciesielska et al., 2018; Liu & Maitlis, 2015; Scholes, 2020; Thomson, 2021). Observation of nonparticipants may be overt or covert. When explicitly overt, participants recognize that the observer is present for study purposes. The observer is present during organizational activities with a distinct role from that of the organization's members. A participant is unaware they are being watched when observation is covertly conducted. As a nonparticipant, regardless of whether the study is overt or covert, the observer does not directly engage in the actions being observed. For this paper's investigation, the researcher was covert or incognito.

Non-participant observation studies are heavily dependent on anecdotal documentation to support and answer research inquiries. Taking detailed field notes to capture observations is a crucial aspect of nonparticipant observation (Curd-Christiansen, 2019). In this study, the researcher used the data to annotate, code, and draw inferences about the communication patterns of internet trolls. Supporting information included scholarly publications, related literature, video presentations, and acquired artifacts.

During the investigation process, it was feasible to spot trends and patterns to create further explanations that answered the study's research questions (Bernard, 2018). Numerous advantages or qualities of the inductive technique apply to qualitative research. For example, while it may suggest observations and ideas toward the end of the research process, the researcher is still free to alter the study's direction even after it has commenced (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Swain, 2018). Qualitative research with an inductive approach has significantly impacted numerous academic fields, including business, political science, educational research, sociology, anthropology, and healthcare (Acciarini et al., 2021; Döringer, 2020; Kyngas, 2019a; Merriam & Grenier, 2019). There are six qualitative research designs available to researchers (Baxter, 2020; Kleinheksel et al., 2020; Rahmawati, 2007). Among the six qualitative design approaches, this study will employ the qualitative content analysis design.

Content Analysis Design

This study employed a qualitative content analysis design. Qualitative content analysts investigate social phenomena by interpreting data as messages created and distributed so that they can be viewed, read, interpreted, formulated, and reflected upon in terms of what they mean to recipients (Krippendorff, 2019, p. xxii). This approach, also known as text mining or text analysis, enables researchers to extract valuable information from human language to compile

heterogeneous, unstructured data in a structured format. To achieve this goal, qualitative content analysis determines the presence of words, themes, or concepts from qualitative data (Ellahi et al., 2019; Verma & Yadav, 2022) to validate assumptions, strengthen causal relationships in a text (Hendren et al., 2022), or answer distinct research questions in a study (Neuendorf, 2017; Roblek et al., 2020). In addition to monitoring and documenting human interaction, the methods of qualitative content analysis included the use of scholarly works; books; secondary or grey-literature; printed publications such as newspapers, magazines, social media news network affiliates; and reference resources (Oltarzhevskiy, 2019; Schöpfel, 2019). In content analysis design, communication researchers can study social artifacts, such as music lyrics, films, documentaries, letters, newspapers, and oral histories. Content analysis enables the researcher to collect specialized artifacts where populations have difficulty to access content, where the knowledge base is saturated, or where psychological biases may be apparent (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2020). In summation, content analysis is the method of evaluating extensive collections of literature, documents, and artifacts to identify and update information, integrate data, and provide answers to specific questions (Palmquist et al., 2019; Snyder, 2019). The content analysis or text analysis method is trustworthy, simple to grasp, straightforward, easily understood, and applicable by research scholars (Campos et al., 2018; Vayansky & Kumar, 2020). The following section offers a brief history and overview of what constitutes content analysis. Afterward, it discusses the research questions, setting, and selection procedure for the source groups utilized in this study.

A Brief History of Content Analysis

Content analysis originated in quantitative research (Berelson, 1952) and can be used in both quantitative (focused on counting and measuring) and qualitative (focused on interpreting

and understanding) inquiry (Aacharya, 2022). To analyzing material in the mass media, such as newspapers and periodicals, this analysis design was created as a quantitative technique with communications and media in mind (Ittefaq, 2019; Mayring, 2019; McKee, 2020). This research method identifies patterns in recorded communication and systematically collect data sets from written, oral, audiovisual, broadcast, or visual works. The data collection process also includes books, blogs, newspapers, speeches, observations, and interviews. It was most practical since it adhered to rule-based systematic analytical techniques of quantitative research to explain qualitative outcomes (Tracy, 2019; Zaki & McColl-Kennedy, 2020).

In academic research, content analysis is used synonymously with the phrase qualitative content analysis. However, there are a few minor differences between the two designs, specifically in the data the researchers seek. Although qualitative content analysis was based on the qualitative research community's interpretation, content analysis had its roots in the quantitative research community. Both involve some quantification of data (Kuckartz, 2019; Shapiro & Markoff, 2020). The slight distinction is that content analysis facilitates researchers' attempts to count the occurrences of codes (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). To measure, evaluate, and identify examples of how words and word patterns are employed in context, content analysis—while a design—can also be utilized as a method for quantitative or qualitative data analysis (Kleinheksel et al., 2020; Lindgren et al., 2020). Qualitative content analysis provides the same applicability. Yet, it also broadens the researcher's capabilities by providing greater flexibility for the discovery or development of themes that can be used as overarching categories of shared data among numerous participants (Reyes et al., 2021; Wood et al., 2020). Similar to how content analysis produces data, qualitative content analysis can employ textual information derived from a theme to build a narrative that reflects the various elements of the phenomenon (Hays &

McKibben, 2021; Kyngäs, 2019a; Roller, 2019; Selvi, 2019). Reflectively, they are identical but belong to different research communities' schools of thinking.

The Benefits of Content Analysis Design

Content analysis is advantageous because it enables the researcher to directly study sizable samples of text-based communication. It is applicable to all forms of written texts, regardless of the source of information (Bengtsson, 2016). This analysis affords an inconspicuous method of interaction analysis. More significantly, the method gives the researcher capability to code text that can be statistically examined (Busch et al., 2005). It permits proximity to text that may switch between categories and relationships, and it statistically examines the language in its coded form (Shapiro & Markoff, 2020).

For this paper, content analysis allowed the researcher to efficiently categorize concepts and code themes throughout the research process (Mustapha & Ebomoyi, 2019). As another benefit, texts can be interpreted by using content analysis for objectives such as the development of intelligent systems. Clear assertions describing the connections between ideas can be used to code newly learned knowledge and rules (Jonassen & Carr, 2020; McDonald et al., 2019).

Along with offering invaluable historical and cultural insights, content analysis provided intimate knowledge of the facts for accurate narrative interpretation. Developing categories is given special consideration, as experts agree that categories are the heart of the technique (Kuckartz, 2019). In qualitative research, using codes and categories provided by the content analysis design is a time-tested technique. (Kumar et al., 2020; Prasad, 2019). In its most prominent application, content analysis is a method that permits researchers to convert qualitative data into numerical data for quantitative examination.

The Disadvantages of Content Analysis

The content analysis design has its disadvantages. For one, it can be extremely time-consuming. Due to the absence of a theoretical foundation, to begin with, the researcher may discover they are overly lax in their ability to draw significant conclusions about the linkages and implications revealed in a study (Ahmad, 2021; Sanchez & Dunning, 2021; Seda, 2020). Also, when a relational analysis is utilized for a higher degree of interpretation in a study, the likelihood of error is enhanced (Stromer-Galley, 2020). Moreover, the copious amounts of texts extracted from complex corpora may make a study inherently reductive (Hassan et al., 2021). Some researchers have asserted that content analysis too often consists of word counts. Others argue that content analysis disregards both the context that created the text and the subsequent state of affairs after it is produced (D'Angelo et al., 2019; Hopp et al., 2021; Roberts, 2020). An overwhelming number of scholars agree that content analysis is often difficult to automate or computerize (Kyngäs, 2019b; Mayring, 2019; Nelson et al., 2018; Stone, 2020).

Two Styles of Content Analysis

In this qualitative study, the researcher undertook a relational content analysis approach. Content analysis may be conducted in two ways: conceptual and relational. The purpose of conceptual analysis is to determine whether concepts are present in a text and how frequently they occur. Examining the relationships between concepts inside a text is the purpose of relational analysis, which aims to advance conceptual analysis. Each style of content analysis can render distinct outcomes, findings, interpretations, and connotations.

Both types of content analyze require the researcher to begin inquiry by identifying concepts within a text or set of texts. In conceptual analysis, a researcher can decide to code for the existence or frequency of a concept (Luque & Herrero-García, 2019; Morakanyane et al.,

2020). Relational analysis aims to go beyond identifying concepts in each text by analyzing the plethora of potential relationships within extracted corpora (Taylor & Stolz, 2020).

As noted, this researcher conducted a relational content analysis. In relational analysis, fundamental theoretical concepts such as linguistics and cognitive science are applicable to the study's methodology. Relational analysis has a variety of approaches, which contributes to its popularity in academic study. Once a process has been thoroughly evaluated using relational analysis, it can be applied to and compared across populations over time. Relational analysis is particularly appealing because it maintains an elevated level of statistical precision without sacrificing the depth of information evident in other qualitative methods.

Methods Used in Content Analysis

In this study, the researcher used the summative approach to interpret the meaning of text data from the *Marielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page. For context, Marielle Lue is a local news personality in Detroit, Michigan. There are three distinct methods for conducting content analysis: conventional, directed, and summative (Kleinheksel et al., 2020; Guerza, 2020). The approaches are all applicable to the naturalistic paradigm, a research endeavor focusing on how people behave in natural settings while engaging in life experiences (Given, 2012). While all three adhere to the naturalistic paradigm, each employs a unique method for interpreting the meaning of text data derived and coded from research sources (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The summative approach was more practical than the conventional and directed approaches for capturing and analyzing trolls' virtual speech acts. This is due to how the coded data was processed and interpreted.

A researcher can use conventional, directed, and summative approaches to content analysis. The same piece of data can be extracted from these three different perspectives. Coding

categories are directly derived from textual data in the traditional or conventional content analysis approach (Hsieh, 2005; Pribanic, 2018). When using a directed approach, preliminary codes for the analysis are guided by a theory or pertinent research findings. In summative content analysis, keywords or other pieces of information are counted and compared, and the context is then interpreted (Humble & Mozelius, 2022). Even though the three categories diverge, they were all driven by the same vital element of any research study: the question or questions that serve as the study's guiding principle. Compared to other approaches involving data analysis, content analysis includes data collection strategies that are particularly suitable for this research.

A summative approach most effectively captured and examined the use of words and indicators while analyzing trolls' virtual speech acts and disruptive online behaviors. It demonstrated promise in broadening the scope of research on trolling. This approach may bolster further analysis that applies the Gricean maxims and politeness theory to capture, process, and code trolls' virtual speech across text from the source groups. In other studies, the summative approach has provided simple insights on using specific words and phrases from the selected text (Connolly 2021; Paaki et al, 2021). Thus, this comprehensive approach was a viable supplement to this study's research questions. This study's research questions helped frame the data gleaned from the content analysis. They established what types of data to collect in order to expand on existing theories and hopefully address or validate problems found in the research. More precisely, framed research questions can direct researchers to areas of theory for understanding what is happening in the study (Lock et al., 2020). The framing of the inquiry questions either strengthens the study or allows essential revisions as needed (Maxwell, 2013). The versatility of content analysis, as well as the summative approach to it, aided in broadening the scope of the following questions.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Is there evidence of a troll typology based on their speech acts?

RQ2: What communication tactics do trolls utilize when they post online?

RQ3: In the observed online community, how did page followers react to the virtual speech acts of trolls?

RQ4: How does the Facebook environment facilitate trolling?

Setting

The site of content analysis and observation for this study was the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* official fan page from the Fox 2 Detroit News station. The *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* page is a public online community with over 91,000 followers. This study adopted a non-participant strategy while examining the communication practices of group members in their natural environment. As a non-participant, the researcher did not engage in virtual or IRL dialogue with those being observed. The researcher operated exclusively as an observer of the fan page's community members.

The non-participant setting was selected for a more objective perspective on the phenomenon of trolling. Particularly, the researcher did not engage or elicit discourse from the fan page's membership. The intention was to avoid invoking self-biased opinionating, and influencing the biases or reactionary influences of the observed subjects. The researcher's focus was to identify potential variables that could contribute to the development of troll typologies. Moreover, this study sought to better understand how to conceptualize and implement practical solutions.

The Process and Rationale for Selecting the Observed Platforms

Purposeful or intentional sampling (Terrell, 2016) was used in this study. The researcher observed smaller subgroups of individuals interacting within the broader ecosystems envisioned for this study. Smaller subsets of purposeful samples were classified as: 1) negative sounding speech acts; 2) communication tactics employed in comments; and 3) linguistic patterns derived from the speech acts. The selected subsets enabled the researcher to delve deeper into the specific aspects of trolls' communication strategies. This approach allowed for a more thorough data analysis and the development of a typology based on trolls' speech acts and tactics. The study's selection of a purposeful sample from a larger research pool was justified as follows.

Rationales for Selection

This study's primary objective was to examine instances of trolling directed at a local news personality. It emphasized the speech acts, online interactions, and communication dynamics observed in a virtual community. The researcher focused on a local news station's social media platform as the study's focal point. Facebook was chosen as the hosting platform for this study's observation. It provides ease of access to groups, interest and fan pages, user-friendliness, global membership, and affordability. Out of the three most popular local news stations in Detroit, Michigan, the researcher selected Fox 2 Detroit for this study. This station is a Fox Televisions Stations affiliate and local news outlet.

A preliminary investigation of Fox 2 Detroit led the researcher to examine the station's news personalities and primary Facebook page. The researcher reviewed and recorded remarks to determine how and which Fox 2 Detroit news personalities were most mentioned by viewers during the preliminary search. The researcher utilized hashtags, a simple technique in which words or phrases preceded by the '#' symbol quickly located topics, subjects, and keywords from

online forum discussions and social media. The two well-known hashtags *#TheNine* and *#TheNoon*, which stand for their distinctive morning and midday programming news segments, are used to curate Fox 2 Detroit's daily news stories.

When *#TheNine* and *#TheNoon* hashtags were used, Maurielle Lue, morning anchors, was mentioned in a considerable number of comments. Among 28 other Fox 2 journalists, Maurielle Lue's name repeatedly surfaced in the comments section. Each news personality managed their own Facebook fan page as part of their affiliation with the station. Thus, the researcher visited each personality's profile. Upon visiting Maurielle Lue's page, the researcher learned she had the most followers, at 91,000, among her colleagues.

This context helped explain Maurielle Lue popularity. Hashtags showed that she was the most referenced anchor in comments on the news station's main website. For this study, the researcher further investigated why Maurielle Lue generated so many referrals across comments. Thus, preliminary findings led to deeper examination of Maurielle Lue's Fox 2 Detroit fan page.

Multiple visits to the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page provided additional insights. The page's activity thrived on members complimenting Lue daily for her looks, lively demeanor, and journalistic approach. However, there were also contradictions within her fan base. Although there were 91,000 followers kept up with the page, not all were devoted fans.

A considerable number of people were always critical of Lue's journalistic style, berated her cheery on-air antics, and pointed out her defects, from her hair to the clothes she wore (see Figure 1). On January 11, 2022, one post used an expletive to call Lue out of her name, the equivalent of a female dog.¹ After a thorough review, the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page

¹ **Maurielle Lue FOX 2 Detroit's Post**, 2022, January 11
<https://www.facebook.com/profile/100044285116745/search/?q=Bitchy>

appeared heavily subjected to trolling activity. This phenomenon will be further detailed in Chapter Four's findings.

Figure 1

Evidence of Trolling on the Maurielle Lue Fan Page



Note. Collected outside the collection period, this sort of post led to the page being selected for study.

Seemingly, the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page was subjected to extreme cases of trolling. Compared to her peers' pages, there was a lot more toxic activity. Thus, the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page was chosen as the population sample for this investigation. The page is highly active, and daily instances of suspected trolling indicated frequent toxic speech activities.

The Subjects

For this non-participant study, the researcher employed the use of disguised naturalistic observations. This process involves observing participants in an environment where projected behaviors will typically occur naturally without researcher interaction (Jhangiani et al., 2019). Researchers conduct anticipated modes of observations as unobtrusively as possible so that individuals are unaware of being observed (Dane, 2019; Ranganathan & Wadhwa, 2019). The observed subjects had no active voice or direct input into the study via interviews, questionnaires, online, or face-to-face interaction with the researcher. In summary, there was no researcher interaction with the observed online community of fan page members.

Procedures

Guided by the study's research questions, the researcher selected texts for analysis. These texts provided samples of perceived virtual speech acts of trolling. In academic inquiry, the research question must be focused so the concept types are not open to interpretation and can be summarized (Braun & Clarke, 2020). A minimum of 1500 comments were originally determined to be extracted from the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page. During extraction, the researcher solely collected text data pertinent to the research questions.

As previously stated, this study was a relational analysis, which is a type of qualitative content analysis. The researcher analyzed the presence, meanings, and relationships of words, themes, and concepts concerning the virtual speech acts and online behaviors of trolls. The researcher used the summative approach to gather and code data to answer the research questions.

Because relational analysis is a very strategic and metered process, the researcher must precisely identify what is to be achieved with the inquiry from the start (Glückler & Panitz, 2021;

Lemon & Hayes, 2020; Recalde et al., 2022). Precision leaves little room for error in category planning, data extraction, and code labeling. In relational analysis, it is essential to decide beforehand which concept types will be investigated (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Starr, 2021). The analysis entailed meticulously examining the relationships between the concepts discovered in the study. Following that, categorization was required. This process involved a well-planned and executed procedure. While there is no minimum or maximum, the process should adequately conduct the study and support the findings (Keinert et al., 2021; Munthali et al., 2021; Recalde et al., 2022). Studies using as few as one and as many as five hundred or more concept categories have been done (Hendrikx & Beinborn, 2020; Nam & Seong, 2019; Pal et al., 2021; Perrotta & Selwyn, 2019). It is essential to highlight, however, that too many categories can confuse the study's results, while too few can lead to incorrect and possibly invalid conclusions (Funder & Ozer, 2019; Schüneman et al., 2019).

The categories aligned with and supported all aspects of the research questions that were formulated to guide the study. Therefore, it is imperative to let the context and requirements of the proposed study govern the coding techniques (Kiger & Varpio, 2020; Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Consequently, the researcher selected the text for analysis with care. It was important to balance having sufficient information for a thorough analysis and gathering information that is comprehensive enough to address gaps and support the overall study. This phase is crucial for preventing an imbalance during the data collection so extensive that the coding process becomes too cumbersome and time-consuming for meaningful and valuable results (McDonald et al., 2019b). While relational analysis appears to begin with quantitative steps, it is a qualitative method that assesses relationships between concepts and how they are connected. It yields holistic answers in a very systematic and transparent manner.

The Process

First, the researcher extracted the words, word windows, and comment strings from online dialogues in the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page. The study captured real-time conversations of relevance according to current social and pop-culture issues. In this study, *real-time dialogue* is defined as previous discourse accessible to the researcher before the commencement of the investigation, as well as any ongoing dialogue pertinent to the study. This data collection process includes daily or weekly postings during the study.

The level of analysis was determined via the researcher's collection of text samples containing the following words or phrases: *troll*, *trolling*, and *you are trolling*. It included any terms deemed flaming when provocative speech, hot-button social issues, demeaning dialogue, or perceived debates arose in the group or on the fan page's Facebook wall. When evaluating the verbal speech actions of group members, particularly when alleged troll-like behavior occurred, the researcher cited and documented triggers. They included emerging questioning, call-outs, accusations, name-calling, retorts, and other toxic speech acts between group members.

Once at least 1500 comment samples were collected, the researcher could determine which relationships to further examine the corpora for theming and categorical coding. Next, the text was reduced to categories according to terms, keywords, and phrases. This subset of findings is color-coded according to any emerging patterns. During this phase, the researcher coded for the existence of meaning or words that online trolls most used according to the grey literature, peer-reviewed articles, and other background resources used to prepare for this study.

Once the words, phrases, and other virtual speech acts ascribed to trolls, as well as troll-like conduct, were coded, the researcher categorized these acts. The goal was to construct a typology of virtual troll speech acts.

The researcher coded the assertions or relationships in accordance with relational analysis. Next, the researcher explored the differences and notated them among the identified variables during the coding process. The last step was to map out the representations by using occurrence data or other visual analysis models.

Researcher's Role

The researcher was a non-participant observer in this investigation. The researcher assessed, synthesized, and coded the acquired data using member comments from the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page. A codebook of developing themes was developed and maintained for this investigation.

Data Collection

This study's data was collected through recording, transcribing, and codifying pertinent information from observations and triangulated data. The observed data was coded and categorized using the reliable and certified text analysis software, Max Qualitative Data Analysis (MAXQDA). MAXQDA software enabled the researcher to use extracted text from discussions in the study's target group and fan page. This tool allowed insights for further text analysis. MAXQDA permitted transcription analysis and preliminary coding for the relational mapping aspect of the study. It further aided in the text interpretation for the qualitative content analysis of the virtual speech acts of trolls.

Data Analysis

The qualitative findings of this study were maintained using the MAXQDA software. During the post-research period, observation notes, coded documents, and drafts were maintained for the purpose of arising questions or discrepancies. All data, thread posts, related

corpora, outliers, and analyses were systematically and ethically grouped and coded. The data, comments, and corpuses relevant to variables, outliers, and analyses were sorted and coded.

A closing research audit detailed the processes, screenshots, videos, digitized files, transcripts, notes, procedural steps, and visual audio materials, such as YouTube presentations and TEDx talks. This step helped establish the study's integrity and ensure that it was conducted with professionalism and high ethical standards. The qualitative data retrieved from this study clearly described the emerging themes, approaches to analysis, and unbiased conclusions. Such data aided professional responsibility, ethics, and credibility.

Trustworthiness

Comprehensive data was collected from the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page. The researcher adequately prepared for this study with peer-reviewed articles, expert books, articles, and relevant documents. The reliability of social media, blogs, and reference materials was also incorporated to further substantiate the validity of the issue and conclusions. Credibility strengthens the perception and logic of individuals to accept study findings (Jordan et al., 2005; Lindheim, 2022). Certain research methodologies employed by researchers instill credibility in their study activities and reports (Stahl & King, 2020). Regarding trustworthiness in this study, triangulation, reflexivity, transferability, and ethical considerations are addressed in the following sections.

Triangulation

The following scholarly resources and social artifacts served as background data for this study. The many phases afforded to triangulation were an essential approach to establishing credibility. Roughly speaking, triangulation is the process of using many sources of information or field procedures to repeatedly establish recognizable evidence patterns (Stahl & King, 2020).

To increase the trustworthiness of the findings, the triangulation process utilized social artifacts from TEDx Talks, peer-reviewed articles on troll speech acts, and other grey literature.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity involves researchers positioning themselves in their investigation by conveying their background in relation to the topic to the reading audience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It entails the researcher's job experience, cultural and social experiences, and historical perspective on the examined topic (Lazard & McAvoy, 2020). As a victim of trolling and administrator of an exceptionally large Facebook group where trolling was encountered, the researcher's personal bias may have had some impact on how to interpret this study. To not compromise the study and remain ethical in the fulfillment of the research, any biases were objectively investigated and reconsidered .

Dependability and Confirmability

This study reduced researcher bias and maintained transparency by acknowledging the sampling that could have impeded any inferences and significantly impacted collected data. During the research phase, copious notetaking and documentation facilitated the use of dense, detailed descriptions. The notes contained comments made by alleged trolls and the perceived reactions of the other group members. Additional notes entailed data taken from the alleged troll profiles. Screen names, gender, and notes on their group activities were maintained for categorical purposes. In addition, trolls' comments and predefined terms, vocabulary, and word phrases were notated for categorization and coding.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which qualitative research findings can be extended or used to various contexts or situations (Kynge et al., 2019c). Since trolling has become

commonplace throughout online communities, findings of this research can possibly be transferred to other contexts. This research can be replicated, although the outcomes may vary depending on the current cultural climate and other social media platforms. This study's generalizable data could confirm the assumptions guiding this study and future studies.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted with integrity and adherence to ethical norms. Nonetheless, three ethical issues were considered when viewing the public postings:

1. Even though the data, comments, and information are overtly available, watching a person without their knowledge could raise ethical tensions.
2. It could have been tempting to misconstrue or take comments out of context to establish a point.
3. It could be difficult to distinguish between arguments and trolling. Plus, labeling someone as a troll could be harmful.

In addition, the researcher adhered to the ethical standards established by the degree-granting institution. Relevant literature and evaluations derived from artifacts were identified, documented, and cited. Chapters Four and Five review critical aspects of prior research, new developments, and the outcomes of this study. As stated previously, to maintain the integrity of this study, the researcher did not observe Facebook groups or pages that they personally created, managed, or participated in.

SUMMARY

This chapter outlined the methodological procedures that were implemented to address the study's research questions. This qualitative study applied text analysis to extract secondary literature and data from an observed group, the Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit fan page. A non-

participatory method was utilized to collect data in the form of 1,675 relevant comments from the Facebook fan page. By collecting and evaluating this data, the researcher gained insight that aided in developing solutions against trolls and trolling behaviors. In Chapter Four, the researcher presents the results of this investigation.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

The *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* Facebook fan page was selected as the site of data gathering for this study. Maurielle Lue is a local news personality located in Detroit, Michigan. Her page is an open platform for her fans, followers, and local Fox Detroit viewers to congregate for camaraderie, show support, and leave comments pertaining to reported news stories each day.

Overview

Chapter One described how trolls' communication tactics and subsequent speech acts could negatively affect other internet users. It posed four research questions to guide the investigation. In doing so, it addressed the primary question of whether the speech acts of trolls could be typologized. A typology could instrumentally facilitate additional research on the phenomenon.

In Chapter Two, the literature review, the researcher presented the theoretical framework, which consisted of Grice's maxims, politeness theory regarding face negotiation theory, and theory of planned behavior (TBP) through the sociopsychological tradition of communication. In addition, this chapter analyzed topics relevant to troll speech characteristics and their communication patterns in online communities.

Chapter Three outlined the methodology used to address the study's research questions. This qualitative study employed a non-participatory observation-only design for the content analysis of comments extracted from the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* Facebook fan page. The researcher conducted this study concerning the speech acts of internet trolls. A summative approach was employed to convey the study's findings.

This chapter will present the study's principal findings. The data collection consisted of an initial review of over 9,000 comments generated from the *Maurielle Lue* Facebook fan page from October 2022 to March 2023. The researcher will discuss the tools used to gather and process data. Approaches included procedures for reducing the data into more manageable subsets, taking notes, and manually sorting, analyzing, theming, and categorizing the datasets obtained. To further analyze the data and create concept maps based on the coding and themes, the researcher utilized software tools such as MAXQDA.

In the first section of this chapter, the researcher will first discuss the setting of the inquiry, challenges, and the complex data reduction process. Next, the researcher will introduce and explore the subjects observed for this study. The second section will speak to the communal culture of Maurielle Lue's fan page. The third section will highlight the results of the observation. The subsequent section will include a discussion of emerging themes and responses to the four research questions used to structure the investigation. A conclusion and summary of the chapter will close out Chapter Four.

An Important Note

It is important to note that a "post" on Facebook is a thread that may contain text, photos, videos, or other content created by a platform user to stimulate conversation among page followers or group members (Facebook, 2023). Per her page's settings, only Maurielle Lue can create "posts" on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page. Accordingly, the "followers," the social media users who subscribe to her page, can only respond to her posts in the form of comments or non-dialogic reactions (i.e., emojis, emoticons, or memes). Despite Lue being the only one who can initiate a post, this setting still facilitates dialogue between Lue and her

followers or amongst themselves, extending the online forum conversations.

The Data Collection Corpus

The data collection for this study initially consisted of 55 posts containing 9,973 follower comments generated from the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page. The posts were created from October 26, 2022 to March 17, 2023, establishing the timeframe of the observation period. Chapter Two presented details on the two types of trolls: classic and predatory. This study found that classic trolls outnumbered predatory trolls on the fan page. The following research questions served as the foundation for this qualitative content analysis:

RQ1: Is there evidence of a troll typology based on their speech acts?

RQ2: What communication tactics do trolls utilize when they post online?

RQ3: In the observed online community, how did page followers react to the virtual speech acts of trolls?

RQ4: How does the Facebook environment facilitate trolling?

The researcher first completed three processes to narrow the 9,973 comments down to the final number of 1,675 comments. The next step was analyzing the collected texts, user-created media artifacts, words, and word strands from the 1,675 comments left during the observation period. This analysis facilitated answers to the research questions. The sorts of artifacts and text gathered from the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* Page are displayed in Table 3. This page served as a rich data source based on the 1,675 comments that were observed. When later discussing this study's challenges, the research will further detail the process of narrowing the data.

Table 3*The Type of Data Used for the Observation Period*

Source or Artifact Type	Description of Content Observed
Page Thread Posts	<p>20 original posts (OP) threads created by the page</p> <p>Host: Maurielle Lue of Fox 2 Detroit = 1,675 comments</p>
Responses	<p>Comments and discussions engaged in by Maurielle Lue, with page followers and replies or discussions on posts between page followers.</p>
Photos/Images	<p>Pictures/Images posted by Maurielle Lue and Page followers to facilitate posts and ongoing dialogue.</p>
Videos/Reels	<p>Videos posted by Maurielle Lue as an original post (OP) to start a conversation.</p>
Non-dialogic responses: Emojis/ Emoticons/ Memes/GIFs	<p>The use of images, memes, emojis, emoticons, and GIFs used in place of a comment by or to Maurielle Lue or between page followers amid dialogue in a post.</p>

Group members reactions and “Likes” via pre-determined radio-buttons by FB.	<p>The comments “Liked” or acknowledged with an emoticon reaction directly to show support or disapproval of what the original poster (OP) or what a responding commenter posted. Reactions are considered also as non-dialogic responses.</p>

Note. This table details the types of data taken from the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page from October 2022 to March 2023 to help address the research questions.

Challenges of this Study

The researcher initially faced challenges with the substantial amount of data.

Firstly, before initiating the observation, the researcher had to reduce the 55 posts comprising 9,973 comments into more manageable subsets. Moreover, the researcher had to specify which posts would not be included in the study. Initially, this involved segregating posts devoid of troll-like or impolite speech acts from those that contained them. Secondly, the researcher had to contend with any posts left after the first elimination process. These posts contained comments which were truly criticisms, hating, or genuine trolling of Maurielle Lue. Thirdly, the researcher had to discern if a comment came from a critic, hater, or troll in the third subset. Fourthly, the researcher had to create a strategy to decipher comments based on context, the tactics used, and intent. Additional sources of information was needed to fill in gaps and meaningfully conclude that a troll indeed left the comment.

Finally, the researcher still had to deal with the issue of data accuracy. There are gray areas when attempting to label someone a troll. The researcher may have perceived some speech acts as troll comments when they actually may have been criticisms. This potential mislabeling

can result from not knowing the commenter's full intent or an inside joke. The researcher may have compounded this perception by being unaware of any background between Maurielle Lue and some page followers. This gray area remained across considerations throughout this study.

Reducing the Data

To overcome initial challenges to beginning the observation, the researcher conducted the close reading method. This method enabled the researcher to focus on specific posts and comments and better comprehend comments on the 55 posts. Thus, the researcher became more familiar with context, content, and the nature of dialogues on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page. Second, through close reading, the researcher manually conducted one of several sentiment analyses and ultimately began to reduce the volume of data. With a quick and dirty sentiment analysis, the researcher skimmed comments in the initial 55 posts to separate posts containing positive or neutral comments from those with negative comments. The researcher retained any posts with two or more negative comments or containing spam for the study. The process allowed the researcher to eliminate seventeen posts containing 2,782 comments. After this initial phase, thirty-eight posts containing 7,191 comments remained, designated Subset A.

Here, the researcher faced a second challenge, which was to further reduce the data. In a second round of data reduction, the researcher was required to review the remaining 38 posts. During this complex procedure, data collection posts containing two or fewer negative or unfavorable comments were eliminated. Eight posts were eliminated immediately, thus yielding subset B.

Subset B consisted of 30 posts with 2,540 remaining comments due to this procedure. To further minimize the data, focusing on the remaining thirty posts with negative comments would be necessary. As Chapter Two of the literature review indicated, no universally acknowledged

definition of a troll exists. Any online user may employ the same communication strategies, linguistic patterns, or speech acts that may sometimes depict troll-like behaviors. Therefore, a second enhanced strategy was implemented to distinguish between critics, haters, and trolls in order to better streamline the data collection process.

Examining the 2,540 comments, the researcher sought to decipher the source of perceived negative comments within Subset B. Particularly, this step involved determining whether some page followers were trolls or posters being overly critical of Maurielle Lue. As negative communication tactics, linguistic patterns, and speech acts may have been evident in the impolite or rude comments, it does not make one a troll, and vice versa. Trolling depends on the intent and the frequency of communication actions (Cheng et al., 2017; Morgan, 2022). Thus, a second sentiment analysis was conducted to discern between criticism, hating, and troll comments in Subset B.

The second sentiment analysis consisted of a strategy (see Figure 2) that the researcher developed. It aimed to determine whether certain comments were criticism or coming from a hater or troll. In the close reading, the researcher reviewed the comments in Subset B that were flagged as unfavorable. Flagged comments were categorized as neutral or negative. The study also observed the frequency that some page followers posted impolite speech acts. According to the criteria presented in Figure 2, the negative remarks extracted from Subset B were color-coded in the research notes. Then, comments could be eliminated if attributable to critics and haters. Others could be kept because they were likely troll comments. These comments would be further analyzed to answer the research questions.

Figure 2*Strategy to Identify Possible Troll Comments*

Color Coding Potential Troll Comments				
All were negative	The intent of this comment appears to:	Negative	Has this commenter posted on the fan page more than three times with this same type of behavior?	If Yes, this commenter appears to be a Troll on the page based on their frequency of negative communication tactics, linguistic patterns and speech acts
The communication tactic	hurt/humiliate			
The linguistic pattern	Provoke			
The speech act	derail	Neutral	Yes or No	
	vilify		If No, stop here	
	criticize of a hater		Eliminate this comment from the data collection	
	Spam the page			

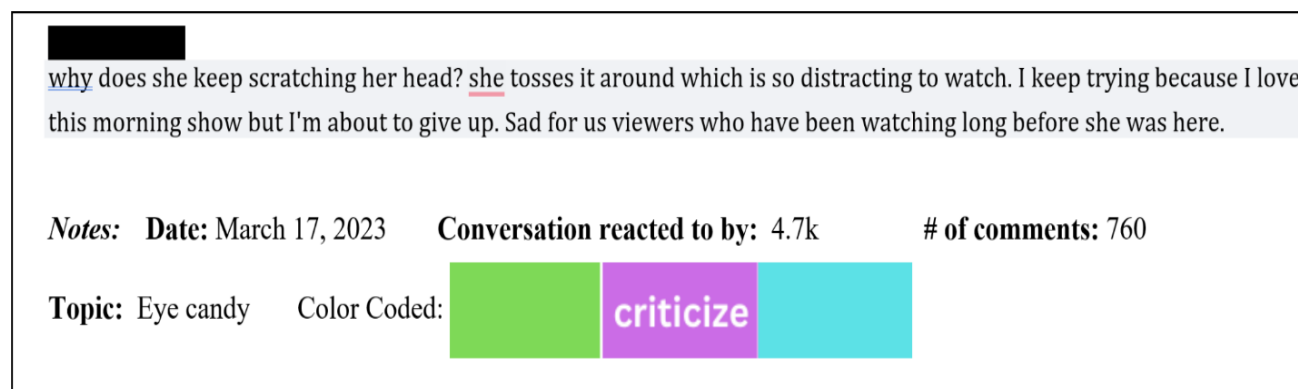
Note. The researcher devised this strategy to discern between possible critics, haters, and troll comments.

Figures 3-4 illustrate examples of the comment elimination process. Any comment noted as unfavorable in Subset B was assigned a color code to indicate which ones would be retained for further analysis.

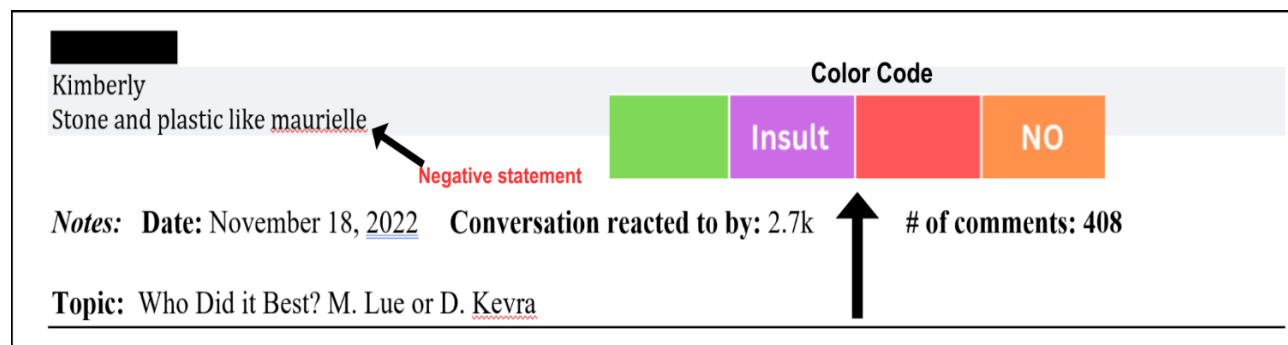
The Rationale for Eliminating and Retaining Comments. If a comment was labeled as neutral, it was immediately eliminated from the data collection. The researcher made this decision based on the classification and context of the comment. While the comment may have appeared to be negative, it was a form of criticism or an opinion that was labeled as *neutral*. One must remember that negative-sounding comments that are merely critical, opinionated, or constructive or that sometimes appear malicious are not inherently trolling (Deibert, 2020; Fichman & Sanfilippo, 2019; Kaplan, 2020). *Trolling* is a malevolent behavior that is more deliberate and intends to cause harm or chaos in an online forum.

If a comment was labeled as negative, and the follower only posted such a speech act once and no more than twice within the observation period, those comments were also eliminated from the data collection. This decision was based on the classification of the comment and the frequency with which the commenter published such speech acts in the forum.

In some instances, based on the context of the conversation, some individuals did not intend to cause damage or stir discord with their remarks. Also, it may have been a one-time occurrence for an individual to publish such a comment. This fits the ambiguous gray area of determining if a comment was published by a troll. Nevertheless, the intent and frequency of a comment are excellent indicators of labeling one a troll. In essence, trolling is the repeated posting of negative comments with the intent to provoke or inflame others (Al-Ameedi & Al-Ghizzy, 2022; Hardaker, 2020). During the elimination process, a negative comment may have been deemed to come from a troll. Yet, if the page follower commented no more than twice in the forum, their comment was removed from the final data set. What remained were posts where any follower published repeated negative and provocative remarks, including spam comments, aimed at Lue.

Figure 3*Color Coding of a Neutral Comment Eliminated from Data Collection*

Note. This follower was considered a critic, as the comment was deemed neutral. The commenter posted less than two times during the entire observation period. Being labeled as neutral, the comment was deleted from the study.

Figure 4*Color Coding of a Negative Comment Eliminated Due to Infrequency of Commenter*

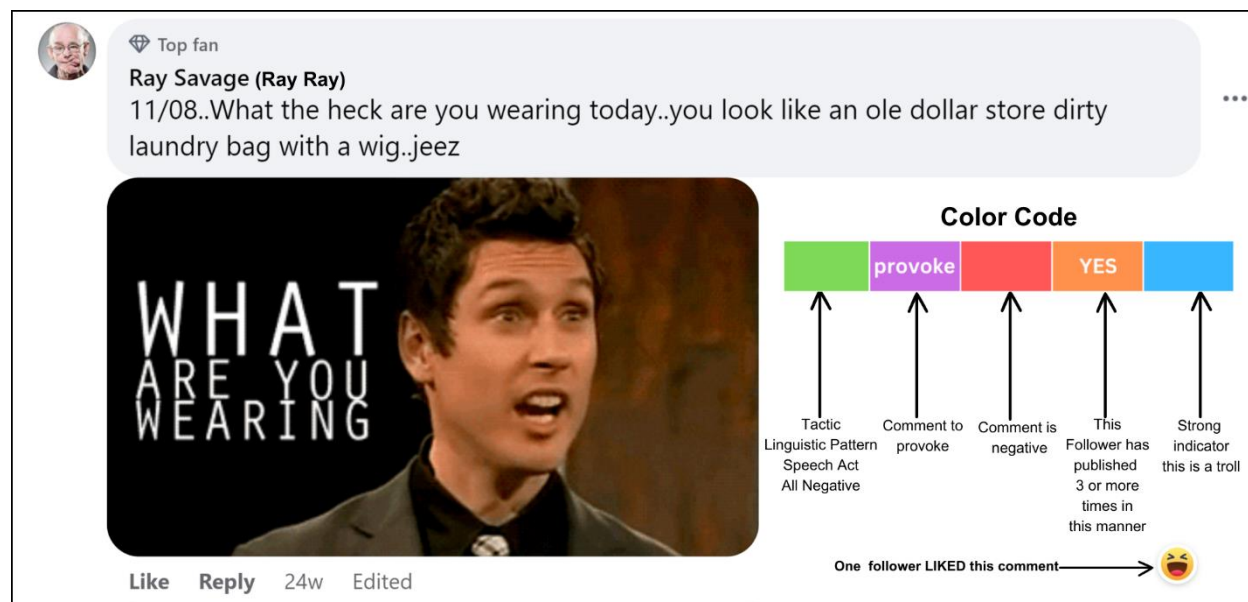
Note. This comment, while negative and intended as an insult, was deleted from the data collection. The page follower only posted once on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page during the observation period.

All comments designated with the colors green, purple, red, orange, and blue strongly suggested that the commenter was a troll and were included in the data set. In addition, any posts which contained “spam,” were automatically included in the data collection process as well.

Figure 5 depicts the color-coding procedure used to determine which posts to retain for the study based on the presence of three or more of these comment types.

Figure 5

Color Coding of a Comment Retained in the Data Collection



Note. This comment received all five color codes due to the negative communication tactic, linguistic pattern, and the ultimate speech act. This particular follower was observed posting negative comments multiple times during the observation period.

437 out of 2,540 comments from subset B were color-coded as neutral and promptly eliminated. Another 428 comments were color-coded as negative, but the followers who published them only posted once or twice on the *Marielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page. Thus, they were excluded from the data collection. Using this method, the researcher reduced the data to 20 posts containing 1,675 comments, which were color-coded to indicate that trolls published them.

The remaining 1,675 comments from twenty of Marielle Lue's posts were designated as Subset C. These comments, on Lue's most trolled posts, became the primary dataset for deriving

observations, analyses, and answers to the research questions. After reducing a complex corpus of text containing 9,793 comments to a manageable subset of 1,675 comments (see Table 4), the researcher was prepared to begin the study.

Table 4

The Progression of the Narrowing of Initial Data

Title of Corpora	Initial # of Comments	Method(s) Used to Reduce	Narrowed Down to
Data Collection October 2022-March 2023	9,793	Quick & Dirty Sentiment Analysis	7,191 comments
Subset A	7,191	Close reading	2,540 comments
Subset B	2,540	Close reading & Researcher Designed Color-Coding Schema	1,675 comments
Subset C	1,675	Final dataset of comments collected for this study	

The Subjects

The subjects of this study were Maurielle Lue, the page followers, and those identified as trolls by the researcher. To conduct the study, the researcher closely observed posts created by Maurielle Lue, her responses, and the comments of followers subscribed to her page. To address the research questions, the researcher paid particular attention to the speech acts of the trolls identified on the page. As this was publicly available data, the researcher still took the initiative of concealing the regular page followers' names. The exceptions were the observed trolls and Maurielle Lue herself, as she is a local public figure and created the page for public consumption.

Maurielle Lue

Maurielle Lue is a native of Atlanta, Georgia and an Emmy award-winning reporter on Fox 2 Detroit News (Fox Television Stations, 2023). Lue is renowned for adding personality and strong energy to the local morning and afternoon shows (Gusho & Headapahl, 2017). She nurtured an interest in journalism as a high school reporter for a local youth broadcast program. In 2006, she graduated from Hampton University's Scripps Howard School of Journalism and Communication. Lue anchored in West Virginia for a local NBC affiliate station and an ABC affiliate station in Cleveland, Ohio. In 2009, she relocated to Detroit, Michigan for the Fox market where she currently delivers local news (Fox 2 Detroit, 2023). Lue has a dedicated fanbase or fandom, known as the *Lue Crew*, where they use terms of endearment such as "Sunflower," "Sunflower Queen," or "Sunshine" to affectionately refer to her (Gusho & Headapahl, 2017; Lue, 2009; Pevos, 2021; The Lue Crew Twitter Fandom Page, 2016).

The Official *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* Facebook Fan Page

Social media fan pages are utilized by news personalities to create personal branding, foster audience engagement, and increase their visibility through constant connection with a wider audience of the network's viewership (Chen, 2020; Costello & Moore, 2007; Finneman et al., 2019). Social media pages are an innovative way for news personalities to highlight their celebrity while generating appealing content for large audiences (Oyadiji, 2019). The *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* Facebook fan page is a prime example of an innovative and thriving community of followers.

Maurielle Lue created her fan page on December 13, 2011, originally under the name of *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 News*. This page began two years after she joined the Detroit Fox 2 news team. On January 3, 2017, the page name was changed to *Maurielle Lue FOX 2 Detroit*.

According to Meta (2023) by Facebook, Maurielle Lue has completed the verification process, authenticating her page, and is solely responsible for its content and management.

Maurielle Lue has the largest number of page followers, at 93,000 compared to her Fox 2 Detroit colleagues. According to earlier studies (Akhtar & Morrison, 2019; Birkbak, 2018; Sanfilippo et al., 2017), public figures with large online followings risk not only attracting adoring fans but also haters, trolls, and critics who use the platform to target them with hate or toxic criticism. Throughout the period of observation, Lue's page has proven to be no exception to this phenomenon.

Based on the comments found in relation to previously aired news stories, the page's regular followers appeared to be a portion of the Fox 2 Detroit viewership. Lue updates the page one to two times a week with original posts (OP) that may relate to previously aired news stories, trending topics, human interests' polls, videos, or lifestyle or trivial inquiries in which she seeks her audience's input. Through their daily engagement, followers helped to maintain the page's activity.

The researcher noted a mix of negative and positive dialogue between followers on the page. Aside from the comments in the corpus, ultimately making up Subset C of data, most comments were favorable. Overall, the page attracted a diverse range of followers and supporters, including her super-fans, known as the *Lue Crew*. It also magnetized those from all socioeconomic, political, and educational levels, which affected the dynamics of the page's community. On average, there was at least one troll who commented on a post each day.

The Culture of Maurielle Lue's Facebook Fan Page

The fan page community is highly interactive and enthusiastically responds to Lue's pictures, posts, musings, and videos. To reiterate, the majority of responses on the page are fortified with positivity and ceaseless affirmation for Maurielle Lue (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Page Followers Exhibiting Politeness and Positive Face



By being the only person who can initiate posts, Lue set the tone for the page's community and participation. It was observed that Lue revisited some posts to acknowledge select comments from followers. This engagement helped facilitate positive conversations that

she had initiated. Her responses to the positive posts were reciprocal, demonstrating appreciation toward the page followers. Figure 7 demonstrates Lue's acknowledgments of page followers as her comments appeared to maintain their interest and support. She elicited additional positive remarks, thereby contributing to community harmony on the page.

Figure 7

Maurielle Lue Acknowledging Comments in her Posts



Note. Maurielle Lue responds to followers regarding a post she published about herself and Fox 2 Detroit colleague, Derek Kevra.

However, there is a dark side to the page that involves followers who are not fans of Maurielle Lue. When Facebook users, genuine fans or not, voluntarily "like" a business or fan page, they automatically become a follower and subscribe to receive updates from the page's creator or managers (Meta, 2023). Hence, trolls are technically considered as fans.

Since Lou's page is public, anyone is permitted to interact on it. Technically, trolls, if they choose to subscribe, qualify as followers on the Facebook fan pages of public figures and celebrities. They can maintain frequent presence on these pages, just like any other follower. Even so, though being included in the followership of a public figure or celebrity, these nefarious characters would not ordinarily be considered genuine fans (Arouh, 2020). In reality, the trolls are what would be called an anti-fandom. Their behaviors were often at odds with the positive and supportive atmosphere typical of a genuine fanbase. All the more, by Facebook standards, this anti-fandom comprises some of Lue's followers on her fan page.

During data collection, the researcher observed page followers who were critical of Lue. Based on tone, some followers' comments suggested unfavorable attitudes or assumptions about her.² Lue sparked the ire of a select group on her page who were intent on expressing their views. She has been referred to as a "premadonna"³, a direct quote by one troll (see Figure 8). This label suggests that Lue behaves in a selfish or entitled manner. There were also a select few followers, not labeled as trolls, who expressed dislike for her on the platform (see Figure 9). Some comments involved page followers stating that Lue was too self-absorbed to be taken seriously as a journalist.⁴ There were 20 posts selected for this study, in which Lue sparked discussions

² **Fox 2 Detroit. Fox 2 Mornings: The Nine. 2022, November 15**

<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=673924564093708&set=a.262834028536099>

³ **Fox 2 Detroit. Fox 2 Mornings: The Nine. 2022, November 23**

<https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=679272733558891&set=pcb.679272790225552>

⁴ **Fox 2 Detroit. Fox 2 Mornings: The Nine. 2022, November 12**

<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=671795127639985&set=a.262834028536099>

about her leisure activities, personal life, and professional accomplishments. They provided a generous sample for identifying communication tactics and discerning the speech acts of trolls.

Figure 8

Trolls Labeling Maurielle Lue

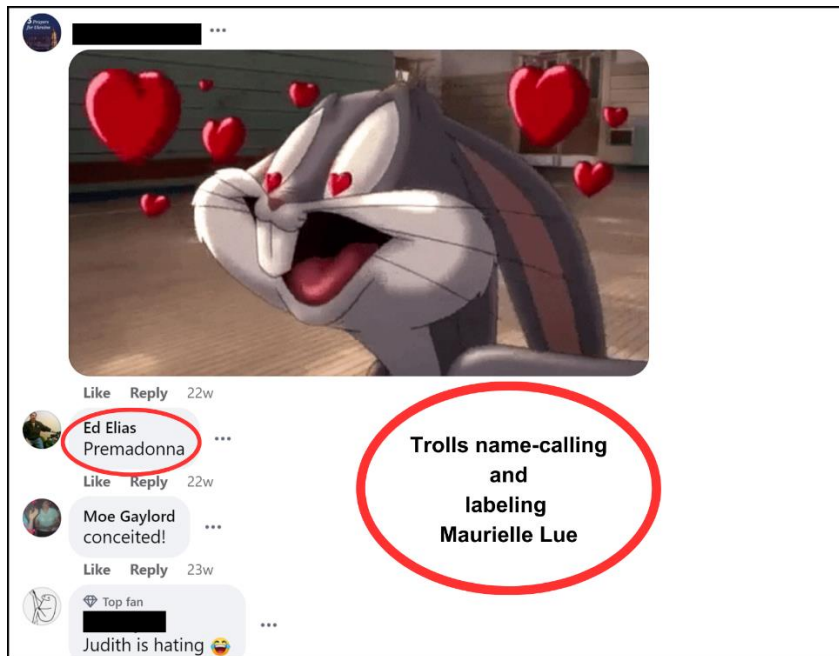
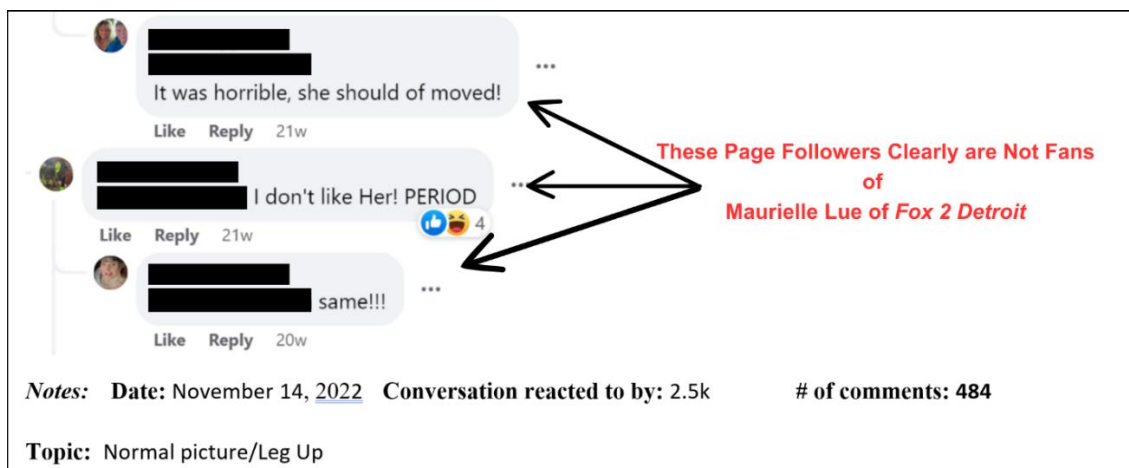


Figure 9

Some Followers on the Fan Page Dislike Maurielle Lue

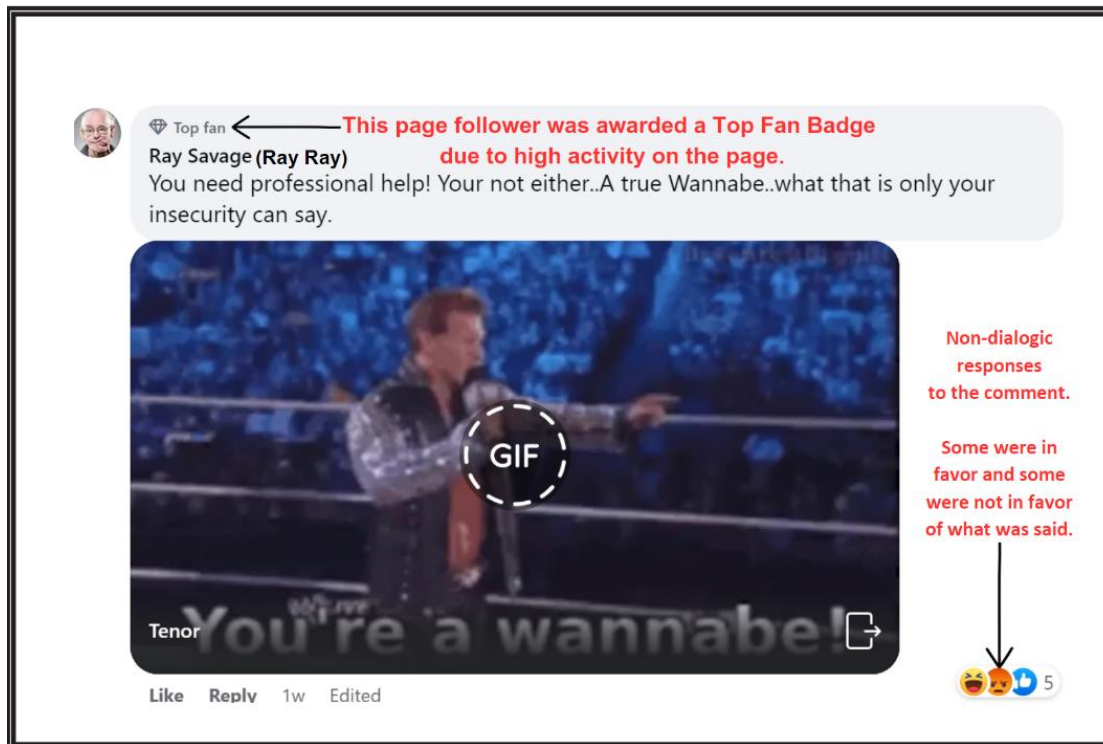


Note. Non-Fans (but not identified as trolls) on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* Fan Page dialoguing with one another.

On occasion, the researcher observed the persistent and intrusive behavior of trolls toward their target, Maurielle Lue. This revelation added an intriguing dynamic to her fan page's culture. Specifically, Facebook awarded Top Fan badges to highly active page followers.

Facebook makes it simple to become a follower on a fan page. On such pages, the platform is unable to differentiate between ardent fans and trolls. This platform awarded at least four recognizable trolls with "Top Fan" badges. Top Fan badges are prized to page followers for their elevated level of engagement and contributions to a Facebook fan page (see Figure 10). The identified trolls with Top Fan badges published comments on the page that commonly coincided with the linguistic patterns, communication tactics, and speech acts of typical malicious actors in online communities. One follower with a Top Fan badge, who this chapter will further discuss, goes by the handle, Ray Savage (Ray Ray). Although a member of the fan page, he has established himself as a troll. Nevertheless, Ray Ray's profile was so active on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* page, as a legitimate follower, that Facebook named him a *Top Fan*.

This study focused on the virtual speech acts and tactics of Top Fan badge-bearing trolls and other perceived trolls.

Figure 10*A Troll with a Top Fan Badge*

Note. A follower with a Top Fan badge responding to a post by Maurielle Lue where she referred to herself as soul food, and not eye candy.

OBSERVATIONS

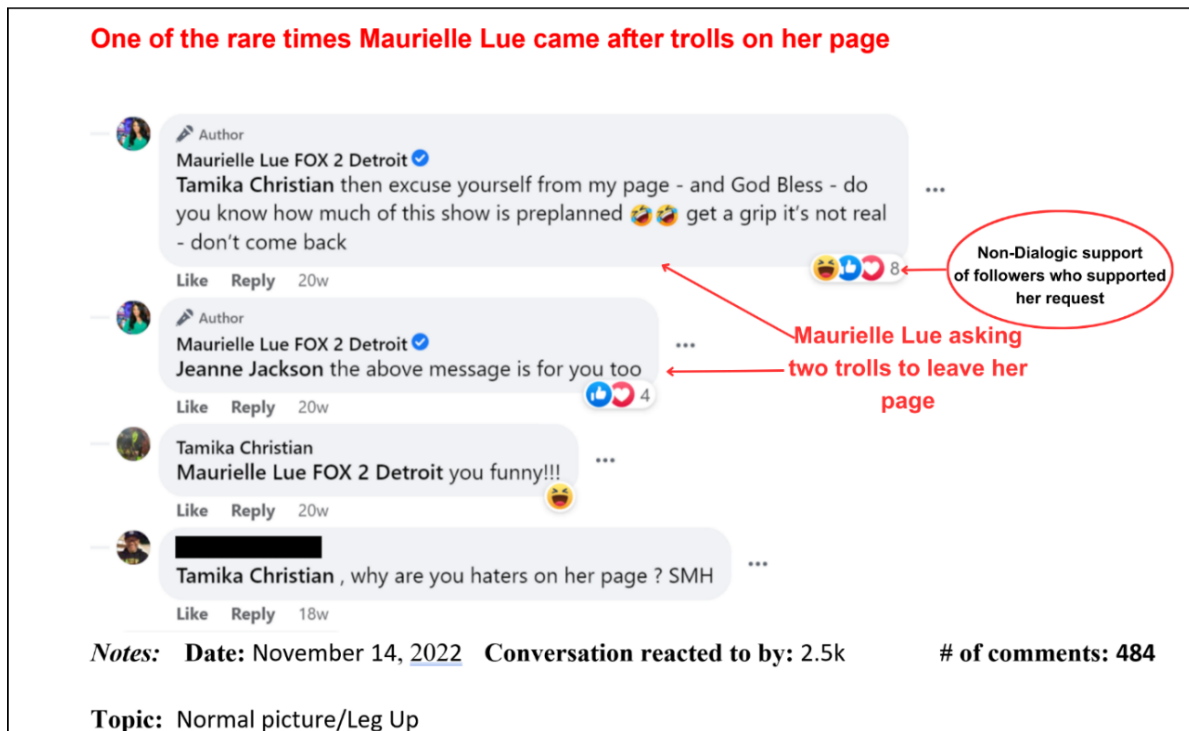
Negativity sometimes continually permeated the conversations of Lue's fan page followers. In some discussions, Maurielle Lue occasionally encountered comments where perceived critics, haters, and trolls judged her, mocked her, or called her out without apparent cause. Trolls went the extra mile to frequently criticize Lue for her attire, hairstyles, perceived on-air behavior, comments, and tone during broadcast segments. In a post created by Lue, dated November 14, 2022, a follower accused her of having a racist agenda.⁵ In another post by Maurielle Lue dated

⁵ **Maurielle Lue FOX 2 Detroit's Post 2022**, November 14
<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=673209307498567&set=a.262834028536099>

December 7, 2022, a group of followers initiated a 100-comment discussion. They questioned and criticized the leadership of the station for granting Lue a recent promotion to produce a new segment, *The Noon*, which would conclude the daily morning broadcasts.⁶ Many comments in the discussion were laced with insults and vilification. At most, Maurielle Lue ignored the provocations. However, she occasionally responded to troll comments. In one instance, Lue, in an unprecedented move, kindly invited two regularly trolling followers to leave the page after they discussed their displeasure with her (see Figure 11). It is unclear what prompted this reaction from Lue. However, Chapter Five will discuss plausible speculations.

Maurielle Lue responded to a troll with humor in another instance (see Figure 12). In a post authored by Lue on March 1, 2023, on a news story entitled "Gas Station Gourmet," a presumed troll questioned her about the story's originality. The troll attempted to sarcastically and condescendingly ask her where she got the idea, referring to a similar story that aired months earlier on another local station. His remark implied that her story was not original. The levity in Lue's remark prompted the researcher to investigate the background of the commenter. It was discovered that this individual had previously interacted with Lue outside of the data collection period. They also may have been familiar with each other prior to the start of this study.

⁶ **Maurielle Lue FOX 2 Detroit's Post**, 2022, December 7
<https://www.facebook.com/100044285116745/videos/3357007414543079>

Figure 11*A Rare Instance Where Lue Addressed Trolls***Figure 12***Responding to a Troll with Humor*

Note. Maurielle Lue's response to a troll sarcastically criticizing her about a story she produced.

At most, other page followers sporadically policed interactions by following Lue's lead on whether or not to respond to a trolls' antagonistic banter. There were instances where followers defended Maurielle Lue by confronting those who posted unwarranted insults in page conversations.⁷ In response to impolite or derogatory remarks about Lue's professionalism and demeanor, devoted supporters came to her defense with unwavering support. During the observation period, the researcher noted several instances in which followers advocated for Lue after trolls attempted to veer off-topic and sow discord. Figure 13 depicts a series of comments in which trolls compared Lue to her colleagues, made crass remarks, and vilified her while hijacking the post's communication flow. This figure also demonstrates a page follower condemning trolls' online conduct.

⁷ **Maurielle Lue FOX 2 Detroit's Post**, 2023, March 17
<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=753147709504726&set=a.262834028536099>

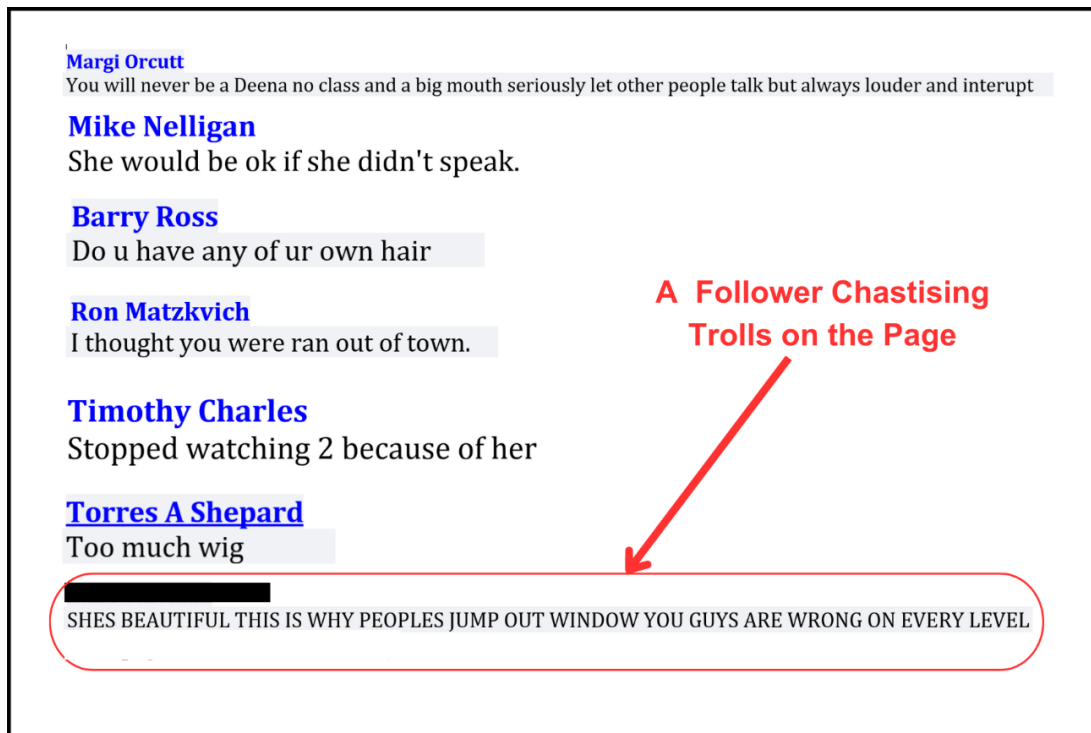
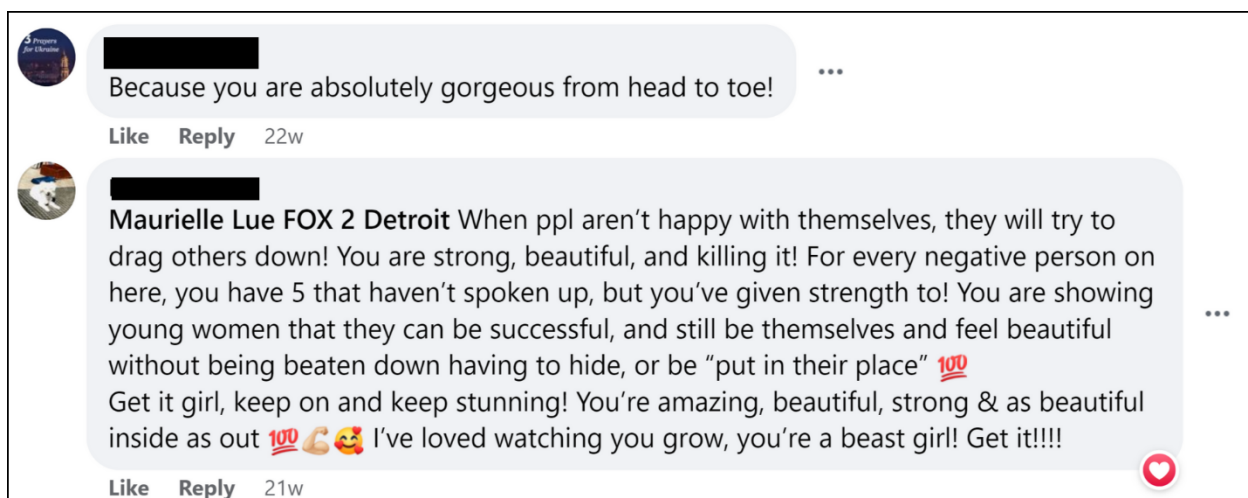
Figure 13*A Follower Speaking Out to Trolls*

Figure 14 shows two regular page followers offering words of encouragement and support for Lue after trolls attacked her with negative speech acts.

Figure 14*Page Followers in Support of Maurielle Lue*

The researcher noted that trolls on Lue's page took advantage of non-news-related posts. They particularly attacked her on posts providing personal insights into her life, such as her likes and dislikes. Although her regular followers and fan base delighted in her joys, convictions, and self-presentation, the page's trolls insisted on insulting speech acts. According to the researcher's observations, these posts generated a high level of troll activity.

On a March 17, 2023, post, several page followers came to Lue's defense after a group of trolls insulted her. She had made a post referring to herself as *soul food* and not *eye candy* (see Figure 15). This post and a few others also produced some unanticipated findings, which will be explored in Chapter 5.

Figure 15

Page Followers Reacting to the Speech Acts of Trolls



However, for the most part, page members often ignored troll comments. In some instances, perceived trolls used virtual speech acts to elicit shame or anger from Maurielle Lue's fanbase or herself. Yet, they frequently failed to affect the overall tone of conversations on the fan page, despite being blatantly present.

Most of the time, neither Maurielle Lue nor many page followers regularly interacted with offenders on the fan page. Furthermore, Lue or the local news station never removed unfavorable remarks from the page during the observation period. Apart from the trolls, the conversation in this virtual community was polite, full of praise, and reciprocal of the good-spirited cheer. The third research question will detail how page followers addressed troll comments on the page during the observation period.

Non-Dialogic Communication Tactics

During the observation period, the researcher observed the use of non-dialogic forms of communication tactics. Emojis, emoticons, GIFs, and memes are all examples of non-dialogic forms of communication. They can be used to convey a message without the use of words. Communicating through non-dialogic means is likely to have the same effects on an audience as if words are used (Britt, 2019). Not limited to trolls, both non-trolls and trolls utilized it as a communication tactic. Adding these visual clues, such as happy or sad faces, brief videos, or moving images, provided a dialogue with additional meaning and emotional context for trolls and non-trolls alike.

Concerning the deployment of non-dialogic communication strategies within the context of this study, the researcher made several observations. Firstly, most followers who received these communication tactics were already familiar with them or understood their intent-based sentiments. This presumption is likely because followers would reply to the tactics through a

refutation, humor, or even a compliment. Regardless, conversations between Lue's followers, whether between themselves or in response to something concerning Lue, acknowledged such techniques. These elements added to the discourse on the overall page.

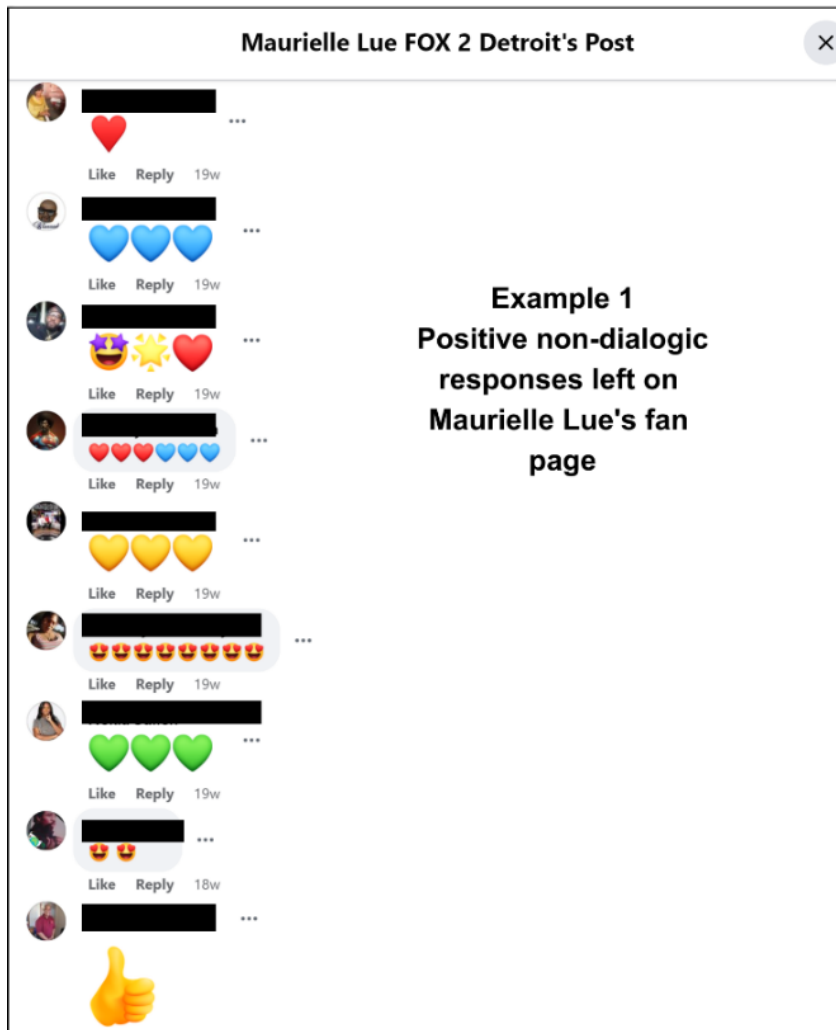
Second, the researcher noticed that trolls on the page exhibited a higher frequency and pattern of non-dialogic patterns than regular users. There was a significant difference between trolls and non-trolls' use of such tactics. The trolls had more frequency and established patterns regarding non-dialogic communication strategies. Still, there was a reasonable degree of fair use of these strategies amongst both factions in the group.

On the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page, both the regular followers and trolls, utilized non-dialogic tactics. Whenever a follower left visual cues in response to a post, their intended effect was fulfilled. However, the study found that including comments provided additional context and clarification to the message intended for the receiver. The researcher found this to be true when text accompanied non-dialogic communication tactics.

Figures 16-18 demonstrate non-dialogic responses that followers positively used on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page.

Figure 16

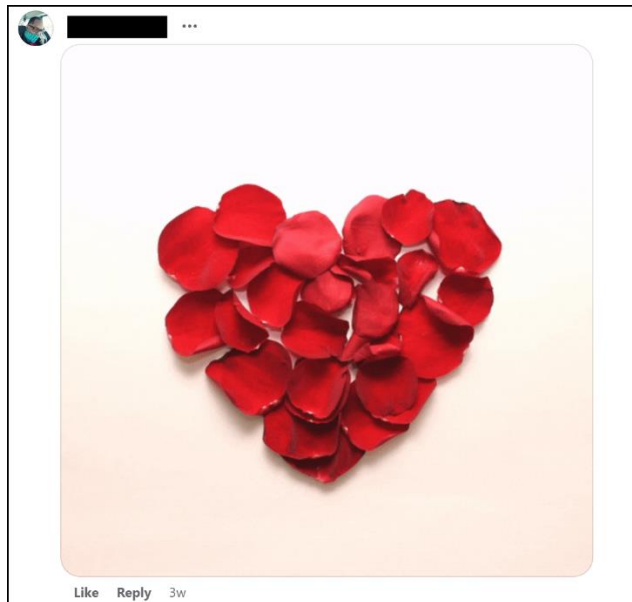
An Example of Positive Non-Dialogic Communication Tactics



Note. Non-dialogic forms of communication showing support for Maurielle Lue.

Figure 17

A Non-Dialogic Communication Tactic Expressing Fondness



Note. This page follower communicated by using a GIF to express his admiration for Maurielle Lue.

Figure 18*A Non-Dialogic Communication Tactic with a Comment*

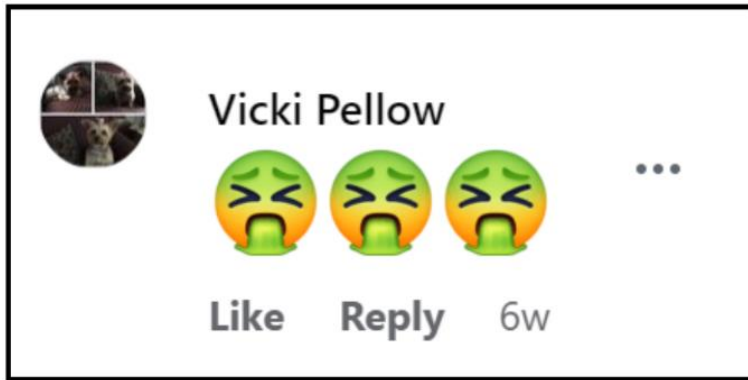
Note. This follower used the popular “drop the mic” emoji and added additional text to drive home its sentiment.

On another level, when trolls employ a pattern of non-dialogic responses to provoke or degrade a target, this can be described as non-dialogic trolling (Britt, 2019). Non-dialogic trolling was also observed on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page. As evidenced, trolling does not always require using words or speech acts; a communication tactic can serve the same purpose. Numerous instances of non-dialogic trolling, aimed at Maurielle Lue and select page followers, appeared on the page. They possibly created a toxic online environment and discouraged healthy discourse in the forum.

Particularly, one follower routinely posted a puke-face emoji. As shown in Figure 19, this occurred whenever Lue published posts to celebrate her celebrity or positive life updates

Figure 19

An example of Non-Dialogic Trolling

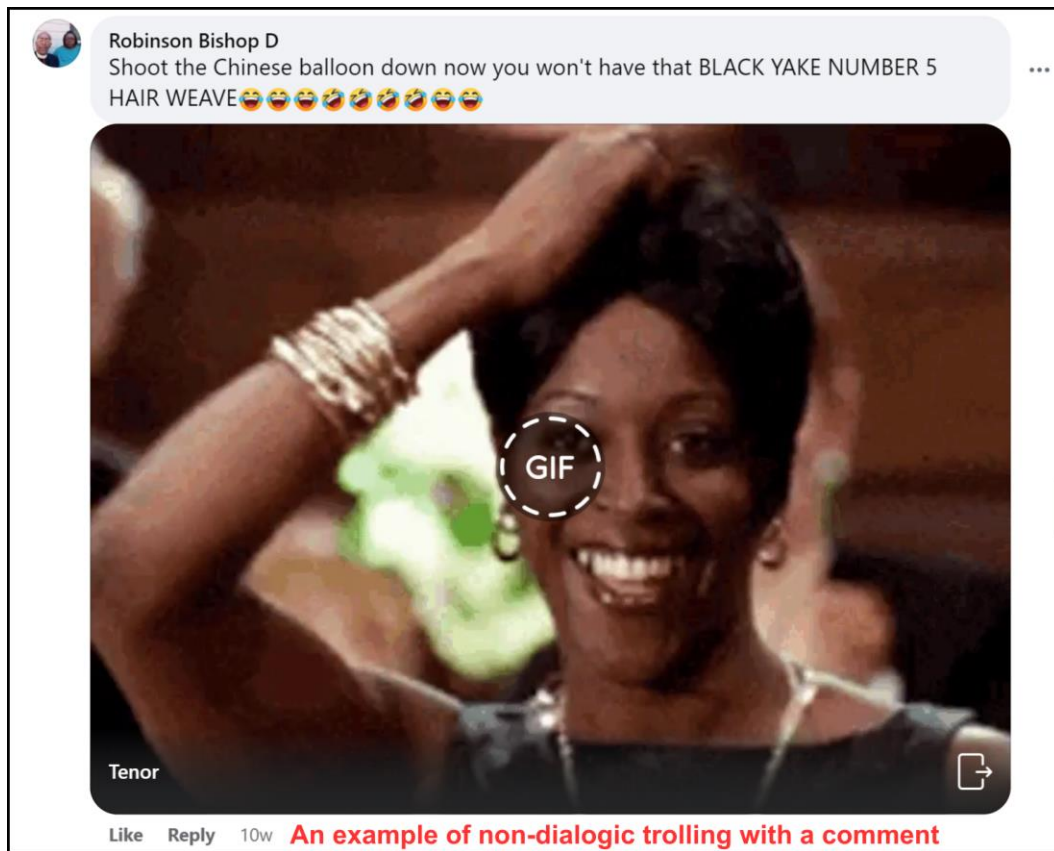


Note. During the observation period, this follower weekly used the communication tactic of non-dialogic trolling on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page.

The researcher observed other instances of non-dialogic trolling occurred on the page. In one of Lue's most trolled posts, dated March 17, 2023, a troll went off-topic and posted a comment with a non-dialogic response. This tactic was intended to shame Lue about the use of wigs. It implied that if government officials shot down the Chinese weather balloons, Lue would no longer be able to obtain wigs (see Figure 20). Lue and the page's other users did not challenge the comment.

Figure 20

Another example of Non-Dialogic Trolling on Lue's Page



Note. A troll on Lue's page used a GIF accompanied by a comment to insult her.

Content Analysis of Comments from the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* Fan Page

The following section will discuss how the researcher further subdivided comments from Subset C. This step was done to help study trolls' speech acts, such as violating Grice's maxims, dialoguing anonymously, and other prevalent communications tactics the fan page. The researcher will then present the findings in response to the research questions.

Violations of Grice's Maxims

First proposed by H. P. Grice (1975), there are conversational principles or Gricean maxims for effective communication. They include:

1. Maxims of Quantity (to be informative)
2. Maxims of Quality (to be truthful)
3. Maxims of Relevancy (to be relational)
4. Maxims of Manner (to be precise)

These cooperative principles help facilitate human interaction by allowing people to collaboratively communicate.

As tools, Grice's maxims are indispensable in situations where humans speak or dialogue with one another to achieve shared objectives and maintain a productive conversation. The maxims aid in maintaining clear communication. Sadly, the conversational maxims of quantity, quality, relevance, and manner are often violated or disregarded concerning online trolls (Alfano, 2021; Paaki et al, 2021). These disruptive violations are also known as flouting the maxims. During the period of observation, there were numerous occasions when these maxims were violated on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page.

As part of the study, the researcher observed, compared, and took copious notes on two subsets of discussions. These subsets, denoted as Subsets C and D, were relevant to the communicative implicatures of Grice's maxims. The collected data was further analyzed against comparative gray literature on deciphering Grice's maxims. It was noted when issues arose due to maxims being thwarted or breakdowns in communication between page followers. The researcher then recorded violations of the maxims according to the communication tactics and linguistic patterns of those who most displayed troll-like behaviors. This step was taken for comparison purposes and to denote the frequency of their activities on the page. This process rendered rich, thick data in validating those labeled as trolls during the earlier data reduction procedure.

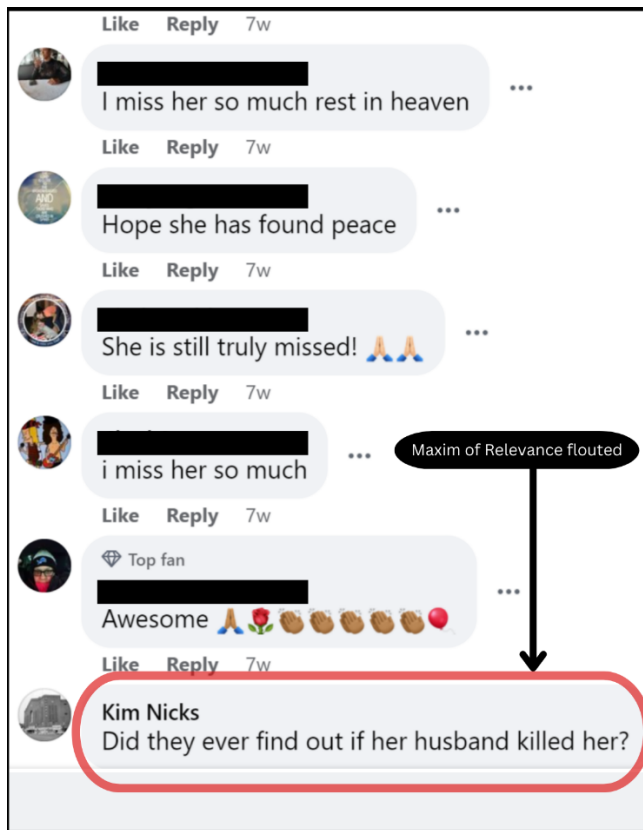
Developing familiarity with these issues allowed the researcher to concentrate on indications in the fan page's dialogue. It contributed to the advancement of the coding and theming process regarding expected communication styles. When these standards were not adhered to, they were readily identifiable. In turn, the researcher observed and recorded speech acts and perceived trolling behaviors when page followers appeared to intentionally violate them. These incidents, at the hands of a few users were sporadic during online communication.

From Subset C's total of 1,675 comments, the researcher observed and recorded at least six instances of trolls disregarding the maxims. These moments held the potential to jeopardize collaborative interaction on the page. On the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* page, the maxims of relevancy⁸ and manner were observed as being violated at an exceptionally high rate. The *maxims of quality* and *maxims of quantity* occurred at a lower rate during the observation period. However, that is not all-inclusive, as some comments may have violated more than one maxim at once. The following section will elaborate on each maxim, beginning with those that were flouted most frequently during the observation period.

Maxims of Relevancy

During the observation period, the researcher determined how trolls manipulated the maxim of relevance to elicit emotional responses from Maurielle Lue and the page's follower base. Several trolls deviated from the original topic of Lue's posts, using irrelevant statements, or posing unrelated questions to promote their agendas and disrupt the established conversations. Created by Lue on February 4, 2023, one post was intended to be a memorial for a deceased colleague (see Figure 21). However, a troll not only published an irrelevant comment to divert the post's sentiments but also implied an unfounded allegation.

⁸ **Maurielle Lue FOX 2 Detroit's Post**, 2023, February 4
<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100044285116745>

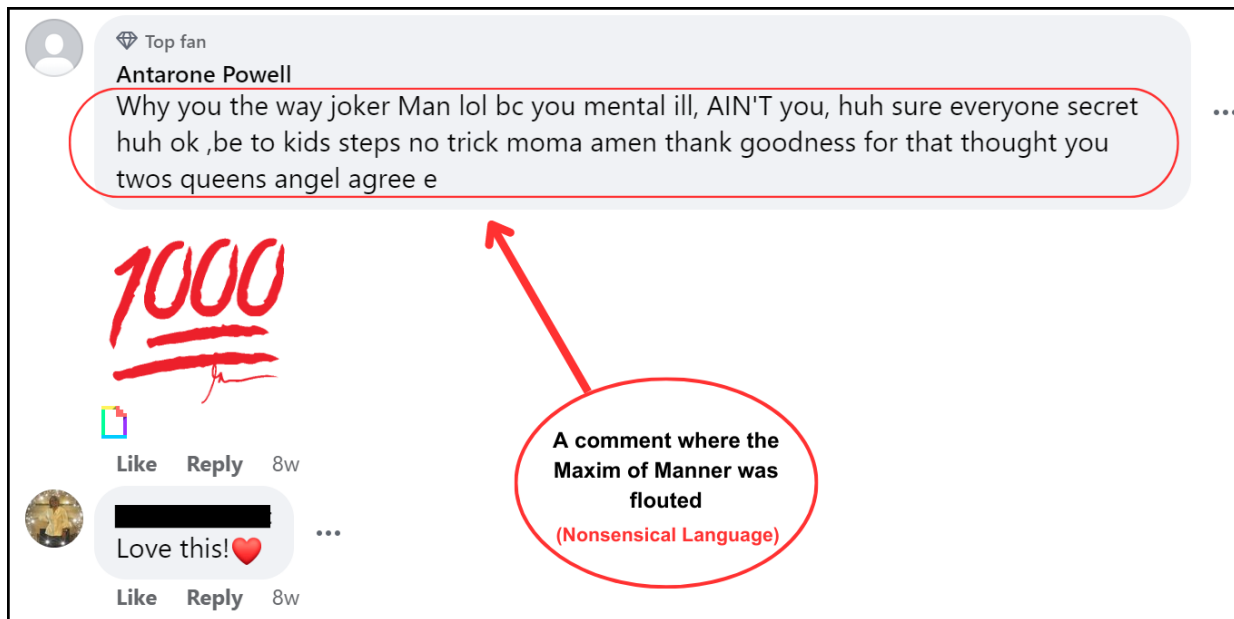
Figure 21*A Troll Flouting the Maxim of Relevance***Maxims of Manner**

The maxim of manner suggests that one should avoid all ambiguity, unbiasedness, and obscurity by being as concise and brief as possible when communicating. The researcher noted the deliberate misuse of language some followers used to sway, mislead, and confuse others on the page wall during the observation period. Below are two examples of the disregard for the maxim of manner based on the dialogic context in two of Lue's posts.

Lue created a post on March 2, 2023 to honor the launch of a new morning segment she and another colleague were hosting. The post revealed that the program would feature upcoming interviews with notable local guests. Amid the audience's feedback of anticipation and accolades about the segment, a fan posted a comment that flouted the maxim of manner (see Figure 22).

Figure 22

Example 1 of Flouting the Maxims of Manner



The researcher notably observed that some statements simultaneously violated more than one of Grice's maxims. Similarly, this particular comment in Figure 21 was exemplary. According to Grice's maxims of cooperative communication, it violated the *maxim of quality* because it contained confusing phrases, like "twos queens angel agree e," which contextually did not make sense. Plus, it violated the *maxim of relevancy* due to the disjointed phrases that did not appear relevant to any coherent topic of conversation, especially regarding the announcement of a new show segment and guest lineups.

Figure 23 is another illustration of a follower violating the maxim of manner by calling Maurielle "*conceited*". The remark is vague and lacks clarity regarding the follower's intention. It did not provide enough background information to the audience. No context was provided in the troll's response to Lue's post of showcasing and thanking the creator of custom-made hand-knitted garments.

Figure 23*Another Instance of Violating the Maxim of Manner*

Moe Gaylord
conceited! ← Maxim of Manner Violated due to no context

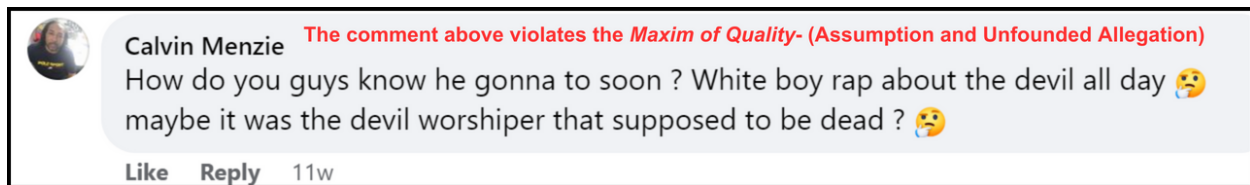
Notes: **Date:** November 23, 2022 **Conversation reacted to by:** 1.3k **# of comments:** 147

Topic: PnknGrn/Sunflower knitwear

Maxims of Quality

The *maxim of quality* stipulates that communicators should not express false or knowingly untrue statements. Some of the comments in Subset C did not appear justified or genuine by select followers, as noted by the researcher. Examples included the remarks of some page followers. Some responses disseminated conspiracy theories⁹, as extensions of expressing the sentiments of possible echo chambers (see Footnote 1) or the use of personal attacks to disseminate rumors that cast doubt on Maurielle Lue's character. A post by Lue on February 13, 2023, announcing the death of Eminem's stunt double, was emblematic of a follower's disregard for this maxim. Page followers responded with their shock to the news and expressed their condolences. One comment, however, completely disregarded the post's sensitive nature by implying that the young man's death was justified due to his ethnicity and profession (see Figure 24).

⁹ **Maurielle Lue FOX 2 Detroit's Post**, 2023, February 24
<https://www.facebook.com/reel/228782859577217>

Figure 24*The Maxim of Quality Violated*

Note. Based on the fact that the subject was "white," this comment implied that he had a propensity to rap about the devil, thus justifying his untimely demise. There is no evidence to support such a claim, and the statement appears to be based on stereotypes rather than facts, thus violating the *maxim of quality*.

Maxims of Quantity

The *maxim of quantity* requires that the communicator (for the purpose of the communication's matter) be informative as needed with no more and no less detail than necessary. Messages should be concisely and clearly conveyed so as not to confuse or overwhelm the receiving audience. This maxim was one of the least flouted in the corpora selected for this study. Nonetheless, some commenters violated the maxim of quantity by either providing insufficient information or overwhelming fellow followers with superfluous information. This is not limited to providing insufficient information or an overabundance of information in a comment but also may entail excessively repeating details within a post. In accordance with the latter, the researcher observed the repetitious behaviors of "spammers" who violated the maxim of quantity.¹⁰ Spamming posts with music videos was one of the most

¹⁰ Maurielle Lue FOX 2 Detroit's Post, 2022, November 18
<https://www.facebook.com/profile/100044285116745/search/?q=who%20did%20it%20best>

popular forms of violating the *maxim of quantity* in the name of repetition. Spamming made it challenging to follow the conversations on the page's wall and identify pertinent information. There was an overabundance of irrelevant, unsolicited messages requesting that followers pause to watch music videos or vacation advertisements.

In one instance, a follower violated the maxim of quantity due to their amount of detail, whether too little or too much, in one of Lue's post on January 18, 2023 (see Figure 25). Lue announced yet another achievement of a new show, *Fox Soul*, which would go national with her and Lee Thomas, a Fox 2 Detroit colleague as the hosts. As followers wished her congratulations, the commenter gave well-wishes to her co-host but not her. The follower violated the maxim of quantity when he congratulated Lee while simultaneously disparaging Lue. He did not provide specific information or justification for why she was deemed overrated. The absence of specifics or context may have made it challenging to comprehend the message, thereby diminishing the significance of the assertion. Comments, such as this one, flouted the maxims of quantity by providing too little detail. These occurred on multiple occasions but at a low frequency. Still, it added to the frustrations of fellow page followers, at times, therefore prompting some commenters to speak out. In the research question segment of this chapter, the researcher will discuss how fellow page followers managed these types of comments. While some comments disregarded or violated the maxims of quantity, many responses on Lue's posts also simultaneously flouted other maxims.

Figure 25*A Follower Violating the Maxim of Quantity***The Shield of Anonymity**

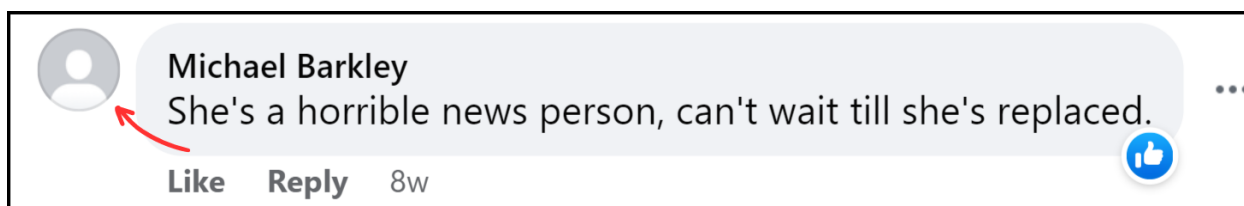
The researcher observed that anonymity was a symptom of increased incivility in dialogue on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page. Some of the harshest comments came from followers who lacked profile pictures, had dubious name handles, or raised the researcher's suspicions of being a fake account. Anonymity played a significant role in face negotiation and politeness. Some trolls felt comfortable engaging in speech acts that were potentially hurtful or offensive. They held no fear of social sanctions or repercussions on the fan page. During the observation period, the researcher created a smaller subset of data in which trolls exploited face

and politeness theory to further their intentions to flame, insult, and disrupt conversations on the page.¹¹

In one post, Maurielle Lue honored Amyre Makeupson¹², a Detroit news industry icon whom she had interviewed. In the 143-comment post, numerous page followers lauded and praised the legendary news anchor whose segment Lue hosted. The theory of politeness and face-negotiation was validated because the followers' responses were respectful and positive. Some even supported the post with positive non-dialogic responses, such as emoticons, emojis, GIFs, and memes. Amid the responses, however, there was one comment from a page follower without a profile picture. This commenter was opposed to Lue being perceived as a quality news person and desired her to be replaced (see Figure 26). In this case, the troll's face is compromised, and an impolite, insulting speech act appears aimed at Maurielle Lue.

Figure 26

The Absence of Profile Picture Facilitates Negative Speech Act



Note. Shielded by anonymity by not having a profile picture, this follower compromises *face*.

Anonymity can also be achieved by creating fake profiles on social media platforms. This mechanism can be used to protect *face* and facilitate impolite speech acts while saving face. The researcher believes that several profiles following the *Maurielle Fox 2 Detroit* fan page are not

¹¹ **Maurielle Lue FOX 2 Detroit's Post**, 2023, March 2
<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100044285116745>

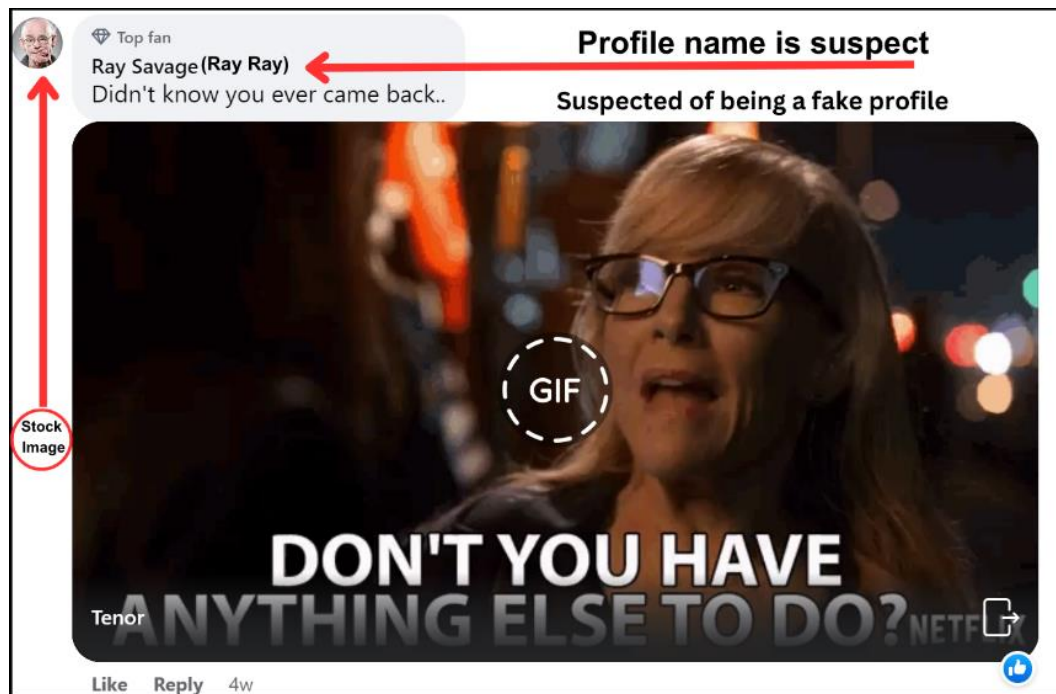
¹² **Maurielle Lue FOX 2 Detroit's Post**, 2023, January 30
https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid0aqrL7UJuP7SVahAP9DHBpbERgTgpt2pBsKkKHx63aqubyNQVycPDZ39QJXs191wjl&id=100044285116745

legitimate Facebook user accounts. Rather, they seem to be shells used by a person or persons who wish to hide their true identities.

One account in question is of a previously mentioned follower, Ray Savage (Ray Ray), who earned a *Top Fan* badge. Ray Savage (Ray Ray) posted insulting or negative comments every week during this study's observation period. His preferred insulting speech acts were flaming one-liners in defiance of Lue's original post (OPs) or sarcastic memes and GIFS as non-dialogic trolling. Ray Savage (Ray Ray)'s profile picture and name used also spoke volumes about the profile's legitimacy (see Figure 27) .

Figure 27

A Possible Fake Profile User



Note. This profile is suspected of compromising face by using a fake profile to post impolite speech act.

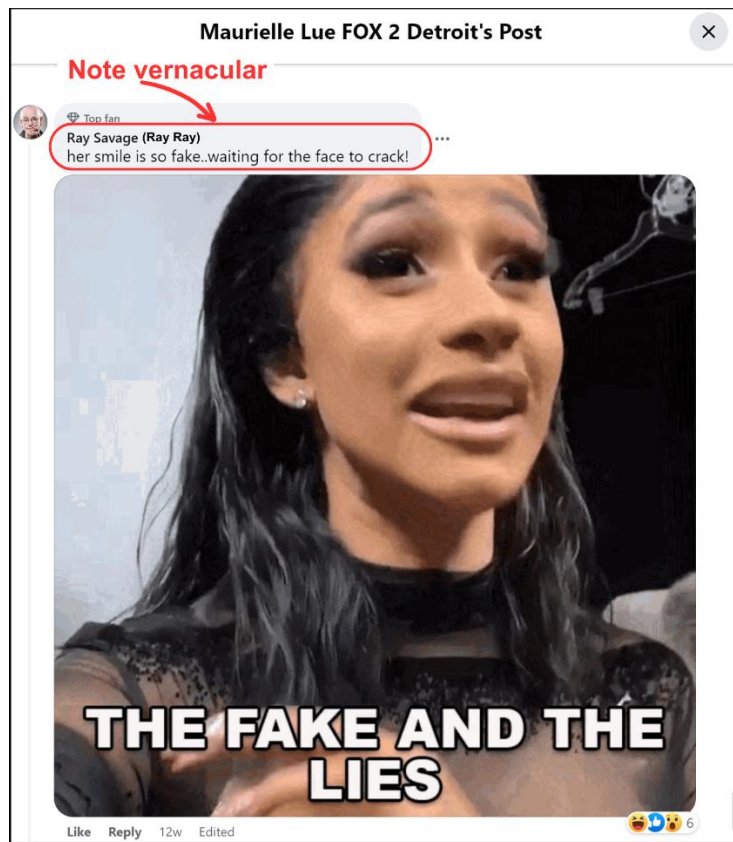
Virtual speech acts are actions performed through language and can take many forms, including gestures, spoken and written words, and even images. Thus, social media handles,

user-identified names, and user-profile images can also qualify as speech acts (Mihaylov & Nakov, 2019; Morgan, 2022).

In addition, the researcher contends that the Ray Savage (Ray Ray)'s vernacular when commenting on the Maurielle Lue page was suspicious. It did not align with how a white male between the ages of 60 to 70 years old might communicate. These negative speech acts cast doubt on Top Fan #1's authenticity. In one thread post, Ray Ray posted a GIF of Cardi B, a hip-hop artist, accompanied by a comment stating how Lue had a fake smile and he was waiting for her face to crack (see Figure 28).

Figure 28

The Vernacular Used Raises Suspicion on Anonymity



The researcher examined the profile of Ray Savage (Ray Ray). While he had a notable presence on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page, his Facebook footprint outside of her page

appears to be limited. Savage's profile picture appears to be a stock image of a white man in his late sixties or early seventies with his tongue sticking out. His friends only included 14 accounts. The pictures on the friends' profiles appeared to be memes or stock photos as well. There was not much activity on the profile page itself. Moreover, conversations on his profile page lacked substantial engagement with Facebook friends.

This example is not to claim that an older white male cannot make such speech acts. However, these instances are highly unlikely. When combined with the profile picture, the tone brings its own brand of humor and implausibility. However, these attributes did not negate that Ray Ray's comments were cruel, hurtful, and denigrating.

Anonymity gives trolls more opportunities to spread venomous speech acts, aggravate, and provoke internet users without remorse or consequence. Ray Savage (Ray Ray) relentlessly trolled the page, presumably anonymous, with little confrontation from other page followers. Whether good or bad actors, all users are allowed to create their profile names or *handles* to their liking on Facebook. A social media profile name speaks to identity and how a person wants to be perceived. Handles on social media serve the desire for authenticity, self-expression, or solely entertainment. Thus, creating a user profile name is intentional, therefore being a virtual speech act (Galán-García et al., 2015). A person may use their actual name to signify transparency, a variant of it, or an entirely different identity to create a persona or to preserve anonymity.

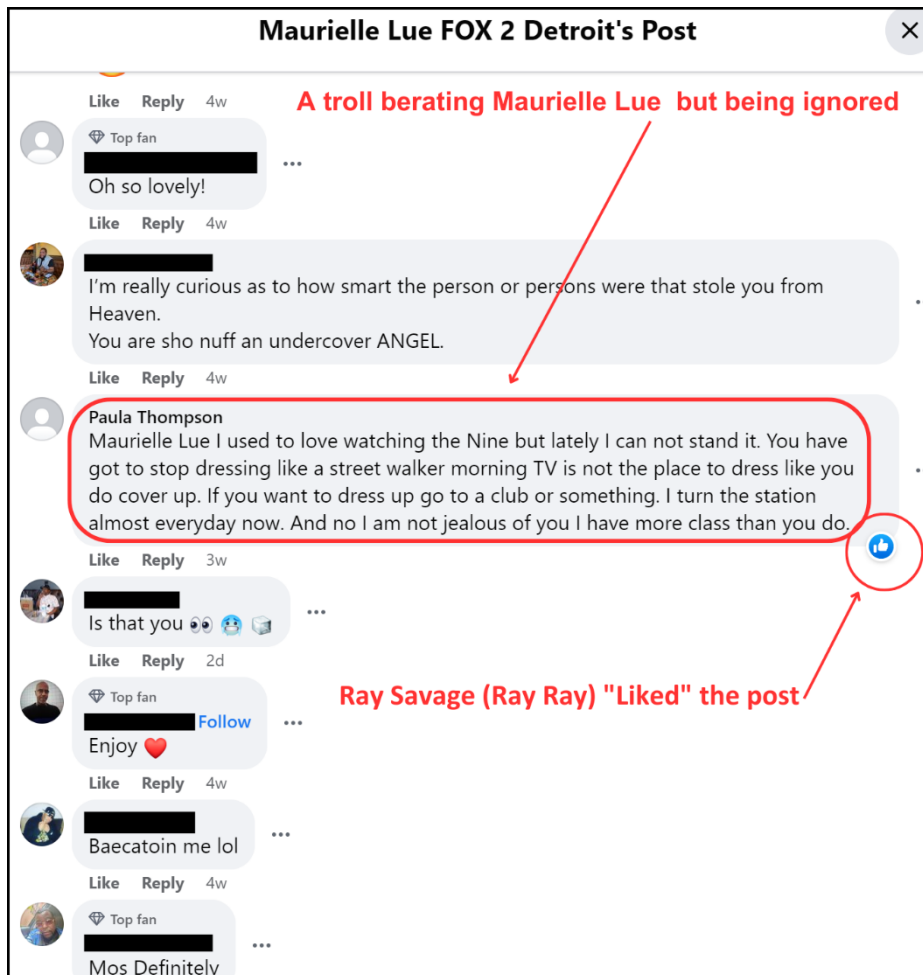
Theory of Planned Behavior

In this study, there was no sure way to determine if trolls had a particular theory of planned behavior toward their target. However, their projected attitude, anticipated subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control appeared to help determine their speech act behavior toward the intended target: Maurielle Lue. These factors substantially fuel the impact of an

individual's speech acts. The theory of planned behavior and speech acts both focus on the relationship between intention, language, and behavior. (Ajzen, 1991; Morales-Ramirez et al., 2019). Therefore, it is essential to comprehend their complex relationship.

Only two factors may have prevented extensive trolling on *Maurielle Lue's Fox 2 Detroit* page. First, most of the page's followers hardly interacted with the trolls. Second, page followers did not encourage trolls. The researcher never witnessed the trolls engaging Maurielle Lue or any other page followers in a flame war. Most of the time, the trolls were disregarded. They were rarely punished when they engaged in uncivil speech acts within the community. In some instances, a page follower responded to trolls. Yet, the researcher did not observe the offenders engaging in a heated verbal battle with those who defended Lue or the community forum. Confronted trolls conceded most of the time, and the conversations intended by Lue's post continued.

An example of this phenomenon is Lue's swimsuit photo (see Figure 29) which garnered a provocative comment. Lue and her followers ignored the speech act. As a result, the troll had minimal perceived behavioral control since there were no repercussions for their actions. The research findings under RQ 3 will further analyze applying the theory of planned behavior to speech acts. This discussion will focus on how trolls' virtual speech acts were managed in the online community.

Figure 29*Applying Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to a Speech Act of Provocation***Extended Analyses: Further Narrowing Subset C**

Prior to answering the first two research questions for this study, it was necessary to conduct a purposeful sample to isolate troll comments from the corpus of 1,675 comments of Subset C. The researcher initiated a second close reading by scanning and extracting all negative comments that were seemingly posted to provoke, insult, affront, or disrupt dialogue from the corpora. As a result of this procedure, the researcher extracted 309 comments from 87 fan page followers during the observation period from Subset C.

Recall that not all adverse comments made in a forum are the result of a troll. In the literature review, the researcher considered the convergence of troll definitions. It was gathered that a troll purposely and habitually provokes others with abusive rhetoric. Moreover, the emergence of linguistic patterns played an integral role in identifying trolls. With a laser focus on linguistic patterns, the researcher constructed a preliminary coding system using 309 comments. Referring to Table 2, *The Most Detectable Linguistic Patterns of Trolls*, in chapter two, the researcher diagrammed and color-coded each of the 309 comments to determine whether linguistic patterns emerged. This step provided an indicator and the rationale to label any one of the 87 followers captured in the preceding process as a legitimate troll.

The researcher conducted a fourth round of close reading to follow the linguistic patterns of each suspected troll's comment. The following step involved examining how those patterns aligned with the style of language used. To describe tactics and speech acts, the researcher noted trolls' language markers, clues, descriptors, and identifiers used to interrupt online conversations and elicit emotional responses. The researcher summarized the most common troll linguistic patterns, as cited in Chapter Two of the literature review. The summarization resulted in the researcher validating the following linguistic patterns, originally seen in Table 2, as *aggressive*, *dismissive*, *deceptive*, *hyperbolic*, and *personal attacks*.

As a result, the researcher identified the linguistic patterns that occurred most frequently within the corpora of 309 comments. Using the replication of Table 2 from Chapter Two, the researcher highlighted the most common linguistic patterns on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page (see Table 5).

Table 5*Linguistic Patterns of Trolls on the Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit Page*

Aggressive Patterns (AP)	Deceptive Patterns (DeP)	Dismissive Patterns (DiP)	Hyperbolic Patterns (HP)	Personal Attacks Patterns (PA)
Threats/Threatening Confrontations harassment Intimidation Sexual explicitness Racially-charged talk Vulgarity Expletives ~not limited to~	Misleading Manipulation False claims Fake profiles Fake profile name for nefarious reasons astroturfing ~not limited to~	Gaslighting Reducing a person Sweeping generalizations Sarcasm Mocking Derailment Spamming ~not limited to~	Exaggerated speech Over-the-Top Comments Talk to provoke emotional responses Shock talk Indignation Accusations ~not limited to~	Character assassination disparagement vilification Insults Ad hominem attacks Name-calling ~not limited to~

Note. The highlighted items were the linguistic patterns of trolls observed on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page.

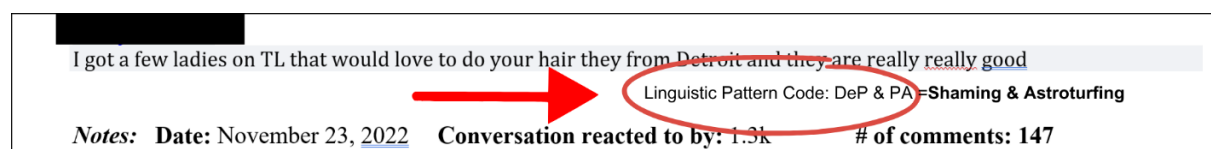
To anticipate the emergence of primary codes and themes to be considered, the researcher constructed word windows in response to the identified linguistic patterns. During a lengthy process of a fifth close reading, the researcher conducted preliminary coding to identify and designate blatantly provocative virtual speech acts represented in 309 comments. After thoroughly reviewing the corpus of comments, the researcher narrowed the data set.

This elimination process refined the corpora of 309 comments to separate the one-offs, gray areas, or those who did not demonstrate a linguistic pattern in their negative speech acts. What remained was an even smaller corpus of 151 comments from 21 followers of the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page. The same followers further validated this process, aside from the routine spammers who firmly established linguistic patterns in their language behaviors. During the observation period, each time these followers commented, they consistently projected disruptive incivilities to provoke the page host, Maurielle Lue.

The smaller purposeful sampling of 151 comments from trolls on the fan page, was labeled as Subset D. It would serve as the data to answer research questions 1 and 2. Figures 30-32 show how the researcher color-coded and diagrammed comments to identify and label negative rhetoric based on the prevalence of linguistic patterns found within 151 responses. This finding further validated the presence of trolls on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page. Some comments from the top 20 most-trolled threads also produced unexpected outcomes, which will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Figure 30

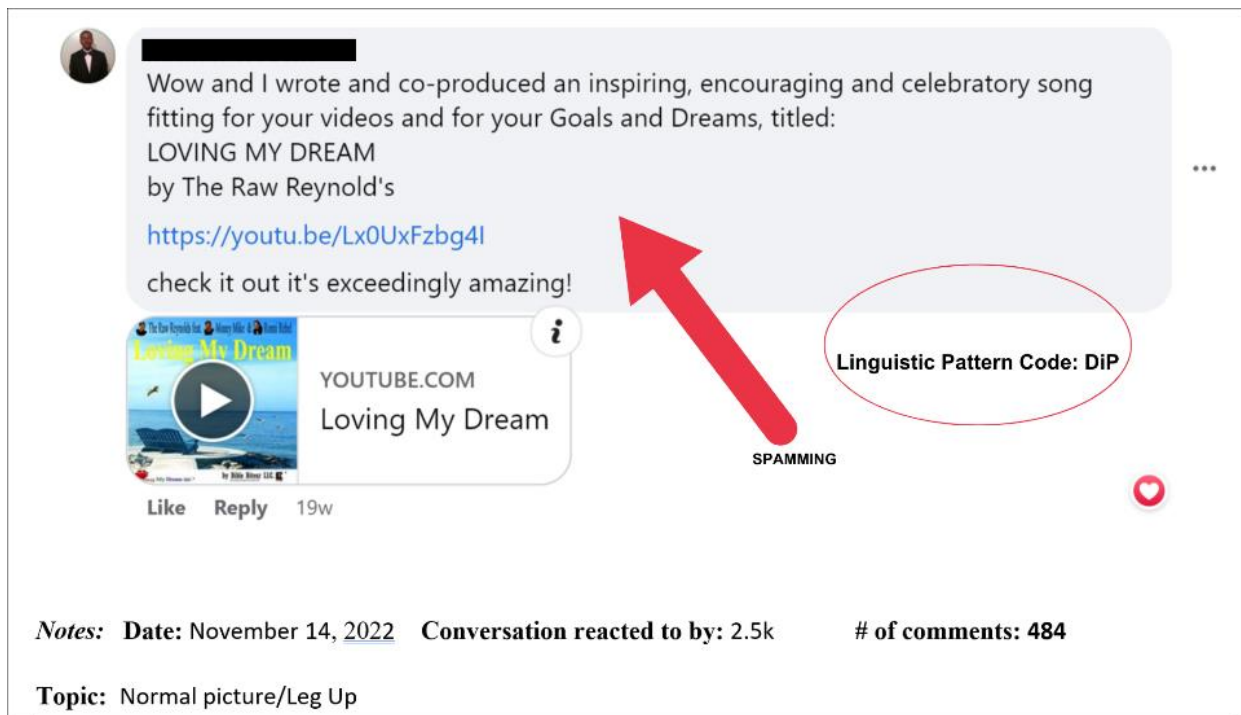
Example A Pre-Coding of Linguistic Patterns



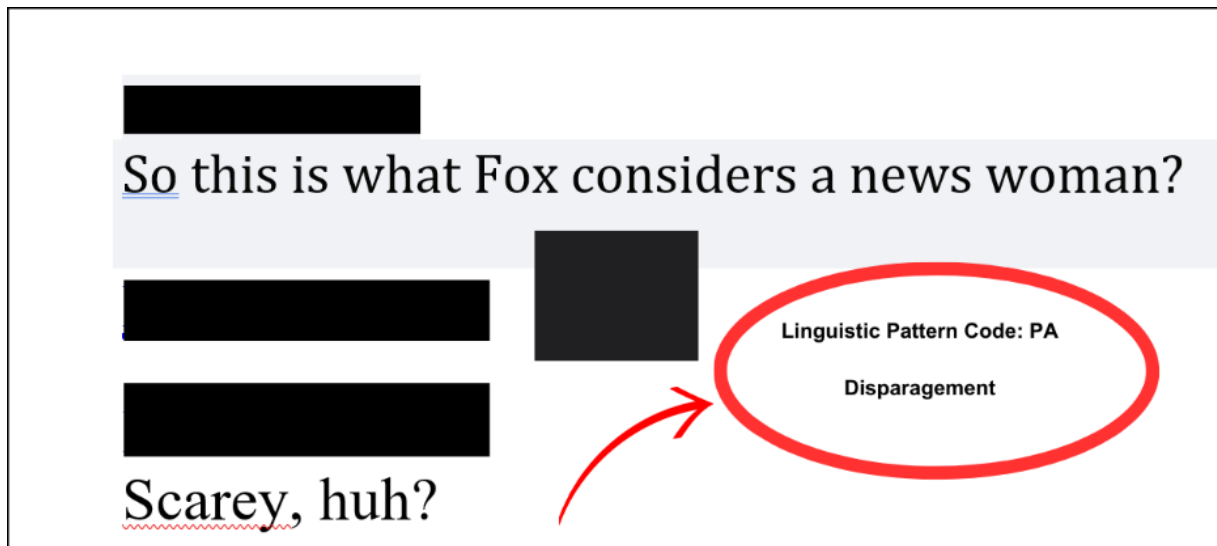
Note. Using the linguistic patterns of Deceptive Patterns (DeP) and Personal Attacks (PA) to astroturf and slight.

Figure 31

Example B Pre-Coding of Linguistic Patterns



Note. The page follower's post was coded as dismissive (DiP), as he spammed comments constantly.

Figure 32*Example C Pre-Coding of Linguistic Patterns*

Note. Two fan page followers' comments were coded as personal attacks (PAP) as the remarks were disparaging.

Research Question Findings

There were definitive answers to each research question, lending credibility to this study. Here, the researcher will not only answer the research questions but also explain the coding and theming process used to derive them.

RQ 1: *Is there evidence of a troll typology based on their speech acts?*

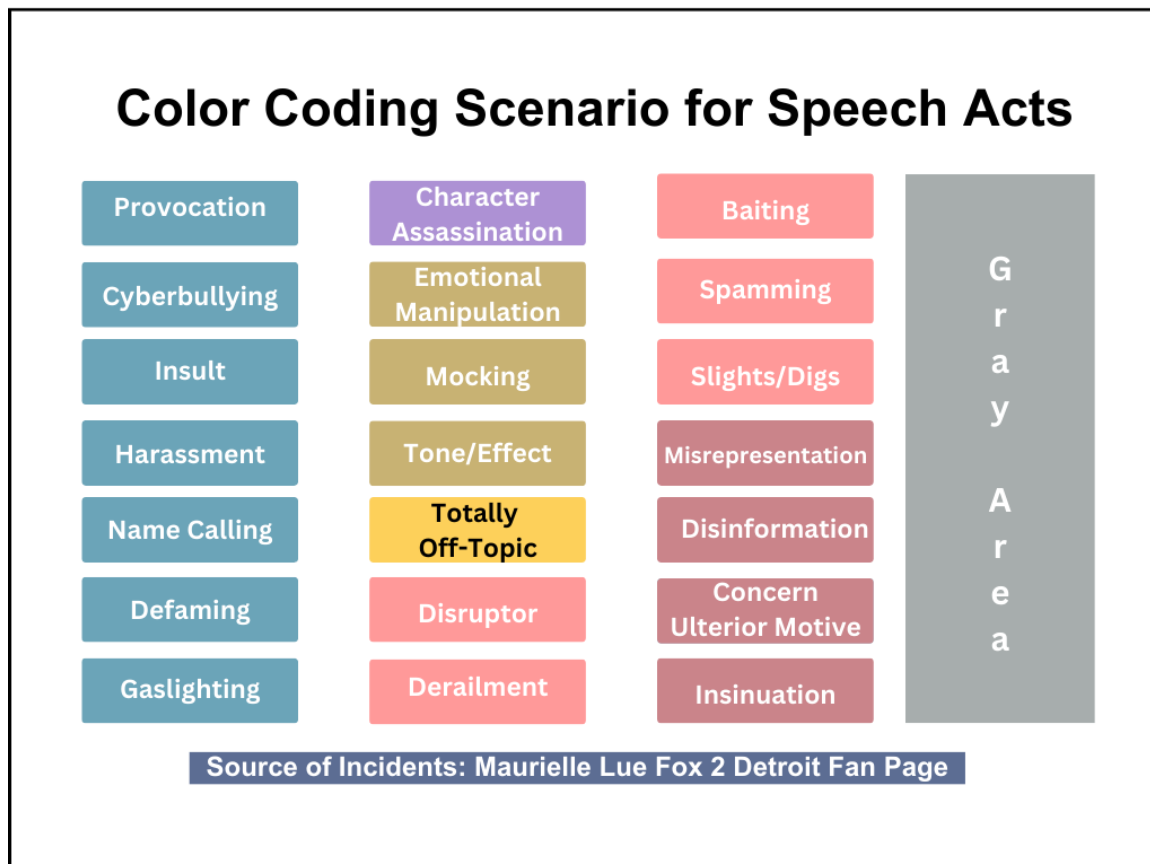
The answer is, yes. By analyzing the speech acts of trolls on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page, the researcher found evidence of trolls' strategic language behaviors. As indicated by the coding and emerging themes during data analysis and categorization, it was possible to develop a typology. To arrive at the answer and begin a typology, the building process entailed the following steps.

The researcher created a color-recoding system based on the speech acts observed in Subset D's reduced sample of 151 comments. The researcher performed a sixth close reading to

reassign a color code based on the comment's context and in accordance with the anticipated categories (see Figure 33). Using the criteria presented in Figure 33, the researcher recoded the observations from the collected data. Figure 34 illustrates how specific comments were color-coded. The researcher allocated multiple codes for comments that fell into more than one category (see Figure 35).

Figure 33

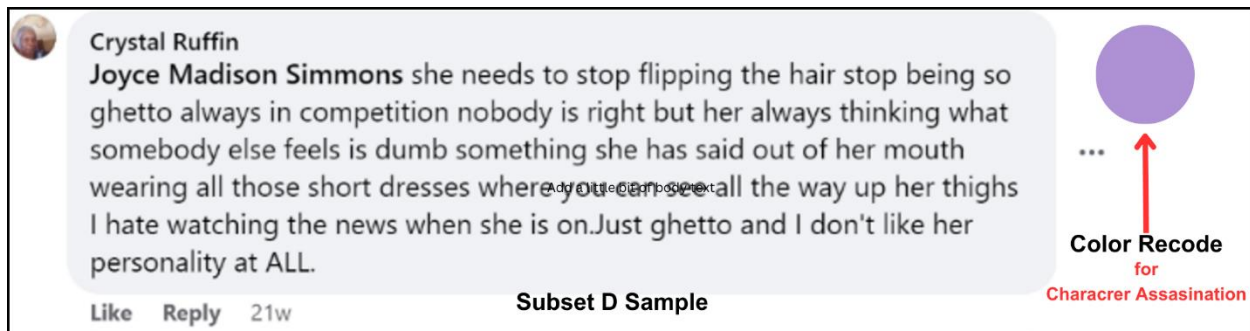
Coding Process of Speech Acts in Subset D



Note. Coding scenario of virtual speech acts found within 151 comments on the Lue FB fan page.

Figure 34

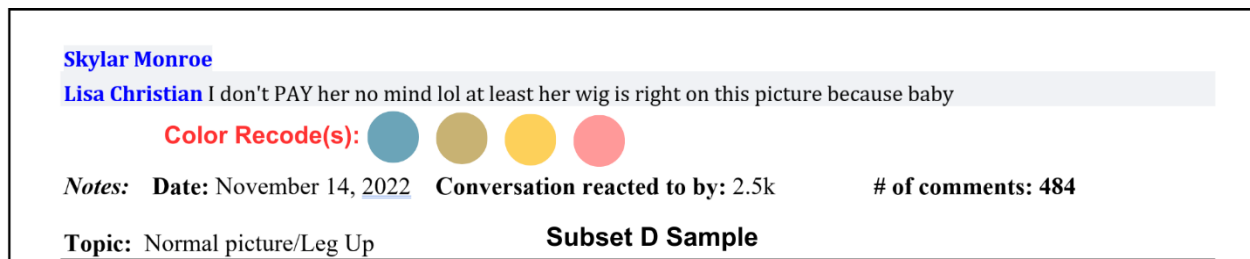
An Example of the Color- Recoding Process



Note. This comment where one follower is addressing another about M. Lue was color re-coded as a character assassination.

Figure 35

An Example of Multiple Color Recoding



Note. This comment was multi-color recoded for insult, mocking, being totally off-topic, and baiting.

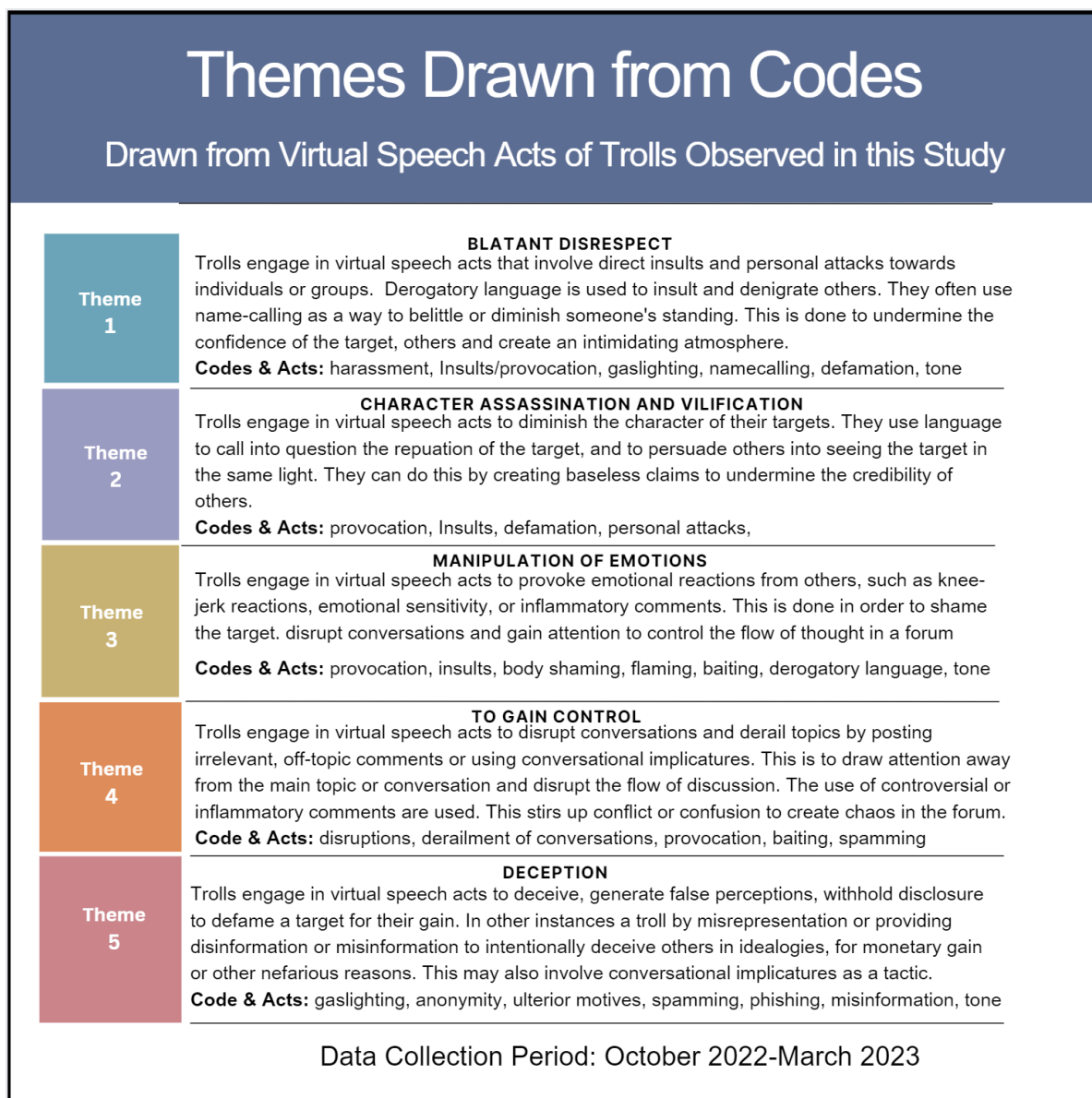
The Emergence of Themes

The observation period offered a plethora of themes. However, some themes were more prevalent or overlapped with others, which nuanced the process. The evidence for a typology of trolls' speech acts was supported by a substantial number of emergent and recurring sub-themes in Subset D during content analysis and coding. With the aid of MAXQDA, the researcher analyzed the color-recoded data to reaffirm and streamline patterns and themes. This analysis was conducted in relation to developing a typology of trolls' speech acts in Subset D.

Through the strenuous coding and analysis of the data, the researcher identified five salient themes across trolls' comments in Subset D. These themes included the categories of *blatant disrespect, to gain control, deception, manipulation of emotion, and character assassination and vilification* (see Figure 36). The following will explore these themes in greater detail and render examples of corresponding comments.

Figure 36

The Following Themes Emerged from the Codes Assigned in this Study



An Analysis and Depiction of the Themes

Theme 1: *Blatant Disrespect*

Closely examining the color-coded virtual speech acts of trolls in Subset D revealed blatant disrespect and provocation patterns. This conduct falls under the headings of insults, harassment, and tone. The analysis of trolls' derogatory language and personal assaults on the page revealed a pattern of ridicule, slights, and digs. The researcher determined that trolls on the fan page engaged in various virtual speech acts encompassing behaviors relative to this theme. Figure 37 illustrates a comment that fits this motif.

Figure 37

A Comment Illustrative of Blatant Disrespect

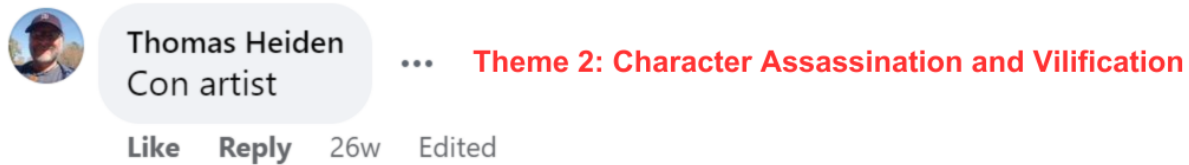


Theme 2: *Character Assassination and Vilification*

The online behavior of trolls on the *Maurielle Fox 2 Detroit fan* page was further characterized using the color-coded virtual speech acts from Subset D. They revealed patterns of character assassination and vilification. Some remarks appeared to undermine Maurielle Lue and other targets' character and reputations. This intent was accomplished through the use of personal assaults, defamation, and provocations. Some comments suggested doubt about Lue's credibility or integrity. A comment on October 26, 2022 is illustrative of this theme (see Figure 38).

Figure 38

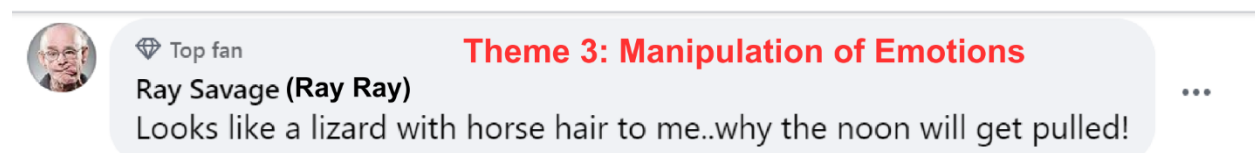
An Example of a Comment Vilifying Maurielle Lue with an Accusation

**Theme 3: Manipulation of Emotions**

Another segment of color-coded comments from Subset D implied emotional manipulation through the observed speech acts. Some comments suggested that others were provoked and elicited emotional responses. It was observed that trolls used a variety of strategies, including blue humor, expletives, body shaming, and derogatory language to elicit knee-jerk responses and inflame emotions. These actions had the propensity to humiliate Maurielle Lue and others. Other comments appeared to disrupt dialogue and seize control of the forum's thought flow. Using techniques such as provocation, flaming, baiting, and tone, the trolls attempted to obtain attention and manipulate the forum's group dynamics. Such a comment is indicative of what is described in this theme (see Figure 39).

Figure 39

A Comment Aimed at Emotional Manipulation

**Theme 4: To Gain Control**

Another aspect of coded comments revealed where trolls on the *Maurielle Fox 2 Detroit* fan page attempted to gain control of posts and ongoing discussions. The observed trolls used

virtual speech acts to disrupt and divert conversations. Trolls posted irrelevant comments or used conversational implicatures to divert attention from the primary topic and create disorder in the forum. Some of Lue's posts were marred by incendiary remarks, which impeded the flow of conversation. In this study, the researcher identified specific codes and actions associated with these troll behaviors, such as disruptions, conversation derailment, provocation, taunting, and spamming.

Figure 40

One example of a Troll Attempting to Gain Control with Spam



Note. This troll tagged over 10 people in the same post with this Billy Wagner Facebook link.

Theme 5: Deception

The fan page was not immune to the deceptive language practices of some trolls. Through their virtual speech acts, a faction of trolls used deceptive information and misrepresented statements to manipulate and deceive others. This was achieved through the use of techniques such as anonymity, phishing, and gaslighting. Figure 41 is the result of one week when Lue's account was hacked. A follower was able to initiate a post before Lue was made

aware and could retrieve control of her page. In addition, Lue learned that multiple Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts had been created in her name. She spoke about this incident on one of the morning newscasts. All of her official social media accounts were suspended four to six days before the situation was back under control. This prime example of “deception” was observed during the data collection period. It appears that the follower who hacked Lue’s account to create the post did so under a fake profile.

Figure 41

A Comment Featuring a Speech Act of Deception



Note. This troll was part of a group who wreaked havoc on the social media pages of Maurielle Lue for one week. Here in this post which he socially engineered. In it, other users call him out.

The researcher gathered sufficient evidence to potentially construct a typology of troll speech acts based on the five identified themes. In addition, the categorization procedures enhanced the reliability and validity of the study’s findings. The evidence of these observations

addressed the research question regarding the creation of a typology of troll speech acts. Through this comprehensive and detailed process, the researcher was able to organize a classification system of troll speech acts germane to the data collected from *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page (see Table 6).

Table 6

A Typology of Troll Speech Acts

TYPOLOGY OF VIRTUAL SPEECH ACTS of Trolls			
Sourced from <i>Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit</i> Fan Page			
Speech Acts			
Harassment	Insults	Misrepresentation	Implicature
Cyberbullying	Mocking	Disinformation	Manipulation
Provocation	Disruption	Body Shaming	Spamming
Name-Calling	Derailment	Sock Puppetry	Phishing
Vilification	Baiting	Conspiracy Talk	
Digs/Slights	Tone	Deception	

The researcher created a concept map to further clarify the study's findings based on the emerging themes. Using the data, codes, and developing themes from virtual speech acts on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page, a concept map depicted the relationship between communication strategies and speech acts' influence on the communication process. It proved to be a useful tool for understanding and organizing distinct aspects and themes related to trolls' virtual speech on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page. The diagram illustrated many concepts and their interrelationships to assist in identifying trolls' patterns, themes, and methods

for constructing ideation to deliver an uncivil message to a specific audience or target. Themes included provocation and emotional manipulation, disruption and derailment, insults, and personal attacks, name-calling and derogatory language, and provocation and baiting. The concept map provided a comprehensive overview of how the page's trolls engaged in virtual speech acts (see Figure 42).

By analyzing the interrelationships between communication strategies and speech acts, communication researchers may be able to develop methods for preventing online incivility. As online discourse has become increasingly mainstream, social media users must get along while freely expressing themselves, particularly when interacting with individuals from diverse backgrounds and social perspectives.

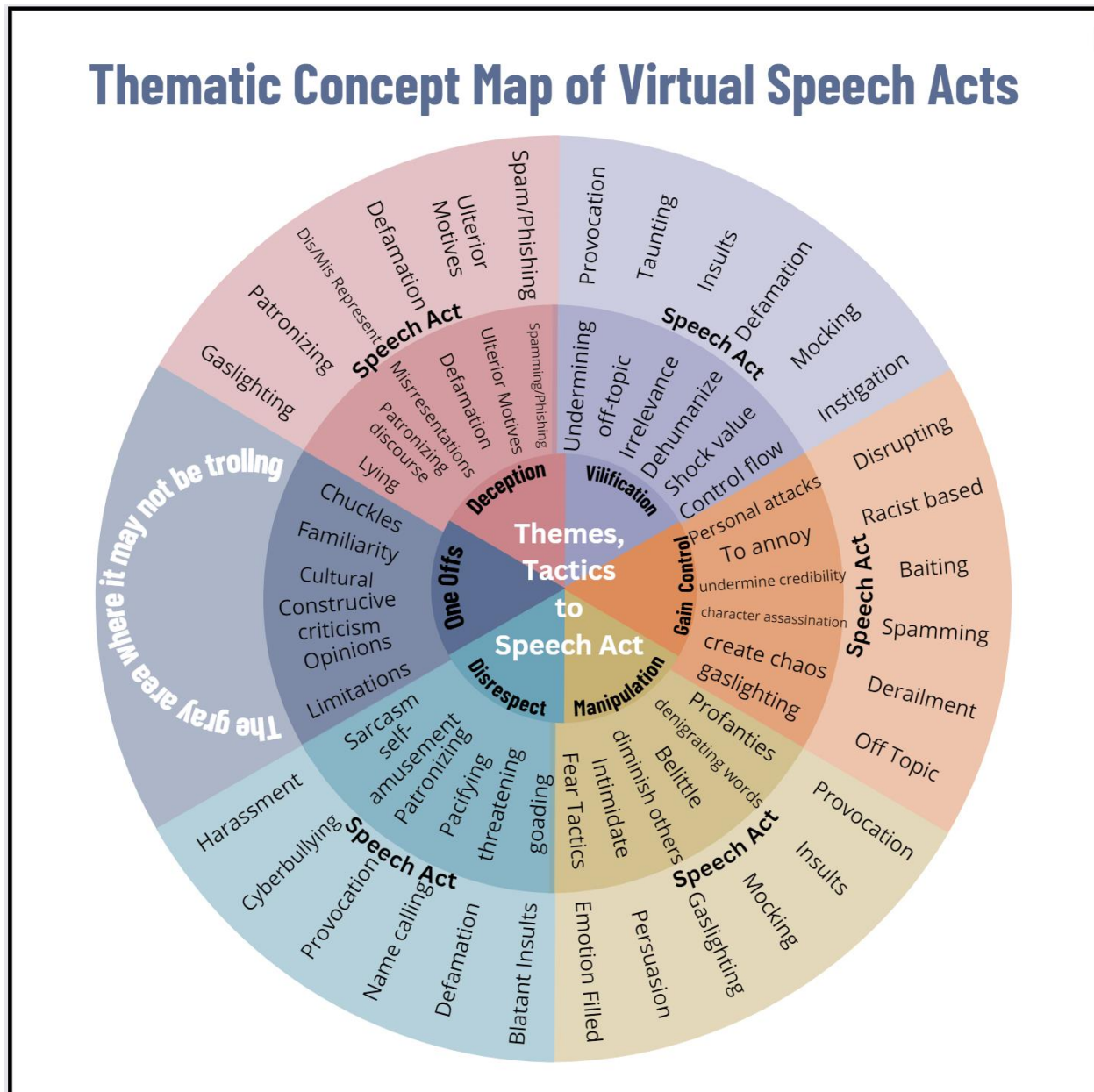
Overall, the concept map illustrates a thematic synthesis in which communication tactics are interconnected. These tactics can contribute to potentially harmful speech acts that can impact individuals and communities. Mapping emphasized the interconnectedness of communication strategies and their potential effects on individuals and communities. Communication researchers and practitioners must be able to identify and address these interrelationships to implement corrective measures that promote respectful and ethical communication in online communities.

The communication process is comprised of numerous moving components, as it is advancing at an unprecedented pace and scale. By analyzing the communication process and its complexities, researchers can obtain a deeper understanding of how trolls operate and develop effective countermeasures. Using concept maps to generate additional sub-questions and themes expedites understanding the phenomena. Throughout this study, the researcher created concept maps to further clarify the study's findings based on the emerging themes. In addition to the

answers provided, there were several serendipitous findings that will be addressed in Chapter Five.

Figure 42

A concept map rendering a visual on patterns and interrelationships of virtual speech acts



Note. A relational view of themes and how communication tactics are connected to speech acts.

RQ 2: *What communication tactics do trolls utilize when they post online?*

In online forums, trolls use communication tactics to strategically disrupt, provoke, and impose upon others. Referring to Chapter Two, the researcher observed nine of the 11 communication tactics utilized during the observation period. Table 7 displays the most prevalent tactics employed on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page. Although some may overlap, the depth of their application varies significantly based on the troll's original intentions.

Table 7

Communication Tactics of Trolls in Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit Fan Page.

Communication Tactic/Strategy	Examples of Occurrences During the Observation Period
Appearance	On occasion, Maurielle Lue was repeatedly called out by trolls about her hair, and attire worn on newscasts.
Concern trolling	Some trolls published repeated remarks offering her free wig installs or recommending stylists however sounding disingenuous (“LOL”s)
False Information	Suspected fake profiles fall under this strategy.
Misinformation	At least three followers were suspected of operating under fake profiles. One was accused of having a fake profile by page followers
Misrepresentation	Two followers of the fan page attempted to use the page to get date.
Off-topic/irrelevant comments	Four trolls established linguistic patterns of always posting an off-topic comment on a post.
Personal attacks	Trolls on the page have labeled Maurielle Lue as a lizard, an old dirty laundry bag, a racist, unprofessional, and selfish.
Insults	Questioning Lue’s professionalism. Calling Lue a “streetwalker”
Character Assassination/Vilifying	Accusing Lue of racism or questioning her intellect

Provocation	At least five trolls engaged in side-conversations belittling Lue. Two tagged her or others in their negative comments to bait.
Name-calling/labeling	One troll accused Maurielle Lue of being “ghetto” and a con artist. This example is just one instance of Lue being labeled.
Spam/Spamming (Both a Communication Tactic and a Speech Act)	Three to five trolls spammed the page by promoting health products and music every time they were visibly active during the observation period.
Phishing	There were at least 15 instances of trolls spamming the page by requesting followers to click on a link.
Tone	Trolls mocked Maurielle Lue about her professionalism and the originality of stories she covered. She was also occasionally subjected to sarcasm.

Note. The communication tactics employed by trolls during the observation period on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page.

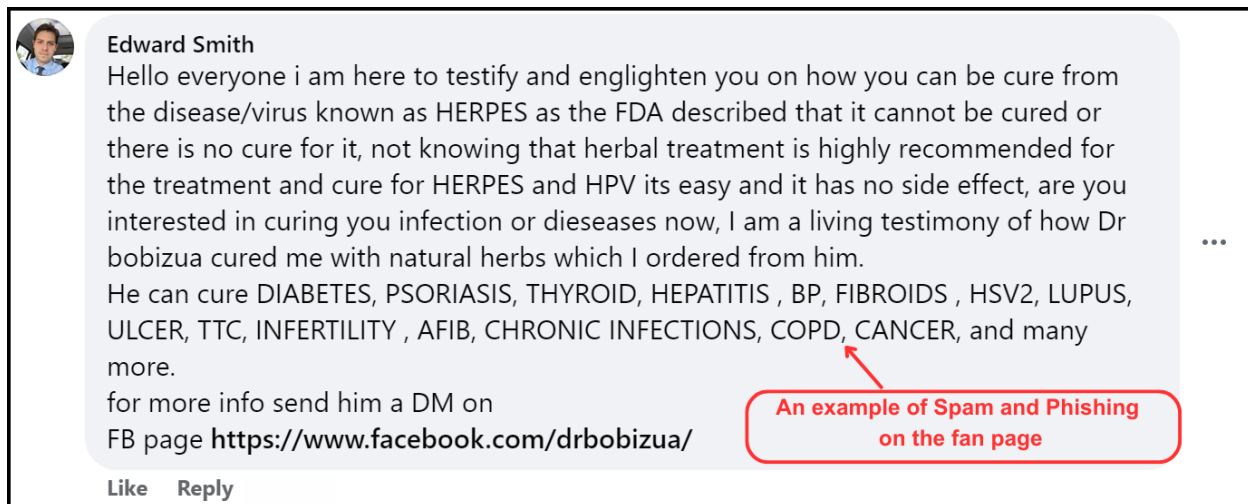
The researcher observed how trolls’ communication tactics and emergent linguistic patterns, as discussed in Chapter Two, were integral to the impact of a speech act.

Additionally, spamming included as a communication tactic because trolls strategically used it to gain visibility or attention. This especially concerned the promotion of local artists’ original music and promos for vacations.

Several page followers took advantage of spamming to publish works of their craft throughout the observation period (see Footnote 6). Other instances of this tactic occurred on November 14, 2022 and November 18, 2022. Two of Lue's followers, including one who "*liked*" his own comment, inundated her posts to promote music videos (see Figures 43-44). Spamming was an intermittent occurrence on the page during the observation period. The researcher never witnessed any feedback in relation to their spammed comments.

Figure 43

Phishing and Spam are Communication Tactics Too

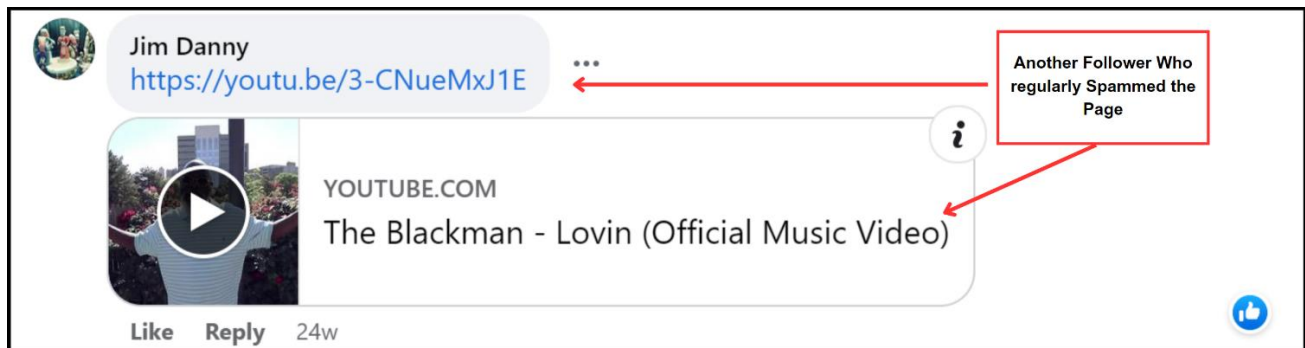


Note. This comment qualifies as both spam and phishing. The troll published it on a post about a leisure event that Maurielle Lue attended.

Spamming and phishing were some of the most intrusive communication tactics that blatantly occurred on the *Maurielle Fox 2 Detroit* fan page. Some followers openly hijacked posts and derailed dialogue in the comments section with unsolicited content. While spamming or the act of phishing are considered one type of communication tactic on the page, others exist, as mentioned in Chapter Two.

Figure 44

Spam Posts Mostly Included Music Videos



Note. Most of the spam posts on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page consisted of music videos and the artists' debuts.

The Process and Procedures to Arrive at the Answer

On the *Maurielle Fox 2 Detroit* Facebook fan page, out of a subset of 151 comments, the most frequent communication tactics were aimed at:

1. appearance
2. insults or personal attacks/character assassination
3. name calling
4. irrelevant or off-topic remarks.

There were fewer occurrences of *concern trolling* communication tactics. For example one follower invited Maurielle Lue to allow her to style her hair or give her a new wig in one conversation¹³, and another troll seemingly used tactic of tone.¹⁴ Although these communication tactics were occasionally employed, they were not as prevalent as the top four previously

¹³ **Maurielle Lue FOX 2 Detroit's Post**, 2022, December 10
<https://www.facebook.com/profile/100044285116745/search/?q=I%20have%20a%20wig%20for%20you>

¹⁴ **Maurielle Lue FOX 2 Detroit's Post**, 2022, November 6
<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=667557368063761&set=pcb.667557418063756>

mentioned tactics. Regarding Lue's fan page, the aforementioned communication tactics suggest that trolls intended to lower Lue's self-esteem¹⁵, derail conversations¹⁶, or publicly attack her character.¹⁷

To reiterate, the researcher analyzed the reduced Subset D to study how trolls' communication tactics developed into linguistic patterns. The researcher was able to discover and validate communication tactics. The study entailed an agenda-driven observation, an analysis of communication tactics, and the identification of linguistic patterns. These factors assured that the themes chosen for this study were valid and reliable for examining the phenomenon of troll speech acts on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page.

This study's findings further evidenced previous research that trolls use communication tactics to promote hostility, undermine constructive dialogue, and target individuals.

Note. To answer the final two questions, the researcher had to refer back to the 1,675 comments in Subset C. This sample represented the average daily follower engagement on the page during the observation period.

RQ3: *In the observed online community, how did page followers react to the virtual speech acts of trolls?*

During the period of data collection, the researcher observed that most followers, similar to Marielle Lue, ignored trolls. Many negative comments on the page were uncontested. To reiterate, the culture of the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page was generally relaxed and supportive of its host. During the observation period, no hard news stories or extreme political

¹⁵ **Maurielle Lue FOX 2 Detroit's Post**, 2022, December 31
<https://www.facebook.com/profile/100044285116745/search/?q=Nicki>

¹⁶ **Maurielle Lue FOX 2 Detroit's Post**, 2023, February 20
<https://www.facebook.com/profile/100044285116745/search/?q=red%20or%20blue>

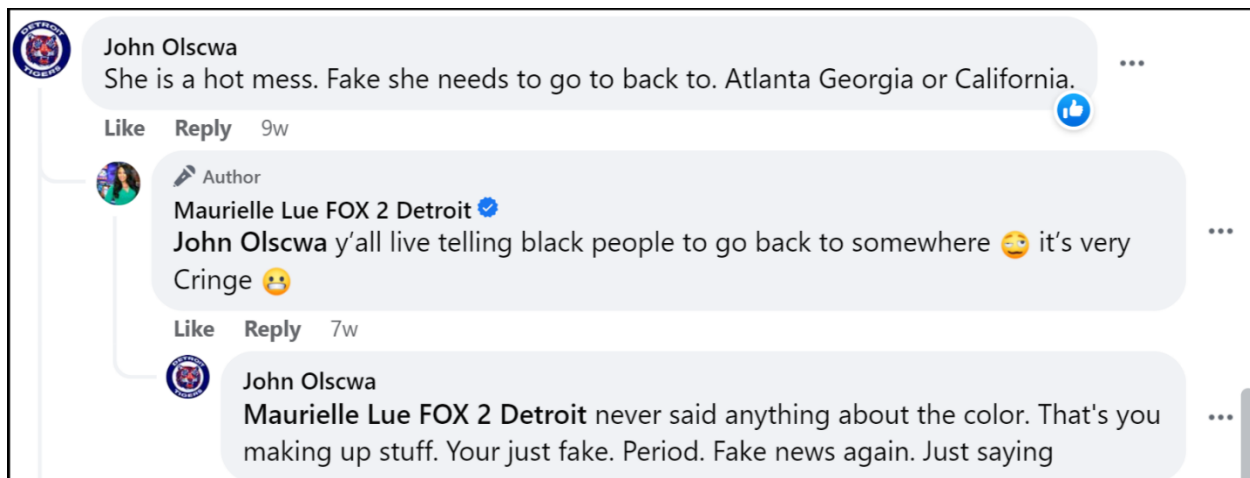
¹⁷ **Maurielle Lue FOX 2 Detroit's Post**, 2023, February 26
<https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=742479380571559&set=a.262834028536099>

discourse were observed to warrant an argument or any type of discord. Posts on the page focused on subjects or topics of interest to Lue, as well as her status as a local news personality. However, there were three instances where page followers or Lue herself confronted trolls during the observation period.

As previously mentioned, Lue once responded to a troll with humor regarding the originality of a feature news story she produced. On another occasion, she directly asked two other trolls to leave her page (refer to Figures 11 and 12). During the observation period, she interacted with a troll at least once more (see Figure 45).

Figure 45

One of the Three Times Lue Confronted a Troll



During the period of observation, however, some followers occasionally engaged the troll on the page. Figures 46-47 depict page followers who ignored troll comments at times and those who confronted trolls about their uncivil comments. Typically, the trolls did not respond and retreated until the next opportunity arose. A follower calling out a troll never resulted in a full-scale flame war during the observation period.

Figure 46*Two Trolls Being Ignored*

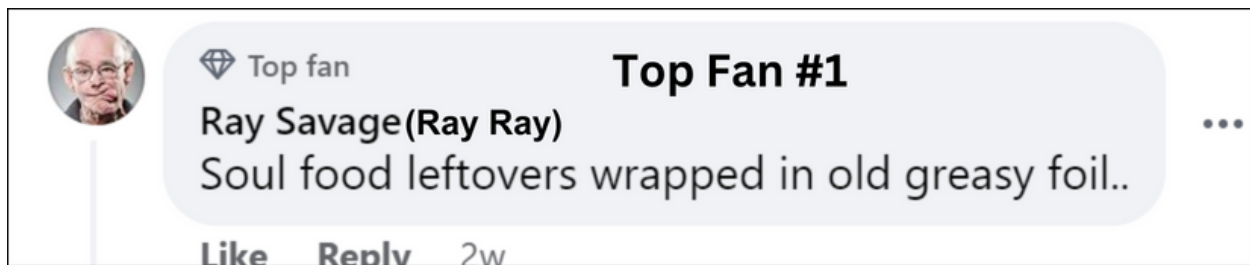
Figure 47*Three Trolls Confronted by Followers*

Note. In this situation, one troll countered back after being confronted by some of the page followers.

As referenced earlier, Ray Savage (Ray Ray) was a troll with a *Top Fan* badge. He appeared to be one of the more aggressive and predominant trolls on the page. For the most part, Maurielle Lue and page followers ignored Ray Savage (Ray Ray)'s impolite and aggressive speech acts. He made multiple failed attention-seeking attempts to draw Lue's ire. In a post where Lue referred to herself as *soul food* and not *eye candy*, Savage published a snide comment in response (see Figure 48).

Figure 48

Ray Savage's Response to Lue's Soul Food Post

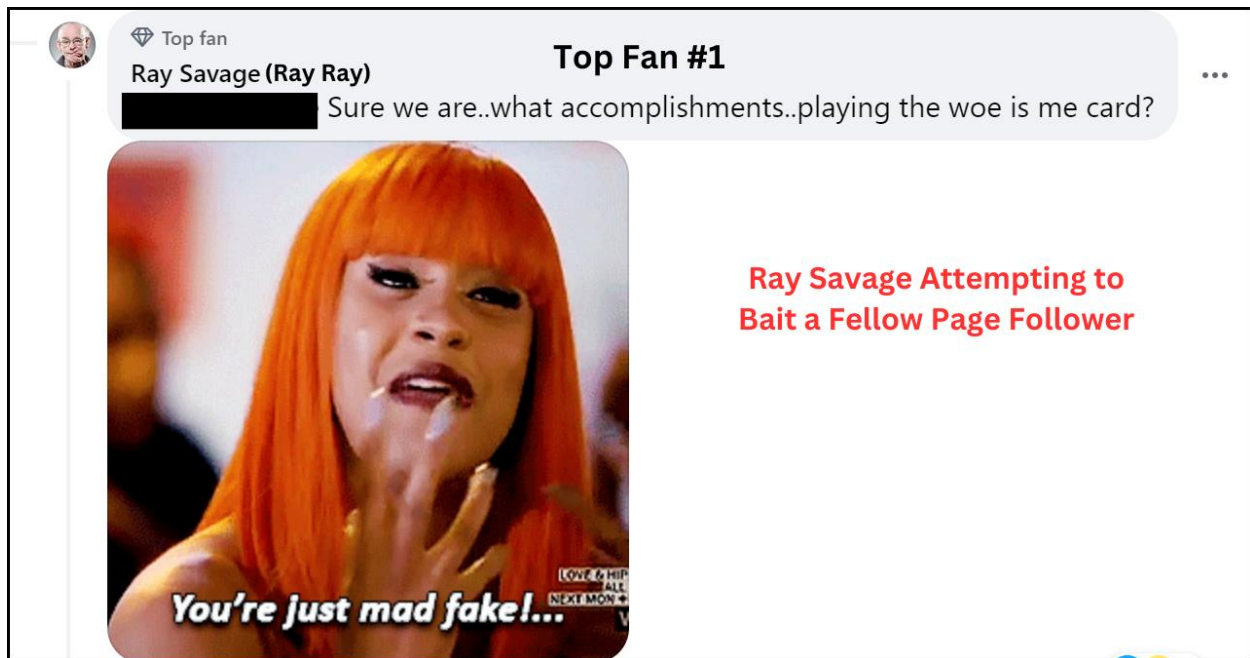


Note. Marielle Lue and others ignored Ray Savage's attempted insult.

In another attempt, Savage created an off-topic comment in one of Lue's posts. It featured a GIF of the hip-hop artist Cardi B to bait another follower into an argument about Maurielle Lue's accomplishments (see Figure 29). The targeted follower, Lue, and others all disregarded the remark.

Figure 49

Ray Savage (Ray Ray) Attempting to Bait a Page Follower into an Argument



Note. Ray Savage attempted to bait a page follower into an argument by tagging her in his comment. He was ignored.

The uncontested comments of trolls on the page resulted in less observed discord. Although these detrimental comments did not completely discourage all troll speech acts, they did not significantly disrupt the overall dynamic of the page. Followers did an exceptional job of ignoring trolls to maintain a harmonious environment. In summary, followers on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page emphasized pleasant interactions while trolls have been outliers.

RQ4: How does the Facebook environment facilitate trolling?

The researcher identified numerous moving elements, which aided in forming the answer to this question. Several factors facilitate trolling on Facebook, including the ease with which individuals can create anonymous accounts and the absence or lack of moderation on some pages. Moreover, trolls can easily conceal their identities or create new personas behind the

screen. These factors permit trolls to engage in disruptive behavior and avoid consequences, fostering a thriving trolling environment.

Although Facebook has community standards and moderation procedures, enforcement can be inconsistent, allowing trolls to act without repercussions. On Lue's fan page, trolls published many uncivil remarks but were never deleted from the forum during the observation period.

As demonstrated on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page, Facebook will award a Top Fan badge to a highly active page user without knowing if that person is a steadfast supporter or genuine troll. As indicated on the page, the subject of this study, Facebook rewarded some trolls with the badge. The key takeaway is that Facebook awarded "*Top Fan*" badges based on frequent interactions, *not* based on the number of *positive* interactions. Thus, the platform cannot differentiate between activity and intent. Thus, the top fan badge gave trolls increased visibility.

Finally, Facebook also enables trolling with its algorithms. Facebook's algorithms promote engagement and frequently display content that is likely to elicit a response, such as provocative or divisive messages (Bene et al., 2022; Moran et al., 2019). This factor can encourage trolling and offensive content being shared and amplified. Whenever Maurielle Lue's post entries generated more than 300 comments, Ray Savage (Ray Ray) and other established trolls were present and actively engaged.

SUMMARY

This chapter provided the results of this qualitative study on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page. It provided a background of Maurielle Lue and a content analysis on her fan

page. The theoretical framework was also reviewed and discussed to guide this study and answering the four research questions.

Over 9,000 comments from 55 of Marielle Lue's posts were gathered to initiate this study. 9,793 comments were narrowed into four subsets. The first subset comprised 7,191 comments. The second subset included 2,540 comments, and the third subset was reduced to 1,675 comments. Purposeful sampling helped answer the first and second research question. It consisted of a smaller fourth subset of 151 comments, designated as Subset D.

From the 1,675 comments, codes and themes were generated. The study analyzed and compared the relationships, communication tactics and linguistic patterns of trolls' virtual speech acts on the *Marielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* page. The findings suggested evidence for a possible typology for such speech acts. A concept map was developed to show a relational value among the processes for arriving at the evidence for a speech act typology. Chapter Five will be devoted to a deeper discussion of the findings, and serendipitous discoveries.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Overview

This study's objectives entailed determining if there was evidence of a troll typology based on their virtual speech acts. It also sought to examine the communication tactics used to deliver such acts. The researcher could then determine the justification for classifying the speech acts of trolls and their online communication tactics.

Chapter One discussed internet trolls and their communication tactics, including troll behavior and history. It introduced the four research questions that guided this study. The research questions, which will be revisited in this chapter, explored potential typologies and communication tactics of trolls, users' strategic responses to trolls, and Facebook's role in facilitating trolling behaviors.

Chapter Two presented the literature review, establishing the study's theoretical framework rooted in the sociopsychological tradition of communication. Grice's maxims, politeness theory, face negotiation theory, and theory of planned behavior (TPB) were examined in relation to troll speech and online community interactions. Tables 1 and 2 in Chapter One organized this study's analysis of online trolls' language and conduct in virtual forums. These tables listed trolls' most prevalent communication tactics and linguistic patterns, allowing the researcher to analyze their language and activities.

Chapter Three discussed this qualitative study's methodology design and content analysis approach. The researcher used disguised naturalistic observation to analyze 1,675 comments from *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit's* Facebook fan page. The qualitative content analysis provided the researcher with data to test and validate the study's theoretical framework. The study's design coded, analyzed, and thematically organized the content presented in Chapter Four.

In Chapter Four, the study was summarized. The first section covered the research challenges and data reduction while introducing the study subjects. The second section examined the fan culture of the Maurielle Lue fan page. The chapter described how comments were manually sorted, analyzed, themed, and classified. The MAXQDA tool was used for concept mapping and data analysis. Finally, the chapter summarized the observations by evaluating comments from the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* Facebook fan page dating from October 2022 to March 2023.

Chapter Five will review the research questions and their implications in addition to discussing the limitations of the study. Additionally, it will highlight unexpected findings and provide recommendations for future research. Finally, the chapter will provide an overall conclusion of the research.

Summary of Findings

The data collected during the observation period yielded comprehensive answers to the following four research questions:

RQ1: Is there evidence of a troll typology based on their speech acts?

RQ2: What communication tactics do trolls utilize when they post online?

RQ3: In the observed online community, how did the page followers react to the virtual speech acts of trolls?

RQ4: How does the Facebook environment facilitate trolling?

RQ1: *Is there evidence of a troll typology based on their speech acts?*

Upon analyzing trolls' language behaviors on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page, the researcher discovered evidence of a potential trolling typology based on their speech acts. The study considered the intent behind trolls' combined use and frequency of communication tactics and linguistic patterns. Signifying a positive response to the research question, coding and identifying emerging themes confirmed the potential development of a typology. Five themes emerged that would undergird constructing a typology.

These themes were:

1. blatant disrespect
2. to gain control
3. deception
4. emotional manipulation
5. character assassination and vilification.

RQ2: *What communication tactics do trolls utilize when they post online?*

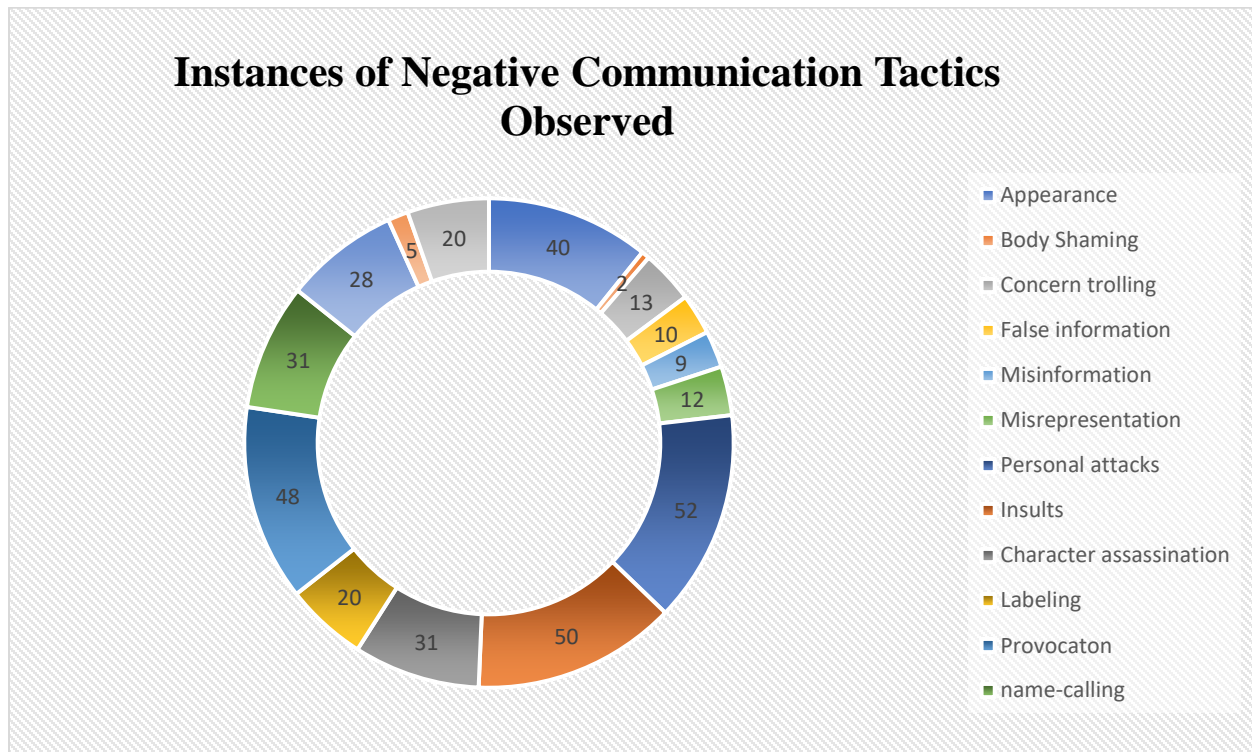
15 out of 24 communication tactics, first presented in Table 1 in Chapter Two, were noted and documented during observation of the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page. Table 7 in the Findings displayed the 15 most prevalent tactics employed on the fan page.

The researcher observed how some trolls' communication tactics were ingrained in their linguistic patterns. Some tactics overlapped based on the troll's intentions and the varied ways the researcher may have analyzed the comments. As mentioned in Chapter Four, spamming was also included as a communication tactic. It was occasionally used as a strategy to gain visibility or attention, especially concerning the promotion of local artists' original music, health and wellness ads, and promos for vacations. Figure 50 depicts the frequency with which the 15 most

prevalent negative communication strategies were observed throughout the data collection period.

Figure 50

Negative Communication Tactics Observed



Note. Out of 24 possible negative communication tactics, the researcher observed multiple instances of 15 acts.

To address the first two research questions, it was necessary to investigate how trolls differ from others in online discourse. It was found that these actors communicate differently from most people. Some trolls deviated from the standard communicative norms of what would be considered polite speech in a public forum.¹⁸ The platform's condoning of anonymity

¹⁸ Maurielle Lue FOX 2 Detroit's Post: Kim Nicks Comment, 2023, February 4
https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=729118275241003&id=100044285116745

frequently facilitated these speech acts. Some trolls often violated Gricean maxims and exhibited a lack of civility in their speech acts.¹⁹ Trolls on Maurielle Lue's page occasionally published or expressed irrelevant, unsuitable, rude, and offensive comments on the online forum, which made these aspects clear.²⁰

RQ3: *In the observed online community how did the page followers react to the virtual speech acts of trolls?*

The researcher observed that followers of the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page generally ignored trolls, resulting in a relaxed and supportive culture. The page's emphasis was on pleasant interactions, which made trolls stand out. While Lue and her followers confronted some trolls, most negative comments were uncontested, leading to a harmonious environment.²¹

RQ4: *How does the Facebook environment facilitate trolling?*

In accordance with the study's setting, limitations, and pertinent findings, the responses to this query were limited. Specifically, the answer centered around two aspects: Facebook's awarding of *Top Fan* badges and anonymity. The factors are discussed in greater detail below.

Top Fan Badges

First, the researcher's observations unveiled an aspect related to Facebook's platform. The researcher noted that highly active users were rewarded with a "*Top Fan*" badge regardless of their intentions or speech behaviors. In other words, this distinction was not exclusively reserved for genuine or positive contributors, as individuals who may engage in trolling or other negative

¹⁹ **Maurielle Lue FOX 2 Detroit's Post: Paula Thompson Comment**, 2023, February 26
<https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=742479380571559&set=a.262834028536099>

²⁰ **Maurielle Lue FOX 2 Detroit's Post: Vicki Hamilton Pellow Comment**, 2023, March 17
<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=753147709504726&set=a.262834028536099>

²¹ **Maurielle Lue FOX 2 Detroit's Post: Seasonal Depression Post**, 2022, December 19
<https://www.facebook.com/profile/100044285116745/search/?q=Seasonal%20Depression>

speech activities could receive this recognition (see Figures 51 and 52). This feature not only increased the trolls' visibility on the fan page but afforded them priority notifications (Meta, 2023) whenever a page host or manager created a new post. As a result, the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page incurred increased troll activity when posts generated priority notifications to those with *Top Fan* badges.

Figure 51

An Example of a Top Fan Badge Awarded to a Polite FB User

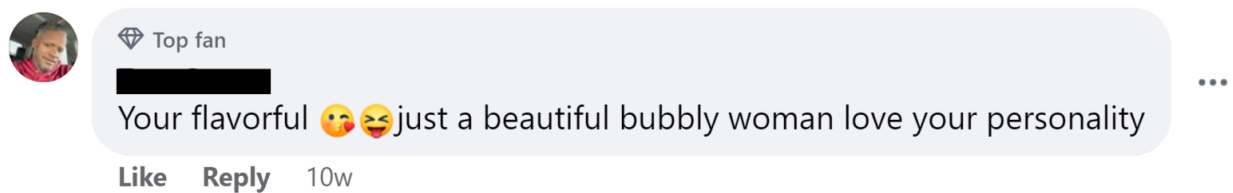


Figure 52

An Example of a Top Fan Badge Awarded to an Impolite FB User



How Anonymity Factored Into Trolling

Suspected fake profiles, which fostered anonymity, also helped provide answers to this query. The researcher observed that Facebook facilitated trolling by permitting users to construct ostensibly fraudulent profiles without authentication or profile pictures, allowing for anonymity (see Figure 53). During the observation period, the researcher encountered numerous suspect profile users. After visiting some accounts and observing a lack of activity outside of

commenting on Maurielle Lue's page²², the researcher surmised that specific profiles may have been the result of sock puppetry. This phenomenon entailed creating an entirely new profile under an assumed name and a completely different profile picture to harass others.

Figure 53

One of Several Suspected Fake FB Profiles



The suspected presence of sock puppetry was seemingly exemplified through individuals like *Ron Matzkovich*²³, Ray Savage (Ray Ray) (refer to Figure 27), and Connie Stafford (see Figure 54). Their profiles and behavior displayed inconsistencies and speculation, further supporting the notion that anonymity was conducive, as outlined in Chapter Two and Four. Trolls appeared to confidently continue abusive behavior because so many of their remarks were allowed to stay on the fan page²⁴, providing detachment of face and reduced accountability.²⁵ Some trolls appeared to disregard face negotiation and operated under the cloak of anonymity, whether by sock puppetry, having a nonsensical profile name or handle, or having no profile picture at all.

²² **Michael Barkley Profile**, 2023, January 23
<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100012317677956>

²³ **Ron Matzkovich Profile**, 2022, December 22
<https://www.facebook.com/ron.matzkovich>

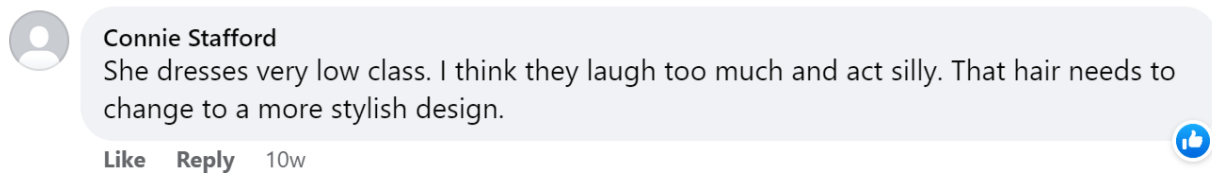
²⁴ **Maurielle Lue FOX 2 Detroit's Post**, 2022, December 19
<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=698320788320752&set=a.262834028536099>

²⁵ **Maurielle Lue FOX 2 Detroit's Post**, 2023, March 17
<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=753147709504726&set=a.262834028536099>

Observations that provided answers to the research questions were consistent with previous literature on anonymity and trolling speech behaviors (Fichman & Peters, 2019; Forest, 2021; Goldberg, 2019; Houe, 2020; Popova, 2017). According to Bancroft (2019) and Cotton (2021), the frivolity of establishing user profiles without proof of actual identity fosters anonymity and can facilitate trolling. Regarding anonymity, the answers to this research question were consistent with the literature review.

Figure 54

The FB Profile Page Follower: Connie Stafford



Note. This is one example of how Facebook facilitates trolling by permitting unverified profiles to remain active.

Discussion

Before a Typology, Trolls Must be Defined and Labeled Appropriately

To establish a typology of troll speech acts, it was necessary to adopt an acceptable definition and label for what constituted a troll. Throughout this study, the researcher recognized the need to distinguish between repeated impolite or negative-sounding comments that emerged during the observation period. Chapter Four delved into impolite speech or negative-sounding comments that arose in online discussions. The researcher categorized such statements into three distinct groups of individuals: *critics*, *haters*, and *trolls*.

A Troll Redefined

This study's literature review disclosed the significance of frequency regarding trolls' use of communication tactics and linguistic patterns to disrupt online forums or target individuals. As social media platforms continue advancing during Web 3.0, there is an urgent need for a more inclusive definition of the twenty-first century troll. To redefine the concept of a troll, extensive consideration has been given to multiple definitions across research from the late 1980s to the present day.

The various definitions offered in previous research (Binns, 2012; Buckels et al., 2014/2019; Cook et al., 2018; Craker & March, 2016; Fichman & Sanfilippo, 2014; Hardaker, 2010; Herring & Stoerger, 2014; Luzón, 2011; Phillips, 2022; Thacker & Griffith, 2012) amalgamate with the observations of this research to offer a new definition of a troll.

Thus, a troll is an individual who regularly practices disruptive incivilities in an online forum with identifiable communication tactics, linguistic patterns, and frequency. They seek to provoke, insult, or derail dialogue in virtual communities over some time.

Separating Critics and Haters from the Trolls

As previously discussed in Chapters Two and Four, not all impolite or negative comments, reactions, disagreements, debates, or conjectures from forum members indicate trolling or trolls' speech act. During the observation period, the researcher encountered the three previously mentioned categories of negative-sounding or rude comments thought to be published by trolls on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page. The following observations and criteria, grounded in prior research, were utilized to determine who was a *critic*, *hater*, or *troll*.

Critics. During data collection, the researcher observed substantial negative comments about Maurielle Lue on her fan page. Figures 55- 57 are examples of such comments. In contrast to

trolls, the comments indicated below are typical expressions of opinion or advice made in a non-threatening or hurtful manner. Due to their initial appearance as negative statements intended to inflict malicious intent such remarks could easily be misinterpreted as trolling.

Figure 55

A Comment Made by a Critic

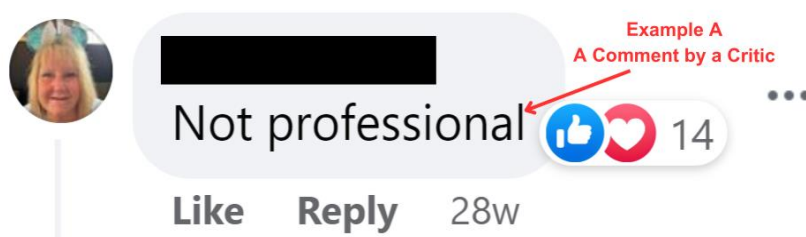


Figure 56

A Critic Chastising Maurielle Lue About a Picture She Posted

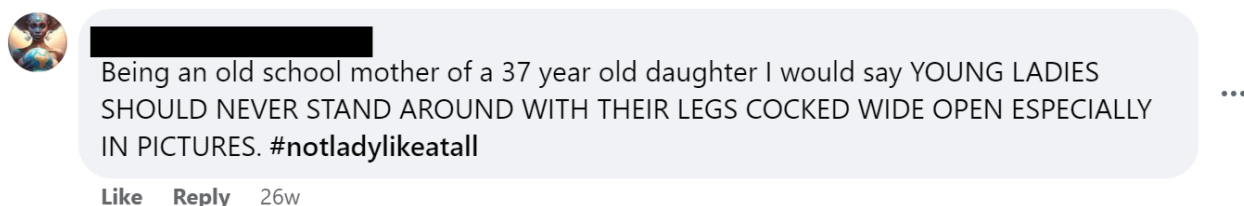
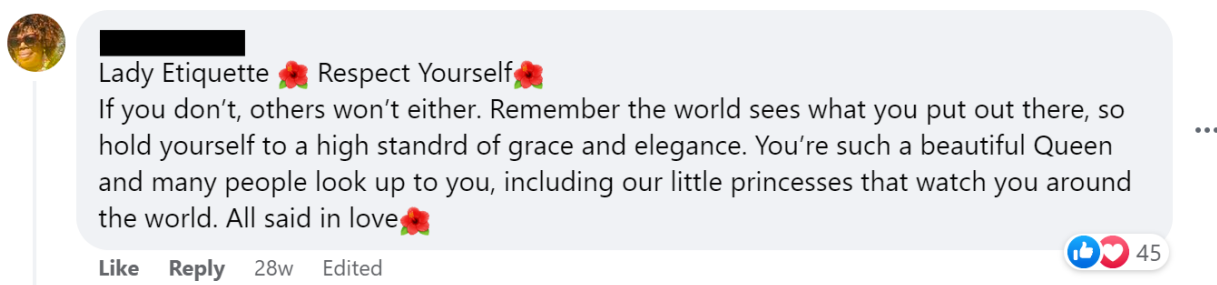


Figure 57

An Example of a Well-Meaning Follower as a Critic



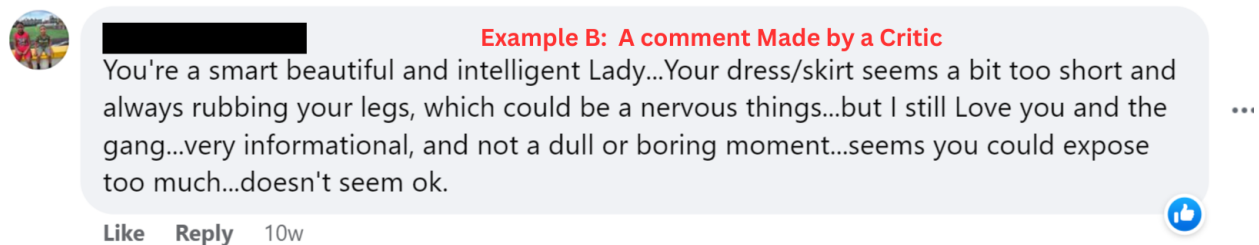
A core of research provided valuable guidance on classifying comments, such as those above, as critical comments. Although these comments might initially suggest trolling (Deibert, 2020), it is crucial to consider the context in which followers posted them (Kang & Kermad,

2019) and the commenters' infrequent use of typical trolling communication tactics or linguistic patterns (Al-Ameedi & Al-Ghizzy, 2022). Concerning critics and criticism, it was crucial to consider the factors of context, the intent of tone, and the absence of an ingrained linguistic pattern or frequency. These factors significantly contribute to the determination and labeling of a troll.

Regarding criticism, the language fundamentals proved challenging to classify such comments during the observation period. Specifically, tact, or lack thereof, was seriously considered whenever a follower disregarded decorum and appeared to be impolite in their dialogue. Despite the sender's best intentions, unfiltered messages might be misinterpreted as trolling even when they are intended to be helpful. For example, in Figure 58, the follower, as a critic, expressed dislike for Lue's attire and alleged nervous ticks while also elaborating on her intellect and praising her newscasts.

Figure 58

More Criticism of Maurielle Lue



Note. This critic claimed to be a Maurielle Lue fan as well.

Despite the inferred negativity, the sentiments also served as a form of constructive criticism. Constructive criticism is feedback, unsolicited or not, that aims to improve or correct something and is typically intended to be beneficial (Cohen & Henry, 2019). While the content may have inferred negative connotations, the message was not intended with malice. The fan may have posted the message with good intentions. In addition, the two *followers* whose

comments are depicted above, only posted once on the fan page during the observation period. They made no repeated attempts to emphasize their points of view. In most cases, criticism is not done repeatedly to irritate whomever one is conversing with or about (Yan & Wang, 2018). If it is done repeatedly, and with malice, it would suggest borderline trolling.

Haters. A hater is a person who opposes or despises something or someone for no apparent or rational reason (Gray, 2019; Yoo et al., 2021). During the observation period, page followers occasionally called out purported "haters" (see Figure 59). However, some commenters may have been mislabeled as "haters," as "haters" tend to blur the line between critics and trolls.

Figure 59

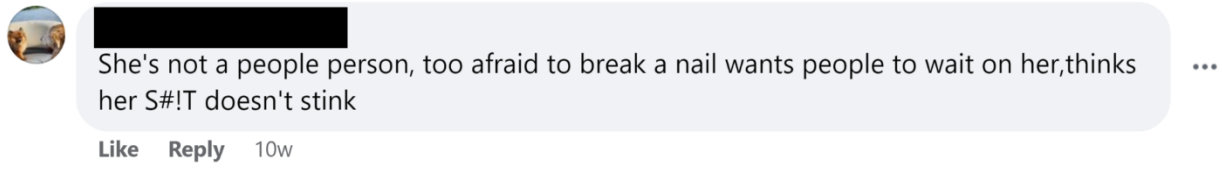
Two Page Followers Calling Out Haters on the Page



Figures 60 and 61 are examples of comments made by "haters" on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page. According to research comparing critics and haters to trolls, the haters on the page did not employ the communication strategies and linguistic patterns typical of trolls. However, there is a fine line between a hater and a troll, as trolls persistently seek to disrupt the online environment through their speech actions (Giglou et al., 2021; Wich et al., 2021). Haters simply express their dislike for a person, concept, or idea (Risch & Krestel, 2020; Stroińska & Drzazga, 2020). In addition, during the observation period, the haters contributed to the page only once.

Figure 60

A Hater in Full E-bile Mode of Maurielle Lue

**Figure 61**

Another Example of a Hater Simply Expressing Dislike of Maurielle Lue



Unlike trolls, haters are not persistent in expressing their disdain for a person or an idea. They may post unconstructive negative comments as a one-off to express negative feelings about the topic or individual (Vučković, 2021). However, it is not done on a frequent basis to provoke. Again, frequency and an ingrained linguistic pattern helps distinguish between a hater a troll.

Trolls. As indicated during data reduction, a troll was any page follower that consistently employed negative communication tactics with denotable linguistic patterns to post three or more provocative messages in the forum. The fan page's trolls showed communicative behaviors that aligned with research. Particularly, their actions validated literature defining trolls as individuals who intentionally post adverse content in the form of slights, digs, and provocations (Alfonzo, 2021; Dineva & Breitsohl, 2021) to insult, instigate or antagonize others (Machová & Kolesár, 2019; Thacker & Griffiths, 2012) on a frequent basis as a part of their communication tactics (Addawood et al., 2019; Jamison et al., 2019) and linguistic patterns (Andersen, 2021; Eberl,

2019; Paaki et al., 2021). In the cited research, words are the common denominator to identifying trolls. While words themselves are neutral, the manner in which trolls employ them is distinctive.

Words...Everybody Has Them...What Makes Trolls Different?

Words are building blocks that create phrases offering sentiment utility. These sentiments crucially shape speech acts, which are the utterances by which the originator communicates the intended message. This process universally applies to all humans. This fact therefore signals an answer to what sets trolls' speech acts apart from others. What distinguishes trolls from other individuals is their persistent objective to disrupt, provoke, or insult a specific target or online community. Trolls employ specific communication tactics and use ingrained linguistic patterns to deliver malicious speech acts. The subsequent discussion will center on linguistic patterns, a crucial aspect of investigating the speech acts of trolls.

Linguistic Patterns: A Clarifying Determinant

This study's findings on the observed linguistic patterns of trolls are consistent with previous research. The identified trolls manifested at least one of the following categories of linguistic patterns: aggressive dialogue, deceptive speech behaviors, dismissive speech, hyperbolic speech, or personal attacks. The researcher further narrowed down the linguistic patterns within each category to specify types of comments, as illustrated in Table 8.

Table 8

The Linguistic Patterns Observed in this Study.

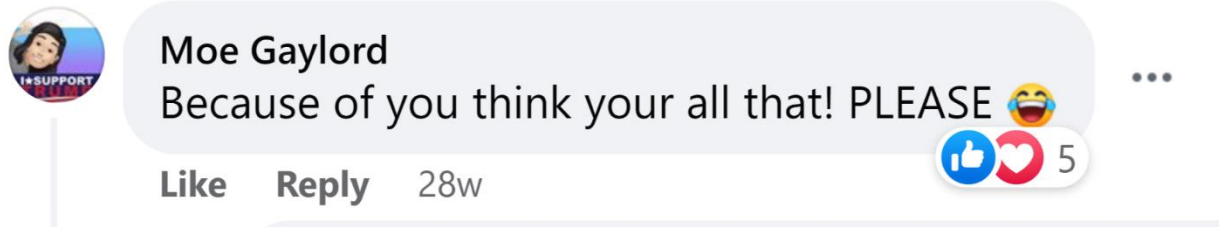
Aggressive Patterns (AP)	Deceptive Patterns (DeP)	Dismissive Patterns (DiP)	Hyperbolic Patterns (HP)	Personal Attack Patterns (PAP)
Confrontations Commenting for shock -value effect	Fake profiles created for nefarious reasons Phishing Spamming page	Reducing a person Sweeping generalizations Sarcasm Mocking Derailment Spamming	Exaggerated speech Over-the-Top Comments Talk to provoke emotional responses Indignation Accusations	Character assassination Disparagement vilification Insults Ad hominem attacks Name-calling /labeling

Note. The following sub-categories of linguistic patterns are representative of the type of comments trolls posted on the fan page.

According to the comment in Figure 62, two categories of linguistic patterns are apparent. Overall, the linguistic pattern is aggressive because it has a confrontational undertone. The linguistic pattern is also dismissive because it incorporates mockery and a sarcastic element. In addition, the comment dismissively challenges the notion that Maurielle Lue thinks highly of herself, using the phrase, *"Because you think you are all that! Please"*.

Figure 62

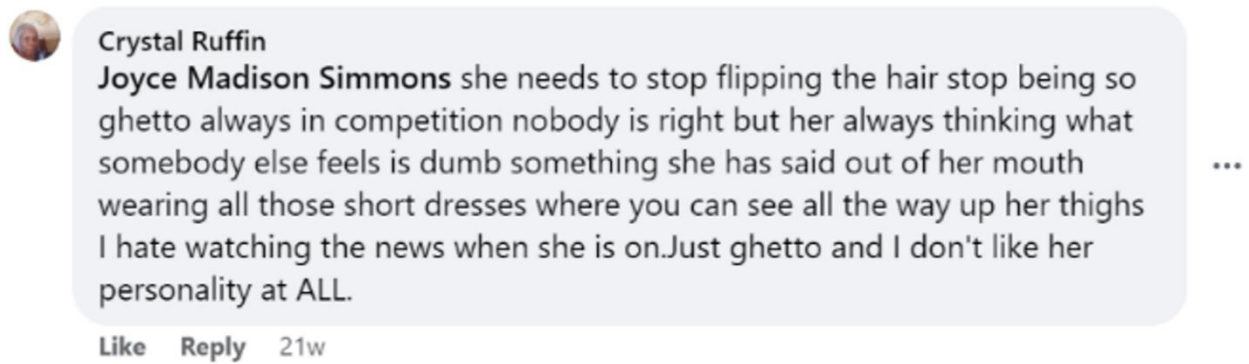
One Comment Exhibiting Aggressive and Dismissive Linguistic Patterns.



The comments that follow exemplify additional linguistic patterns pertinent to trolls' mode of speech or communication tactics. The comment depicted in Figure 63 represents the linguistic pattern of hyperbolic speech. It uses exaggerated language and extreme statements to express strong negative opinions about Maurielle Lue, including, *"She needs to stop..."*, *"always in competition,"* *"nobody is right..."*, *"all the way up her thighs,"* *"I hate watching the news,"* and *"I don't like her personality AT ALL."* These exaggerated expressions amplified the speaker's disdain for Lue.

Figure 63

Hyperbolic Speech Ingrained as a Linguistic Pattern

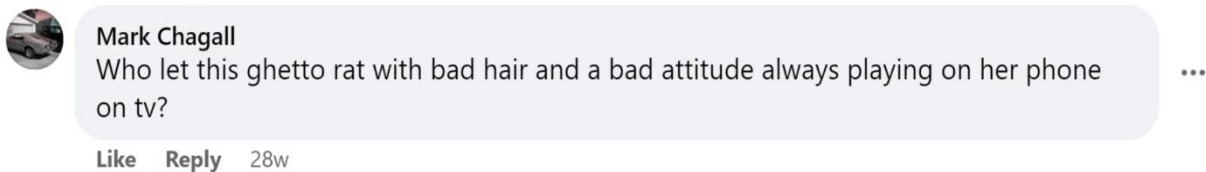


Note. The troll, Crystal Ruffin, exercised this type of linguistic pattern in each of her comments on the fan page during the observation period.

The comment in Figure 64's exhibits the linguistic pattern of a personal assault. Character assassination, disparagement, vilification, insults, ad hominem assaults, and name-calling are applicable. The use of derogatory terms like "ghetto rat" and negative evaluations of Maurielle Lue's appearance, attitude, and behavior (playing on her phone) were intended to degrade and demean her.

Figure 64

The Linguistic Pattern of Mark Chagall a Personal Attack



A Full Embodiment of Negative Communication Tactics: Linguistic Patterns

A troll's language behavior and actions are neither random nor isolated. Instead, they reveal a persistent and calculated effort to antagonize and disturb others in online interactions through established speech acts. This was evident with Ray Savage (Ray Ray), a follower who has established himself as a troll on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page. Not only were Ray Ray's posts deliberate, his commenting style had also become a brand in its own right, nearly covering the spectrum of linguistic patterns.

One of Ray Ray's comments (see Figure 65) reveals an array of linguistic patterns entrenched in his communication tactics. This singular statement demonstrates aggressive (AP), dismissive (DiP), hyperbolic (HP), and personal attack (PA) language patterns.

Figure 65

The Linguistic Patterns of Ray Savage (Ray Ray)



Top fan

Ray Savage (Ray Ray)

Show is tanking..no one wants to see you act out on TV. Bad enough you ruin the 9 show. Waiting for a cancel on this..sorry!

Like Reply 29w

Table 9 provides a succinct summary of the subcategories to which each element in the comment pertains, with minimal detail.

Table 9

The Linguistic Patterns of Ray Savage (Ray Ray) Further Analyzed

Linguistic pattern	Subcategory	Descriptor/Rationale
Aggressive (AP)	Confrontation	Includes an element of confrontation with the phrase <i>"Bad enough you ruin the 9 Show"</i>
Deceptive (DeP)	Fake profile	Reiterating that Ray Savage (Ray Ray)'s profile is suspected of being fake.
Dismissive (DiP)	Sweeping Generalization	The statement makes sweeping generalizations by asserting that <i>"no one wants to see you act out on television,"</i> insinuating that nobody is interested in Lue as a news personality.
	Mocking	The overall statement implies that Maurielle Lue's performance is subpar and implies that she will be fired, which can be interpreted as mocking.

Hyperbolic (HP)	<p>Exaggerated Speech/Terms</p> <p>Over-the-top comments/Sentiment/Tone</p> <p>Dialogue to provoke emotional responses</p>	<p>Expressions like "<i>tanking</i>," "<i>ruin</i>," and "<i>waiting for a cancel</i>" use exaggerated language to emphasize Savage's negative sentiment.</p> <p>Savage used strong language and negative predictions in the form of over-the-top phrases to intensify his criticism and convey a negative opinion of Lue and her morning news performance.</p> <p>The statement may have been further intended to elicit an emotive reaction by criticizing and diminishing Lue's abilities as a news reporter.</p>
Personal Attack (PA)	<p>Disparagement & Insult</p> <p>Name-calling/Labeling</p>	<p>The statement also contains disparaging remarks implying that Lue's reporting is insufficient leading to it being poorly delivered and received.</p> <p>This statement implied criticism, negativity, and inferiority in regard to Lue's presentation station, despite the absence of outright explicit names or derogatory labels being made.</p>

Figure 66

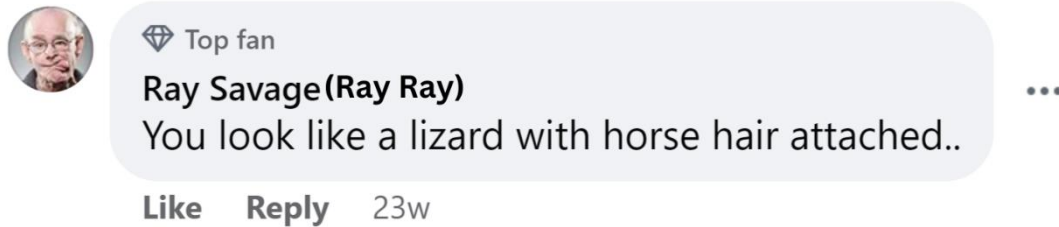
Another Example of Savage's Array of Linguistic Patterns



Note. This comment by Savage is nonsensical by implying due to Lue's appearance *The Noon* midday show will be canceled.

Figure 67

An Example of Savage's Frequency, Communication Tactics, and Linguistic Patterns.



Note. Ray Savage (Ray Ray) established a regular pattern of communication tactics and linguistic patterns to irritate Maurielle Lue or disrupt the flow of conversation on the fan page.

Savage's frequent publication of provocative comments aligned with trolls' typical communication tactics as discussed in Chapter Two. His communicative behaviors established a consistent pattern of negative language. Throughout the observation period, Ray Savage and other suspect followers routinely engaged in a barrage of adverse speech acts indicative of genuine trolling.

Consistent with previous research, the emergence of linguistic patterns and their frequency helped to identify trolls. Trolls can be labeled as such due to linguistic patterns in their comments, their frequency of activity, and their tone of intent to disrupt, insult, or derail a conversation in the online community (Clarke, 2019; Golder & Donath, 2004; Masrani et al., 2023; Paaki et al., 2021). It is important to note that Ray Savage (Ray Ray) has consistently demonstrated these well-documented trolling characteristics. Other recent research has established that the distinctive and frequent use of communication tactics and linguistic patterns sets trolls apart (Clarke, 2018; Morgan, 2022; Paaki et al., 2021; Samory & Peserico, 2017; Xu & Trzaskawka, 2021; Zhamaletdinova, 2022). Through extensive research and the findings of this investigation, it has become clear that consistently used communication strategies and

linguistic patterns for negative speech acts symbolize characteristics of authentic troll behavior. In essence, trolling is characterized by a pattern of behavior as opposed to isolated incidents.

The Trolls on *The Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit Fan Page*

This research identified more than 20 recognizable trolls. They exhibited speech acts with identified communication tactics and linguistic patterns to make derogatory remarks or post malicious comments directed at the page host, Maurielle Lue. The top 10 trolls during the observation period are presented in Table 10.

Table 10

Top Ten Trolls on The Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit Fan Page

Profile Name	# Trolling Instances	Applicable Notes
During Observation Period		
Ray Savage (Ray Ray)	9+	Suspected of sock puppetry <i>Linguistic Pattern(s):</i> Ap, DeP, DiP, HP, and PA
Vicki Hamilton Pellow	6+	Used Non-Dialogic Trolling <i>Linguistic Pattern(s):</i> PA
Eileen Sperow	6	<i>Linguistic Pattern(s):</i> AP, DiP

Thomas Heiden	6+	Co-signs with fellow trolls <i>Linguistic Pattern(s):</i> AP, DiP, HP, PA
Allison Allison-Detav	5	Non-Dialogic Trolling & Remarks <i>Linguistic Pattern(s):</i> DiP, PA
Nora Williams	5	<i>Linguistic Pattern(s):</i> HP, PA
Terri Kubitski Waggoner	5+	Started out as a “Critic” <i>Linguistic Pattern(s):</i> PA
Dale Renaud	4	<i>Linguistic Pattern(s):</i> DiP, HP, PA
Crystal Ruffin	3	Also co-signed with fellow trolls <i>Linguistic Pattern(s):</i> DiP, HP
Lisa Juopperi	3	Also co-signed with fellow trolls <i>Linguistic Pattern(s):</i> DiP, HP, PA

A Note on How Maurielle Lue Addressed Trolls

The researcher made the intriguing observation that trolling was minimized although prevalent on the fan page. When Lue confronted trolls, which was seldom, she did so with less vitriol and more lightheartedness. Chapter Four discussed Lue responding to a troll with humor, potentially diffusing an otherwise unpleasant exchange. When confronted with the toxicity of trolls in virtual communities, academicians have extensively explored the role of humor in defusing tense situations.

Fichman & Sanfilippo (2016) posited that trolls are not equipped to deal with humor. Research by Inam, Basharat, and Muzammil (2021) attempted to describe how humor could subvert trolls' social and political subjectivities in group situations. Other studies recommend simply using humor, sarcasm, and sometimes agreeance to add entertainment value to a discussion when responding to a troll (Coles & West, 2016; Jenks, 2019; Snider, 2021). At the expense of the troll, humorous sarcastic responses indirectly diminish their contribution as a member of a virtual community while simultaneously increasing the entertainment value of the discussions (Ziegele & Jost, 2020). In certain circumstances, humor can be one of the most effective ways to neutralize a troll's insults and negative comments as it disarms their speculative intentions.

How Others Responded to Trolls and Trolling on the Page

As disclosed in Chapter Four, the page's followers typically heeded Maurielle Lue's example and refrained from responding to trolls' speech acts. However, when page followers confronted trolls, the negative actors often relented. This effect is contrary to what typically occurs, in which the situation escalates and can evolve into a forum flame war. Maurielle Lue's fan page became an exception to the norm since confronting a troll did not prolong engagement,

causing disorder in the forum. During t data collection, the following responses were observed on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page in response to trolls and trolling in the forum.

Figures 68-69 represent a sampling of responses to trolls who posted malevolent comments during the observation period.

Figure 68

Example 1 of Responses to Trolls on the Fan Page



Figure 69*Example 2 of Responses to Trolls on the Fan*

Figures 70-72 illustrate how trolls were directly confronted during their attempt to disparage her. These images provide a summary of the sentiments of the followers.

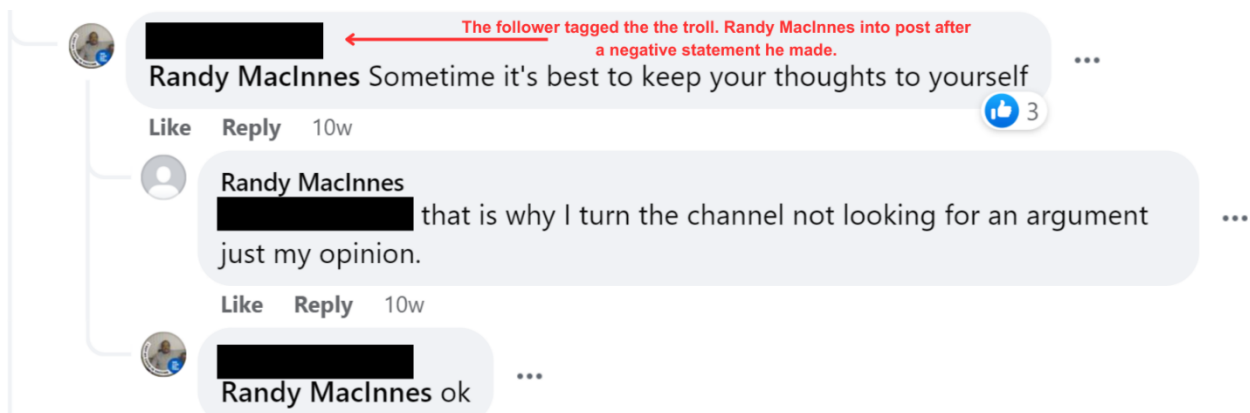
Figure 70*One Page Follower Communicating Directly with a Troll*

Figure 71

Another Example of a Troll Tagged to a Thread by a Follower

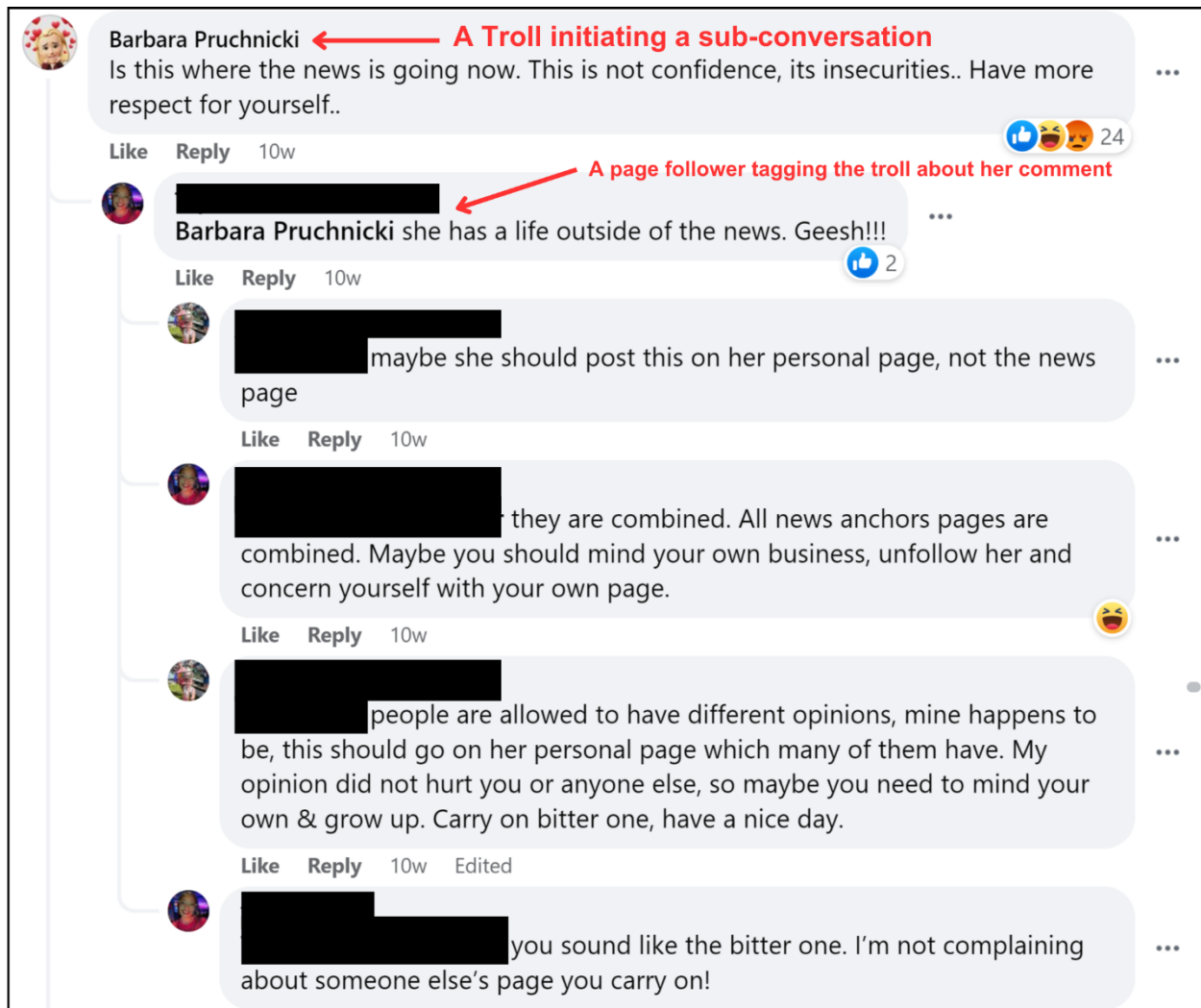


Figure 72*Page Followers Responding to a Well-Known Troll*

The researcher was astonished that trolls did not engage in any disputes or retaliation when confronted. It is common for such conflicts to escalate into intense flame wars (Hardaker, 2013; Shen et al., 2020). In most cases, the hostilities and abusive speech acts are redirected toward those criticizing the trolls' behavior (Doerfler et al., 2021; Kozyreva et al., 2020). As stated, this phenomenon did not affect the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page.

Best Practices Observed...Don't Feed the Trolls!

The most prevalent response observed on the page, whether by Maurielle Lue or the followers, was to overlook the troll comments. Figure 73 illustrates how most conversations unfolded whenever a troll published an abrasive remark.

Figure 73

A Troll Ignored



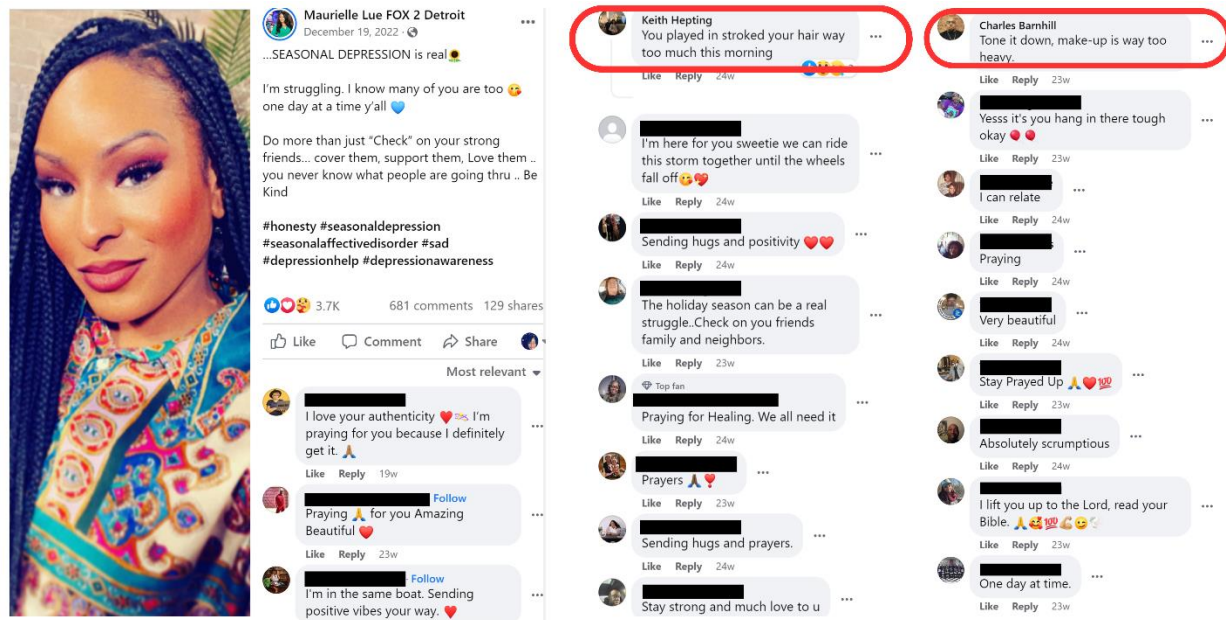
Note. Followers respond to Lue after debuting her braided hairstyle and ignoring a troll.

In December 2023, Maurielle Lue created a post about seasonal depression, a condition from which she admits to suffering. The thread began with followers either sympathizing with her by expressing support or sharing that they, too, were affected by the illness. Soon after, two trolls commented with complete disregard for the post's gravity. Nonetheless, the followers disregarded them and continued to share their stories and post in support of Lue. Ignoring trolls or not feeding them has been an effective aphorism since the beginning of troll research (Binns, 2012; Coatney, 2021; Richardson, 2008; Ruitenberg, 2018). On the fan page, trolls were ignored more often than they were confronted. In each case, harmony was maintained as followers continued to participate in the posts without giving trolls a second thought. Figure 74

demonstrates how followers did “*not feed the trolls*” in Maurielle Lue’s post on seasonal depression.

Figure 74

The Norm: Ignore Trolls



Note. The trolls, circled in red, were ignored.

Not Feeding Trolls

The observed responses to trolls demonstrated that page followers adhered to widely recognized advice known as “*Do not feed the trolls*”. This approach aligns with prior research. Due to the implications of not feeding trolls, an online forum stands to gain a number of benefits.

Several outcomes can be accomplished by not feeding trolls, according to research. Initially, it diminishes the gratification that trolls seek. Trolls are frequently satisfied by the emotional responses and attention they elicit. Research by Doerfler et al. (2021), Milligan (2023), and Verbalyte et al. (2022) indicates that trolls' satisfaction can decrease if failing to accomplish their desired goals.

Second, by not feeding trolls, the abrasive behavior is reduced. The researcher observed that trolls did not repeat their spiteful remarks for attention's sake when ignored. Sun and Shen (2021) found that when trolls perceive a response from their target audience, they are more likely to continue to engage in their projected trolling behaviors. The trolls on the fan page were never given a chance to continue their anticipated mayhem due to followers imposing reduction of the trolling behaviors. Third, disregarding trolls creates a feeling of disengagement within the conversational environment. When ignored, trolls are denied the attention and responses they seek. Bauman (2019), March & Marrington (2019), and Wu et al. (2021)'s research indicates that disengagement can effectively reduce troll's motivation for continuing disruptive behavior. When trolls are not acknowledged, the online environment is improved (Kozyreva et al., 2023; Simchon et al., 2022). When individuals ignore trolls and concentrate on positive interactions, the online environment becomes more supportive and collaborative (Demsar et al., 2021; Paaki et al., 2021). Contributing to a more positive online environment, these studies emphasize the potential advantages of avoiding engagement with trolls.

Outliers

This study aimed to determine if the speech acts of trolls could be classified into a discernible typology. The researcher identified outliers that considerably deviated from the expected patterns of trolls and trolling on the fan page. The outliers of this study are limited to exhibited distinctive characteristics or communicative behavior that differ from most of the observed population. The following section discusses the outliers identified during the data analysis. Particularly, it emphasizes their unique characteristics and the potential insights they provide on troll speech behaviors.

Trolls Focused on Appearance and Mental State

Two users, Ray Savage (Ray Ray) and Thomas Heiden, were identified as intriguing anomalies during the analysis of trolls on Lue's fan page. They were recognized as part of the page's top 10 offenders. In contrast to most trolls on the page, both individuals employed a more aggressive and indignant strategy. When attempting to disparage Maurielle Lue, Savage and Heiden's remarks were more inflammatory and personal in nature. Ray Savage (Ray Ray) always commented on her appearance.²⁶ Heiden's insulting comments were always about Lue's mental state (see Footnote 9).

The Non-Dialogic Troll

A third troll, Vicki Hamilton Pellow, demonstrated a speech act and communication tactic solely consisting of dialogic trolling. Pellow always responded with emoji "*puke faces*," regardless of the topic of a post.²⁷ It was irrelevant whether Pellow's non-dialogic contributions matched the context. However, the images helped convey her contempt for Lue just as effectively as if she had used words.

A Troll with Three Faces

Terri Kubitski Waggoner deviated from the observed patterns of the average troll in this study. She began as a critic.²⁸ As the study progressed, the frequency with which she wrote malevolent content began to increase. She operated within a gray, borderline proximity to trolling. According to research informing this investigation, her communication strategies and linguistic patterns made her readily recognizable as a troll. Nevertheless, her comments

²⁶ **Fox 2 Detroit. Fox 2 Mornings: The Nine. 2022, December 19**
<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=698320788320752&set=a.262834028536099>

²⁸ **Fox 2 Detroit. Fox 2 Mornings: The Nine. 2022, December 19**
<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=673209307498567&set=a.262834028536099>

occasionally revealed that she was a genuine Maurielle Lue fan.²⁹ Waggoner's incessant transitions between fan, critic, and troll did not qualify as "concern trolling" either. Waggoner's participation on the fan page puzzled yet intrigued the researcher.

Gap Between Expectation and Reality

The observation revealed a disconnect between page followers' perceptions of Maurielle Lue and some sentiments expressed on her Facebook fan page. This phenomenon is referred to as the "gap between expectation and reality" when an individual's expectations of a person, idea, or concept do not match their encountered reality. On Lue's fan page, multiple followers shared comments of disappointment in her performance as a "news anchor."

To help analysis, the researcher further investigated Lue's role as a news personality for the local Detroit news station. While Maurielle Lue was indeed considered an anchor, she does not operate in that capacity on the morning news show. She rather acts as a morning show cohost (Fox 2 Detroit News, 2023), which is a different capacity than one who delivers the news. An anchor is a news reader who delivers or reports the news (Arthur, 2023). However, a co-host is a news station journalist who supports anchors as they deliver the news during a broadcast and shares their opinions on what is being reported (Newberry, 2021). As the anchor delivers facts, a co-host adds commentary to the news piece and may appear to be very subjective, opinionated, and sometimes overly animated (Westlund & Ekström, 2019). Some followers judged Lue based on their perspective of a news anchor as opposed to her true role in the morning shows. As a result, some individuals commented on her fan page with sentiments of disappointment in her on-air persona. It appears that some users commented as critics while others may have evolved into full-fledged trolls.

²⁹ **Fox 2 Detroit. Fox 2 Mornings: The Nine. 2022, October 31**

<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=663467998472698&set=pcb.663468048472693>

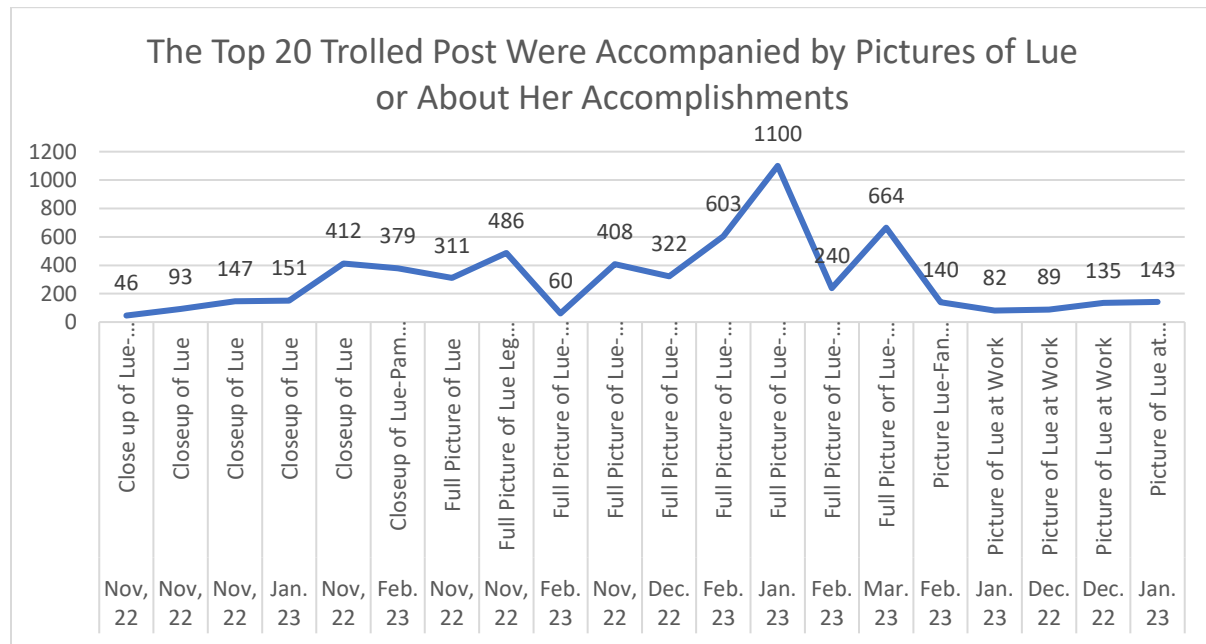
Serendipities: A Case of Consistent Trends

Amid a rigorous investigation, this study unexpectedly uncovered intriguing and serendipitous occurrences. Initially, it appeared that Maurielle Lue received the most trolling whenever she posted a picture of herself, particularly a close-up. A runner-up for trolling were her posts about career accomplishments. These are also known as consistent trends.

Below, Figure 75 depicts a selection of the most trolled posts on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page. All contained pictures of Lue, personal information, or her accomplishments. This discovery prompted the researcher to question if some individuals are more susceptible to harassment and trolling based on their projected self-confidence, perceived attractiveness, or accomplishments.

Figure 75

A Sampling of the Most Trolled Post on the Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit Fan Page



Note. This visualization highlights a correlation between dated posts featuring Lue's pictures or accomplishments and the number of comments they generated. These 20 posts attracted the highest instances of trolling.

As a third unanticipated result, the researcher discovered that one of the trolls (refer to Figure 12) was a newscaster from a rival news station. The researcher spotted him in a commercial one night shortly after completing Chapter Four. This confirms the researcher's suspicion that he and Lue had a history based on the tone of their conversation.

Implications

Theoretical

The theoretical framework of this research was based on the sociopsychological tradition of communication, Grice's Maxims, politeness theory as it relates to face-threatening acts, and the theory of planned behavior. This study assessed the sociopsychological tradition of

communication via social and psychological factors influencing communication processes on the fan page. The researcher determined how the sociopsychological tradition shed light on the motivations, behaviors, and subsequent speech acts of the perceived trolls on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page.

The Sociopsychological Tradition of Communication

The sociopsychological tradition provided a lens for comprehending the underlying factors enabling troll behavior and their projected speech acts. Research indicates that some trolls may be motivated by a need for attention or a desire to feel powerful by exerting control over others (Li et al., 2022). Others may have been motivated by a desire for social approval from other page users, as this also rings true for the good actors in virtual communities (Wadsley et al., 2022). The researcher also presumed trolls' desire to elicit an emotional response from the page host, Maurielle Lue. The sociopsychological tradition clarified the impact that trolls' speech acts may have on their intended victims. The host of the page, Maurielle Lue, as she mentioned during a morning broadcast, was profoundly impacted by one viewer's upsetting post on her page.³⁰

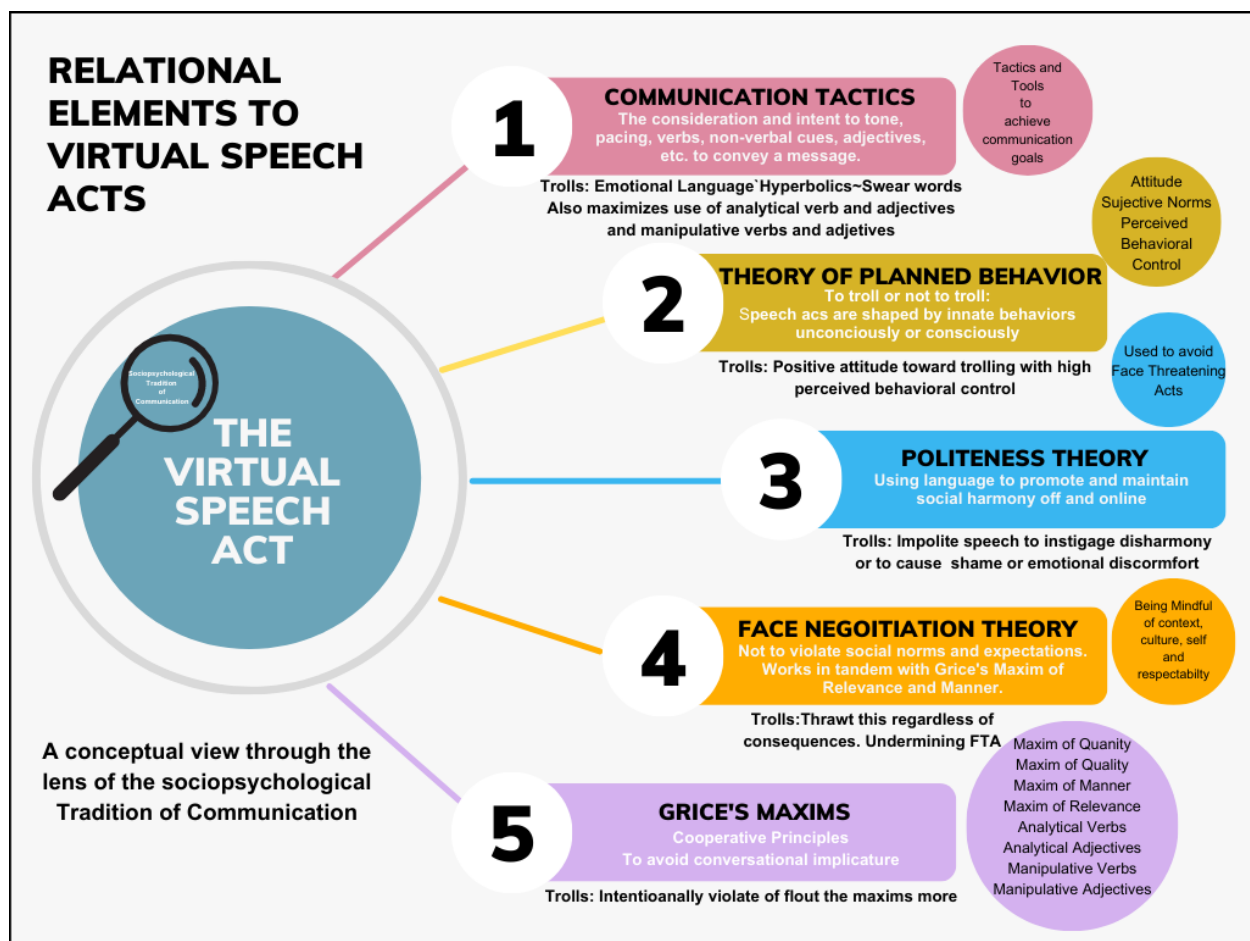
The sociopsychological tradition provided a helpful framework for comprehending the motivations and consequences of trolls' virtual speech acts on Lue's fan page. It emphasized the social and psychological factors influencing communication processes and guided how to identify factors contributing to and mitigating trolling and its effects. Figure 76 depicts the researcher's comprehension of the sociopsychological tradition of communication regarding speech motivations, communication tactics, and their interrelationships. This lens allows for the development and examination of the consequences that arise from these factors, ultimately

³⁰ **Fox 2 Detroit. Fox 2 Mornings: The Nine. 2023, January 16**
<https://www.fox2detroit.com/shows/the-nine>

resulting in the formation of a speech act. The diagram illustrates the importance of understanding these interconnected factors to comprehend the complexity of speech production and its effect on interpersonal communication. Recognizing these sociopsychological factors can help communication researchers and practitioners not only comprehend why people say what they say but also influence or alter their behavior.

Figure 76

The Relational Elements of the Theoretical Framework



Note. This example illustrates the relationship between the factored elements of 1-5 and how they influence the produced speech act.

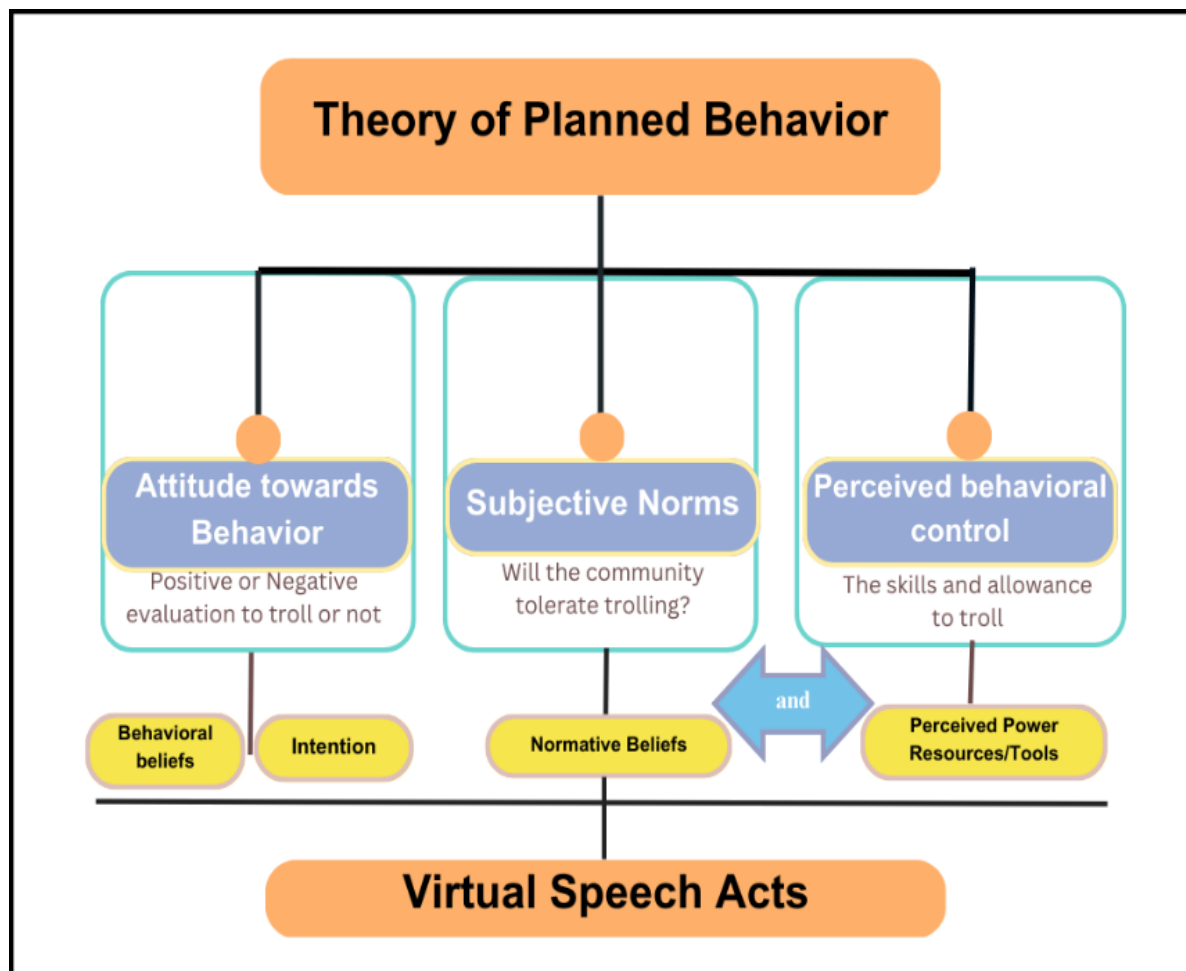
Politeness Theory and Face Negotiation Theory

The observation period revealed that trolls on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page used or disregarded face-negotiation and politeness theories to insult, disrupt, and incite problematic conversations. Although the theories of politeness and face negotiation are applicable to online communication, trolls' negative use of them insignificantly affected the page's discourse and user interactions. As previously discussed, negative speech acts were typically ignored or rarely contested by fellow page followers. This observation indicates that trolls' attempts to disrupt the page were generally ineffectual.³¹ While the trolls negotiated their face to disrupt, most followers maintained their *face* and remained polite by overlooking trolling antics.

Theory of Planned Behavior

The theory of planned behavior (TPB), when applied to comments, revealed presumed underlying motivations and intentions that drove an individual's commenting behavior within various online contexts. Figure 77 illustrates the role of the theory of planned behavior (TPB) in the initial stage of issuing a speech act. TPB informs and influences the factors involved in the decision-making process leading to the commencement of a speech act. The figure illustrates TPB's various components or stages and how they relate to issuing a speech act. TPB provides a framework to understand the factors influencing individuals' decisions to initiate a speech act and the underlying psychological processes involved in this initial stage of communication.

³¹ **Maurielle Lue FOX 2 Detroit's Post**, 2023, March 2
<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100044285116745>

Figure 77*A Concept Map Relating TPB to Virtual Speech Acts***To Harm or Not to Harm**

By examining attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control that influence an individual's intention to engage or not engage in such harmful discourse, communication practitioners can better understand the underlying psychological processes that may motivate the use of hurtful language and develop strategies to encourage positive communication and discourage harmful discourse (Buhmann & Brønn, 2018; Pelling & White, 2009). Consider, for instance, the commenter from Chapter Four who left a negative comment when Lue shared a

photograph of herself in a swimsuit³² while on vacation. This individual employed their negative attitude towards Lue's attire, drawing upon personal norms, to rationalize their perception that Lue was transgressing conventional standards. To transmit their message, the follower used this self-justification by stating that she *"had more class than Lue"* as motivation and perceived intent to engage in critical speech acts.

Understanding the Relational Value of TPB and Speech Acts

In essence, an individual's emotions and the perceptions shaping their personality influence speech acts (Bower, 2020; Kenski et al., 2020; Tang & Hew, 2019). TPB clarifies how these factors contribute to some individuals' intention to engage in hurtful speech acts. Researchers and practitioners of strategic communication can identify interventions and strategies to promote empathetic, respectful, and polite communication online. Through TPB, they can also challenge injurious attitudes and societal norms contributing to destructive speech acts. Working in tandem with Grice's Maxims, face theory, and politeness theory, the theory of planned behavior can be used to educate and possibly eliminate harmful speech acts. Researchers and communication practitioners should make everyone aware of the negative repercussions of troll speech acts to reduce their perceived behavioral controls and neutralize their caustic communicative behaviors in online settings.

As evidenced by previous research and further corroborated by this study's findings, the theory of TPB and speech acts have a significant relational value. Their relational value resides in the capacity of a person's beliefs, attitudes, and intentions, which influence their behavior to facilitate social connections and foster a sense of maintaining communal harmony (Geurts, 2019; Hymes, 2020; Kramsch, 2020). The findings and cited research indicate that TPB helps illustrate

³² **Maurielle Lue FOX 2 Detroit's Post**, 2023, February 29
<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=742479380571559&set=a.262834028536099>

the factors that influence the initiation, content, and intentions of speech acts. Thus, there is a significant relationship between TPB and speech acts observed in this investigation.

Methodological Implications

The researcher used multiple methods to reduce a large dataset of 9,973 comments to a final sample of 1,675. Data analysis included the examination of various artifacts and texts. Despite encountering difficulties in managing such voluminous data, the researcher implemented strategies to reduce and classify information. There were gray areas along with the researcher's limited understanding of the relationship between Maurielle Lue and some page followers. This fact made it difficult to accurately identify comments as troll behavior. The researcher, however, utilized techniques such as close reading and sentiment analysis to effectively identify negative comments and differentiate between critics, haters, and trolls. It was determined that trolls are distinguished not by isolated incidents but by the frequency with which they posted spiteful speech acts. In this study, a troll was defined as someone who had posted such speech acts three times or more. By employing these methods, the researcher aimed to gain a nuanced understanding of communication tactics and linguistic patterns which fueled the negative comments. The process of data reduction yielded Subsets A and B, C and D, allowing for additional analysis to answer the research questions.

Refinement of Research Strategies

Encountered difficulties during data collection provided insights for refining future research strategies. The development of criteria and frameworks to differentiate between types of user comments (critics, haters, trolls) can improve the accuracy and efficiency of data collection, leading to more credible findings.

The implications emphasize the significance of meticulous data reduction, the complexities of labeling troll behavior, the value of combining analytical techniques, and the potential for refining research strategies in the study of online communication.

Practical Implications

The results of this study have some significant practical repercussions that diverse stakeholders should consider. The researcher will provide recommendations for administrators of Facebook platforms, practical implications for celebrities or public figures who are active on the social platform, and insights for everyday users of Facebook.

For Facebook Administrators of Pages and Groups

Facebook group administrators and page moderators can take a number of measures to manage a more harmonious group and combat trolling. First, they can establish clear, enforceable community guidelines that specifically address trolling and discourage it. These guidelines should emphasize the significance of respectful and constructive communication .

In addition, administrators and moderators can actively monitor the group or page for instances of abuse and immediately respond to them. Actions can include removing or hiding offensive comments, issuing warnings or sanctions to repeat offenders, and fostering a positive online environment by actively engaging fellow netizens.

Group administrators and page moderators can also facilitate discussions and educational initiatives within the group. They can raise awareness of the impact of trolling and the significance of responsible online conduct. This can involve sharing resources, hosting question and answer (Q&A) sessions or inviting experts on fostering positive online communities.

Group administrators and page moderators can also provide their own guidance and examples of desirable communication norms within their forums. These steps can address

Facebook's possible failure to incorporate tools that track, detect, or monitor theoretical factors such as the Gricean Maxims and politeness theory into their media policy. Admins and moderators can set a positive tone for interactions by encouraging members to adhere to the principles of respect, empathy, and constructive dialogue.

By actively implementing these strategies and promoting a culture of respectful communication, Facebook group administrators and page moderators can mitigate the effects of troll speech acts and foster a more harmonious and inclusive online environment.

For Celebrities and Public Figures

Based on the observations from this study, the researcher provides personalities and public figures with the following recommendations regarding trolls' speech acts.

The process of educating and empowering followers

During the observation period, Lue did not address how to manage trolls on her page. The *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page had no clear guidelines on how to avoid engaging with trolls. As followers were considered Lue's guests, who were welcome to participate on the page, there were no specific measures in place to safeguard their experience.

In addition, the forum posted no distinguishable set of rules against trolling. Celebrities and public figures can play a vital role in educating their followers about the adverse effects of trolling and nurturing a supportive online community. Informing followers can include fostering positive participation, encouraging respectful discourse, and providing guidance on reporting and blocking trolls. Reporting trolls can be advantageous in any online forum, particularly to address extreme instances of trolling or harassment. Celebrities and public figures can help develop more robust policies and enforcement actions against trolls by reporting abusive behavior and

providing evidence. Also, incorporating and enforcing terms of service would be advantageous for all forum participants.

Mental Health and Personal Care

In some of the morning broadcasts and on her fan page, Maurielle Lue addressed her mental health or the impact trolling has on others on social media platforms (see Footnote 9).³³ Celebrities and other public figures must prioritize their mental health and engage in self-care. This may involve obtaining professional assistance or a team to help manage their pages, taking breaks from social media when necessary, and surrounding oneself with an online and offline support network.

Through these practical steps, celebrities and public figures can better navigate challenges with trolling, maintain a positive online presence, and foster a safer and more constructive environment for themselves and followers.

Facebook Users Who are Members of Groups or Follow Pages. General Facebook users can follow the same practical implication proposed to celebrities and public figures. Additionally, the researcher suggests four other strategies of equal significance.

Recognition and Sensitivity. Regular users should understand the various forms of trolling and be able to identify them when they occur. By becoming familiar with trolls' standard strategies and speech acts, users can avoid stumbling into their traps and engaging in ineffective or harmful interactions.

Emotional Resistance and Self-Care. Regular users must also develop emotional resilience and prioritize self-care when coping with trolls. This requires not internalizing personal attacks or offensive comments and understanding that trolls frequently attempt to provoke emotional

³³ **Fox 2 Detroit Morning News: The Nine** 2023, May 19
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLuPRchQmZxv8p5iTwFLLrcyQBnVAf5Yf_

responses. Regular users should exercise techniques to effectively manage their emotions, such as taking breaks from social media, seeking support from friends or communities, and engaging in well-being-promoting activities.

Mindful Engagement. Regular users should exercise caution when interacting with others on social media. This requires being aware of the potential presence of trolls and responding with caution to incendiary or offensive comments. Users should evaluate whether engaging with trolls would positively contribute to the conversation or escalate tensions. Avoiding or exiting discussions with pests can contribute to a healthier online environment.

Reporting to the Admin or Moderators' Team and Facebook. Regular users should utilize the social media platform's reporting and moderation features. If they encounter trolling, they should disclose it to the platform's administrators or moderators, preferably with supporting evidence. The researcher also recommends that regular Facebook users report directly to Facebook.

Through active reporting and Facebook's moderation processes, regular users can do their part to reduce instances of trolling and create a safer online community. All users can navigate social media platforms more effectively, safeguard their well-being, and contribute to a positive and constructive online environment by adhering to these practical implications.

Ignoring and reporting trolls will make a significant difference.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations

The researcher used several boundaries and parameters to define the scope of this study on trolls' speech acts in a Facebook fan page group of a local news personality. First, the study was limited to trolls' speech acts this particular fan page and did not include other platforms,

such as Instagram or Twitter. The sample selection was restricted to comments posted on the fan page between October 2022 and March 2023. The sample size consisted of 1,675 comments and the analysis primarily focused on 20 identified trolls from this larger dataset. Except for one troll, the study did not go beyond the identified trolls or investigate their motivations or backgrounds in depth. In addition, it is impossible to generalize this study's findings and conclusions to other online communities or platforms. The results should be interpreted in the context of the fan page chosen for this study during the period designated for data collection.

Limitations

Even though this study provided valuable insights on trolls' speech acts within the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* Facebook fan page, it is essential to acknowledge and resolve the limitations inherent to the research design and data collection process. Understanding these limitations helps accurately interpret the study's findings and recognize their scope and generalizability. By critically examining limitations, researchers can understand its bounds and future research opportunities.

The Platform Used for this Study

Another potential limitation of this study is the choice of platform, as the research was limited to Facebook. It may not have captured the nuances of other social media platforms. Specifically, the study may not reflect the unique dynamics and behaviors of platforms, such as Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, which have their own user base and communication norms. This limitation restricts the applicability of the findings beyond Facebook to a broader social media context.

The Subject of this Study

This investigation focused on Maurielle Lue, a local news personality in a major city. This information may restrict the generalizability of the findings when compared to a study of a national celebrity. Focusing on a local news personality in a large city may impose restrictions on the audience and their behaviors. The characteristics and dynamics of the followers on the fan page of a local news personality may differ from those of the followers of a national celebrity. Therefore, it is possible that the findings and conclusions of this study are not explicitly applicable to other contexts involving celebrities with a broader national or international reach.

No Access to Demographic Makeup and Page Insights

Unlike most pages, the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page did not permit followers to observe the page's demographics and insights. The page's creator or moderator typically determines this ability. The researcher was not privy to why this feature was deactivated. As a result, the researcher was unaware of followers' gender demographics, age ranges, educational levels, and professional backgrounds. It was also impossible to locate the posting history of followers and the top-performing threads, as determined by Facebook. Not knowing the page's demographic makeup and participation insights for each post limited the researcher's ability to analyze trolls and the exact frequency of their speech behaviors.

Unawareness of the Removal of Comments

During the data collection period, the researcher never observed a post so offensive that it was removed from the page. Lue was never called *profane* names or subjected to exaggerated sexual innuendos during the observation period. However, this does not mean that these instances did not occur. Also, the researcher is unaware of whether Lue or the station's media

management promptly removed these comments. Due to the researcher's inability to monitor the page for 24 hours, it was implausible to witness deleted comments if occurring immediately.

The Researcher's Own Biases

Even though the researcher made a concerted effort to remain objective, biases are still possible. First, both the researcher and Maurielle Lue are African American. Second, the researcher and Lue have attended some of the same events while never speaking in person. The researcher is a fan of Lue and her colleagues on the local news morning program. In contrast to regular viewers who criticized Lue for not meeting their expectations of an anchor, the researcher went above and beyond to comprehend her role as a co-host on the morning program. In addition, the researcher administers more than twenty Facebook fan pages with a total of over 5,000 followers and more than five Facebook groups with over 70,000 members. In these forums, trolling harassment has been nearly eradicated.

Face-Negotiation Theory Not Observed

While most of this study's theoretical frameworks provided significant insights into the observed communicative environment, the observed context did not provide all the anticipated connections. The study aimed to incorporate face-negotiation theory into its theoretical framework, expecting to observe user activity that would reveal face-negotiation behaviors.

However, this study did not observe the expected face-negotiation behaviors. A factor could be that the research focused on the verbal aspects of trolling rather than the psychological profiles, which are more closely related to the rationalization of face negotiation. In a more appropriate context, face-negotiation theory may become more applicable in future research.

Features Beyond the Facebook Fan Page

Finally, the researcher did not explicitly discuss features beyond the page that trolls may have exploited on Facebook. Facebook provides open, closed, and private groups that significantly alter forum dynamics due to their more intimate nature than fan pages. There may be additional limitations of individuals who effectively leverage specific engagement-boosting algorithms or employ alternative strategies to gain visibility and incite disruptive behavior beyond what the research has highlighted.

When it comes to identifying the speech acts of trolls, identifying and analyzing such limitations can help broaden researchers' understanding of trolling behaviors and a troll's employment of language. Through profound synthesis, the researcher may be able to reveal unique patterns or strategies and emphasize the complexities and nuances of online interactions.

In closing, the reliance on personalized algorithms, alerts, and news feeds poses a difficulty for this study. Due to the personalized nature of these features, users may differently encounter and view content, including posts related to the study. Variations in algorithms and individual preferences may affect the visibility and reach of the research subject's postings, thereby influencing the observed engagement patterns of trolls. These considerations should be noted when interpreting the study's findings and contemplating their implications.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on insights gained from this study, several avenues for future research have been identified that can advance an understanding of troll speech acts, communication tactics, and their impact on digital communities. Scholars and practitioners can help develop effective strategies, interventions, and policies to mitigate disruptive incivility and foster healthier online environments. In this section, the researcher will discuss key recommendations for future

research, emphasizing areas that merit additional investigation and possible avenues for advancing knowledge.

Algorithms for Early Troll Detection Based on Established Speech Act Typology

An investigation of virtual tools, equipped with troll typology detection software that flags the algorithms of suspected trolls, would constitute ground-breaking research. One potential approach to early troll detection involves analyzing the words, phrases, and word combinations commonly used in troll communication tactics and linguistic patterns. This type of research would likely involve quantitative measures to identify specific linguistic markers associated with trolling behavior. However, it is crucial to consider the possibility of drawbacks of this approach, particularly the need for accuracy to avoid mislabeling regular-netizen users as trolls. Ensuring the reliability and precision of the detection methods would be crucial in implementing such research effectively. Initial work by Monakhov (2020b) indicates promise.

Research on Intervention Strategies with the Aid of a Troll Speech Typology

It is essential to develop and evaluate effective intervention strategies to mitigate the negative effects of trolls' speech acts. Research can focus on developing technological tools, community guidelines, and educational programs that promote healthy online interactions, reduce the influence of trolls, and empower users to effectively respond to disruptive behavior.

Speech Acts and User Perception Studies

Examining the influence of trolls' speech acts on the perceptions and experiences of users can aid in the comprehension of trolling's psychological effects. This research can investigate how trolls' various communication strategies and linguistic patterns utilized influence the emotions, well-being, and online behavior of individuals.

Longitudinal Studies Involving Speech Acts

Longitudinal studies conducted over an extended period can provide a deeper understanding of the speech actions of trolls. This process would enable the observation of patterns and shifts in communication strategies and linguistic patterns over time, thereby illuminating the evolution of harassing behavior, retributions, and the mental health of all involved.

Multi-Platform Comparative Studies

Comparing the speech acts of trolls across various online communities and platforms can reveal differences in communication strategies and linguistic patterns. By analyzing how trolls adapt their strategies and language in various contexts, researchers can better understand factors that influence their behavior.

Cultural and Contextual Factors that Impact of Influence Speech Acts

Examining the impact of cultural and contextual factors on trolls' speech acts can yield insightful information. The study of how cultural norms, social structures, and online community dynamics influence trolls' communication strategies and linguistic patterns can contribute to more nuanced insights.

Future research should investigate communication tactics, linguistic patterns, user perceptions, intervention strategies, and the influence of cultural and contextual factors in order to increase our understanding of troll speech acts. Such research can contribute to the development of effective measures to combat trolling challenges and, cyberbullying. Ultimately, such scholarship could promote healthier, more inclusive online environments.

An Amalgamated Discussion

This study has generated a wealth of information on trolling speech acts. This section serves as an amalgamated discussion, integrating additional insights grounded in the research, newly acquired knowledge, and the researcher's pre-existing expertise as a current Facebook administrator and page moderator. Managing over 20 groups and fan pages with a combined membership and following of more than 100,000 Facebook users, the researcher brings valuable practical experience to the study.

Knowledge Gained Grounded in the Research

The following insights are implicative of the knowledge gained from the research. It emphasizes information and insights which are directly derived from the research procedure and findings.

Non-Dialogic Trolling

The researcher observed another novel way trolls communicated on the fan page. They implemented non-dialogic communication. Many of the page's followers positively and negatively utilized non-dialogic forms of communication, such as emojis, emoticons, memes, and GIFs to convey messages or sentiments without using words. Typically, non-dialogic communication is considered a speech act. However, due to the ever-changing landscape of how technology fosters new forms of communication, it is now considered both a speech act and a communication tactic (Fichman & Dainas, 2019). When a troll utilizes non-dialogic communication to facilitate their intentions for provocation or stir controversy on a continual basis, this is known as non-dialogic trolling (Britt, 2019). Non-dialogic trolling maintains the assumption of both Baccarella et al. (2018) and Sano-Franchini (2018) in that it is not interactive since the sender neither anticipates nor requires a response. Kent & Lane (2021) and Paquette et

al. (2015) support their claim by indicating that non-dialogic communication, whether sent affirmatively or by a troll, does not require two-way communication, making it a more distinctive form of speech act.

Linking Mental Hygiene to Being Social in Media

Mental hygiene is a proactive approach to maintaining and promoting mental well-being. It includes managing stress, mental health, and coping skills. Trolls and social media use can negatively affect mental health, making mental hygiene important. This risk is especially concerning for the developmental stages of our nation's youth. The U.S. Surgeon General (2023) issued a 19-page advisory on social media's implications on youth's mental health. It premised:

At this time, we do not yet have enough evidence to determine if social media is sufficiently safe for children and adolescents. We must acknowledge the growing body of research about potential harms, increase our collective understanding of the risks associated with social media use, and urgently take action to create safe and healthy digital environments that minimize harm and safeguard children's and adolescents' mental health and well-being during critical stages of development (The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory, 2023, p. 4)

Trolls on social media platforms often engage in provocative and offensive behavior, targeting individuals with the intention of causing harm or eliciting negative reactions. This type of online harassment can have detrimental effects on the mental health of those targeted. The research community must adopt and recommend proactive behaviors to promote awareness and maintain the mental health of social media users.

Maintaining good mental hygiene while using social media is crucial. Awareness can mitigate trolling as it helps people set boundaries and minimize troll interactions in the long run.

Numerous individuals have fallen victim to trolls and other perils of social media use. While some have recovered, others have not. The suicide of entertainment journalist and former Miss USA 2019 Cheslei Kryst, who leaped to her death in 2022, has long been attributed partly to the constant insults and daily vilification of her character by online trolls (Musumeci, 2022). As the premise of this research is to develop a typology of the speech acts of trolls, these practical implications can assist celebrities and public figures in identifying and categorizing the various categories of trolling behavior they may encounter. By recognizing linguistic patterns and communication tactics and comprehending the underlying motivations behind these speech acts, social media users may effectively mitigate the impact of trolling to promote healthier online interactions by adapting their strategies and responses accordingly. In addition, the typology developed through this research can be a valuable tool for training and educating celebrities and public figures on the various tactics that trolls employ, enabling them to address and prevent future trolling incidents.

Newly Acquired Knowledge Resulting from the Research

The following revelation in sociolinguistic research highlights the knowledge acquired through this research investigation. The investigation process, aided by the literature review and new data that arose in the findings and beyond the observation period, resulted in fresh insights on sociolinguistics and speech acts.

The Evolving Role of Sociolinguistics

In recent years, there has been a groundswell in research connecting sociolinguistics to the sociopsychological tradition of communication (Haji, 2019; Przygoński, 2020; Rymes, 2021). Sociolinguistics examines the connection between language and society by considering a variety of theoretical frameworks pertinent to speech acts, including the speech acts of trolls

(Kartika, 2019; Przygoński, 2021). These studies have explored the connection between language use in social contexts and psychological factors that influence communication behaviors. Within this framework, researchers have investigated a variety of theoretical perspectives regarding speech acts, including those exhibited by trolls (Clarke, 2019; Monakhov, 2020a). Monakhov's (2020b) noteworthy study aimed to address a research gap by investigating the feasibility of an early detection system for identifying troll messages. The study considered specific sociolinguistic elements present in troll speech, focusing primarily on linguistic patterns and communication tactics as indicators. By analyzing these aspects, the research sought to enhance understanding of troll behavior and develop potential strategies for identification and mitigation. Throughout this study of Marielle Lue's fan page, the researcher gained an extensive understanding of sociolinguistics and its intricate relationship to the theoretical frameworks developed for this investigation. This latest information enabled investigation of the multifaceted nature of speech acts within communication phenomena. It also facilitated comprehension of sociolinguistic perspectives pertinent to the study's analytical framework.

The Researcher's Existing Knowledge and Expertise

As an active content creator, group administrator, and fan page moderator with over 10 years of experience, the researcher was afforded an extensive knowledge base of social media management, which proved beneficial to this study. There may have been results or speculations in the study's findings that were not entirely explicable or may have appeared inconsistent with certain aspects of the literature presented. This section will highlight existing key knowledge points and expertise of the researcher that guided and shaped the presentation of findings, ensuring a coherent and connected discussion.

The Researcher's Experience as a Facebook Administrator

As a Facebook group and page administrator who has administered online forums for over a decade, a considerable number of factors contributed to the platform's inability to adequately address trolls and trolling. First, the availability of moderation tools for forum administrators and moderators to combat and report bad actors is insufficient. Admins and moderators frequently receive delayed or ineffectual responses to reports of online harassment or trolling in their groups. This is primarily attributable to the inability to locate the radio controls on the dashboard to report the incidents. As Facebook modifies its platform designs frequently, so do the locations of the reporting icons. In addition, almost no notifications or alerts are provided when a new tool becomes available.

Second, Facebook provides few proactive anti-trolling measures. The platform relies on user reports before considering acting against abusers, so their approach has been largely reactive. However, this does not negate the fact that Facebook gives administrators and moderators the ability to block a bad actor. It would be most advantageous if the bad actor had been identified as a known troll in other forums prior to joining Facebook and causing pandemonium. Facebook administers insufficient punishments to those who engage in harassment on the platform. It gives the impression that Facebook is too lenient, encouraging trolls to believe their actions will have negligible repercussions. Facebook's algorithms and moderation systems may have difficulty accurately identifying and differentiating between genuine opinions, heated debates, and true troll speech acts that foment discord, resulting in inconsistent responses to trolling.

While Facebook has flaws, the tools available to administrators and moderators are sufficient. However, Facebook must do a better job of educating group and page managers on how to navigate their forums to eliminate abuse via its tools.

Summary

This study sought to identify evidence of trolls' virtual speech acts and construct a typology based on their communication tactics. The researcher analyzed over 1,675 comments, in which trolls used negative speech acts to insult others and disrupt conversations on the *Maurielle Lue Fox 2 Detroit* fan page. The trolls frequently used negative communication tactics of provocation to incite Maurielle Lue and page followers.

The findings confirmed the existence of troll-specific speech acts and distinguished them according to their communication tactics. Additionally, the study revealed that linguistic patterns across these speech acts and tactics can be used to identify trolls. While this study further reveals trolls' negative communication strategies, additional research is required to achieve more positive online engagements. This study provided a comprehensive framework of trolls' speech characteristics and communication patterns in online communities. It integrated the sociopsychological tradition of communication, Grice's maxims, politeness theory, face negotiation theory, and the theory of planned behavior, thus informing future research in this area.

Conclusion

Over the past two decades, abundant studies have been devoted to defining and determining trolls, based on their psychological makeup (Herring et al., 2002; March, 2019; Nuccitelli, 2014; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). A wealth of research has examined the personality characteristics and motives of online trolls (Brubaker et al., 2021; Buckels et al., 2014; Hardaker,

2010; Hardaker 2013; Molenda et al., 2022; Phillips, 2012). There has been even more research ad nauseum on how and how not to deal with trolls in online forums (Binns, 2012; Dammann, 2019; Lange, 2014). However, there has been limited research in the communications field about trolls and their weaponization of words.

Until recently, research on trolls' virtual speech acts and tactics has spurred renewed interest in the topic (Connolly, 2022; Kaplan, 2021; Paaki et al., 2022). More communications research studies must be conducted to fully develop inquiry on trolls' speech acts and communication tactics. Areas of study include but are not limited to social psychology, media studies, linguistics, and discourse analysis. This study has the potential to significantly advance the communication field by expanding and contributing to troll research concerning their virtual speech acts.

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