

Chapter 4

Trolling and Victims’ Perception of Trolling: A Thematic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Online trolling is the practise of engaging in dishonest, harmful, or disruptive behaviour in a social setting over the internet without any apparent gain. If a target falls for their trick, the trolling gets worse for even more heinous enjoyment. Trolling may be distinguished from other forms of online antisociality by its dishonest and “pointless” disruptive features, in contrast to which the perpetrators’ names and objectives are usually more transparent. Trolling has adverse negative effects on mental health. Therefore, there is an urgent need to address this issue. This chapter attempted to look into the causes of trolling which is damaging the mental health of people and why people become victims of trolling. Secondly, it assessed whether the damage in mental health vary with age or not. Thematic analysis was conducted on the transcribed data and the findings were discussed.

1. INTRODUCTION

Trolls act in ways intended to “annoy, degrade, disrupt, mock, incite, or encourage individuals to respond passionately to the individuals they target” in order to have fun. Assaultive, stimulating discriminatory, racist, or offensive language can be used in trolling on social media, electronic newspapers, news comments, or other media outlets on the internet Trolls are not conscious that they are injuring actual individuals; instead, they view online interaction platforms as accessible venues for their peculiar sense of humour. They view other internet consumers as a kind of technological abstraction rather than as true people. As a result, they are unmoved by the suffering they have brought about on the opposite side. In reality,

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-8893-5.ch004

they are more effective the more agony they inflict. Trolls are utterly immune to any kind of productive or bothersome comments or criticisms. One cannot bargain with them, implore them to show generosity or contrition, or appeal to their sense of guilt. However, trolls do not feel constrained by the laws of compassion or social obligation, for whatever cause. Such acts of trolls leave a deep scar on the lives of human beings. Therefore, there is an urgent need to address the issue of trolling. This chapter attempted to look into the causes of trolling, why people become victim of trolling and the impact of trolling on mental health of two age groups, viz, 18-35 years and 36-55 years, with the help of thematic analysis.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 What Is Trolling?

It's ambiguous where the terms "troll" and "trolling" emerged from or when they started to be used. A common view among scientific articles is that the application of the term trolling, regarding its use on the internet, springs from a form of fishing where a baited line is set in the water and dragged slowly by a boat to encourage the fish to bite (Cambria, Chandra, Sharma & Hussain, 2010; Binns, 2012; Bishop, 2014a; Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017; Jussinoja & Terho, 2018). According to Hardaker (2013) said that Usenet, one of the first worldwide discussion systems on computers has been recognised as the place where trolling started, even though there is no direct convincing proof for it.

Despite decades of research that aims to create typologies, shed light on trolls' motives and motivations, and theorise the wider ramifications of the phenomena, scholars cannot agree on how to define or operationalize trolling. Comparing studies on trolling is extremely challenging due to the wide variety of theoretical frameworks, contexts, and sampling frames. Indeed, researchers contend that trolling is contextually dependent and irrational; what users see as trolling in one area, like Wikipedia, may not be considered such in another, like Instagram (Hardaker, 2010; Ortiz, 2022). However, researchers cited that "Trolls" are those who take pleasure in stirring up conflict online, seeking to initiate conversations, and upsetting other people (Aydn et al., 2021). Presenting purposefully offensive content in a specific context with the intention of misleading other people into responding angrily is one common form of trolling, according to Hardaker (2010). According to many researchers (Buckels et al., 2014; Hardaker, 2010; Phillips, 2015; Sanfilippo et al., 2018), trolling is effectively an umbrella word encompassing a spectrum of multifaceted, hostile, antisocial, or deviant behaviours and motivations online. Trolling is an identity-deception game that is performed without the consent of other players. He also noted that trolls try to pose as real users, interrupt conversations, and undermine confidence (Jussinoja & Terho, 2018).

There is no agreed-upon definition for trolling, but it is a phrase that is used in the literature to refer to a wide range of offensive online behaviours. The practise of trolling is a recent phenomenon that is changing from a rather anarchic kind of individual internet harassment to one that is more systematic. It defines trolling as an online behaviour that takes place in settings where debate is encouraged (e.g., social media platforms, online forums, comment and discussion threads, online gaming, chat groups, etc.). Investigators defined trolling as a situation-specific, intentional, controversial and repetitive (Fichman & Sanfilippo, 2016) behaviour by a person towards other people or groups (Sanfilippo, Yang & Fichman, 2017). The cross-national variability of online trolling was noted by Phillips (2015), who also discussed the diverse causes of trolling behaviour in Australia, Britain, and the US, respectively (Sun & Fichman, 2018). The idea of trolling has undergone a significant transformation from a distinctive type

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