Feeding the trolling: understanding and mitigating online trolling behavior as an unintended consequence

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Feeding the Trolling: Understanding and Mitigating Online Trolling Behavior as an Unintended Consequence

Abstract

Trolling is a form of consumer misbehavior that involves deliberate, deceptive, and mischievous attempts to provoke reactions from other online users. This research draws on actor-network theory to explore the assemblages of human and non-human entities that allow and perpetuate online trolling behaviors. By taking a practice-focused multi-sited ethnographic research approach, the research shows that online trolling is often an unintended consequence of interactions between human and non-human entities that are joined in the performance of trolling behavior. These entities include: troll(s), target(s), a medium of exchange, audience(s), other trolls, trolling artifacts, regulators, revenue streams, and assistants. Some of these actors (i.e., troll, target, medium) are playing a role in initiating, and other actors are (un)intentionally sustaining trolling by celebrating it, boosting it, facilitating it, and normalizing it. The findings highlight the role of nontraditional actors in the performance of misbehaviors and suggest that effective management of online consumer misbehaviors such as trolling will include managing the socio-technical networks that allow and fuel these misbehaviors.

Introduction

Customer posting on Sainsbury’s Facebook page: “I bought a pack of always ultra sanitary pads in store only to discover there were 14 in pack rather than 16 as stated. I do not want to use the rest as the pack has been tampered with. Do I complain to your or always direct. Please advise?”

Customer Support (i.e., the troll posing as a customer service representative): “Are you only mad because it’s that time of the month tho?”

Customer: “Really? How unprofessional to make a rude joke over a personal matter. Absolutely disgusting!”
Customer Support (i.e., the troll posing as a customer service representative): I’m sorry, you’re absolutely right. Jokes about a woman’s menstrual cycle are not funny. Period!

The vignette above, posted on the UK retailer Sainsbury’s Facebook page, epitomizes one of the many types of what media, researchers, and other internet users refer to as trolling. We use trolling to mean the deliberate, deceptive, and mischievous attempts to provoke reactions from other online users (Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017). These attempts vary in nature and are closely associated with the behaviors of so-called problem customers (Bitner et al., 1994) and jaycustomers (Lovlock & Wirtz, 2016). In addition to impolitely replying to disappointed customers under fake customer service accounts, as seen in the example above, trolling includes posting irrelevant product reviews (e.g., r/amazonreviews, n.d.), giving false and endangering information about products and services to other consumers (Greenberg, 2016), and prank-calling businesses (D’Anastasio, 2020).

Trolling behaviors are pervasive, comprising “a substantial fraction of user activity on many web sites” (Cheng et al., 2017, p. 1217). They occur particularly frequently on social media sites, with 38% of US adults reporting seeing trolling on social media on a daily basis (Statista, 2017). Trolling is also witnessed on comments sections, discussion sites, review sites and various online services and applications, such as dating apps and video games (Pew Research Center, 2017; Statista, 2017; YouGov, 2014). Despite presenting challenges for the owners of these channels, and for marketers and brand managers utilizing the channels, and despite detracting from the experience of other consumers, trolling has received very little attention from marketing scholars. Also, it has not been considered to be one of the key challenges impacting brand management in social media environments (Gensler et al., 2013). Trolling has, however, recently started gaining increased interest from researchers from other disciplines, including psychology (e.g., Buckels et al., 2014; Craker & March, 2016; March et al., 2017; Sest & March, 2017), linguistics (e.g.,
As insightful as these studies are, most of the consumer misbehavior and trolling literature, with some notable exceptions (Cruz et al., 2018; Daunt & Greer, 2015; Daunt & Harris, 2012; Demsar et al., 2021; Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017) adopt a dispositional perspective, explaining misbehaviors by referring to the characteristics and predispositions of misbehaving consumers. Furthermore, practitioners concerned with tackling consumer misbehaviors such as trolling seem to focus on managing one “masterful, separate actor” (Mol, 2010, p. 256)—the troll—overlooking the role of all other entities involved in trolling. While some studies recognize that there are other actors besides trolls included in trolling (e.g., Cruz et al., 2018; Hardaker, 2010; Herring et al., 2002 examine trolling from a community user perspective), there is a need for a more holistic investigation of the different types of actors joined in the performance of trolling.

In a desire to contribute to a more rounded and actionable understanding of trolling, we focus on the making of trolling rather than on trolls and their nature. Our aim is to better understand the “building blocks that enable” trolling behaviors (Cruz et al., 2018, p. 24). More specifically, using actor-network theory as a lens, our purpose is to better understand the assemblages of actors that allow or perpetuate mischief-making consumer (mis)behaviors such as online trolling. In particular, our research questions are:

(1) *What human and non-human actors are involved in the performance of trolling?*

(2) *How can tracing associations between actors help us determine how trolling emerges and is sustained?*

In answering these questions, we contribute to the existing body of knowledge and practice on consumer misbehaviors in general, and online trolling in particular. First, the original contribution lies in identifying the actors (human and non-human) involved in trolling and presenting a conceptual model of how trolling comes about and is nourished. Our work extends
prior research on consumer misbehaviors and trolling by showing how some previously unexplored actors such as non-humans (e.g., various material and technical elements) and spectators (e.g., fans of misbehaving consumers) (un)intentionally support misbehaviors. By revealing that misbehaviors such as trolling may be exacerbated by marketers’ efforts to manage these misbehaviors, we add empirical support to the idea that consumer misbehaviors managing strategies could be counterproductive (see Fullerton & Punj, 2004). We also offer a new understanding of the role of compliance of the actors in the success of actor-networks, suggesting that the lack of compliance among some actors may actually stabilize and invigorate the network (cf. Callon, 1984). Our conceptual model has practical value, providing guidance to marketers on how trolling and similar mischief-making consumer misbehaviors can be stymied, or, if so wished, bolstered by managing the network of associating actors rather than trying to deter only one actor within these networks.

We begin by reviewing the literature on online trolling as a form of online consumer misbehavior. We delineate trolling from other forms of misbehaviors and discuss what is currently known about how trolling occurs, its impacts, and how can it be dealt with. After presenting the key tenets of actor-network theory—an approach that this research draws on—we describe our process of data collection and analysis. Then, we describe our findings, presenting the actors involved in the trolling and discussing how trolling emerges and is sustained. Finally, we discuss the implications of our work for both researchers and practitioners aiming to understand and manage (online) mischief-making consumer misbehaviors such as trolling.

**Literature Review**

**Consumer Misbehaviors**

In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of literature uncovering how people misbehave in their role as consumers. A great deal of previous research has focused on offline, analogue settings, with researchers investigating misbehaviors such as shoplifting (Daunt &
Greer, 2015; Egan & Taylor, 2010), cheating on service guarantees (Wirtz & Kum, 2004), fraudulent returning (Harris, 2008), customer retaliatory behaviors (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008), vandalism (Van Vliet, 1984), customer aggression and sexual harassment in service encounters (Yagil, 2008), and relating badly to brands (Fournier & Alvarez, 2013).

Although we know much more about consumer misbehavior in traditional and offline settings than in online settings, prior research mentions several ways in which consumers may cause problems for marketers online. Examples include falsifying personal information in order to take advantage of online services (Punj, 2017), participating in online firestorms (Pfeffer et al., 2014), engaging in negative word-of-mouth (Tuzovic, 2010), trash-talking brands and their users (Hickman & Ward, 2007), and engaging in hostile and rude consumer-to-consumer interactions (Bacile et al., 2018; Dineva et al., 2020; Dineva et al., 2017), such as participating in a dialogue with the supporters of rival brands that resembles flaming (Ewing et al., 2013). All these forms of online consumer misbehaviors remain poorly understood in comparison to illegal downloading, which has been the most studied form of misbehaving (e.g., Giesler, 2008; Harris & Dumas, 2009; Hinduja, 2007; Odou & Bonnin, 2014; Phau et al., 2014; Sinha & Mandel, 2008). The focus on illegal downloading neglects the whole spectrum of consumer misbehaviors that are not straightforwardly illegal and financially motivated. Examples mentioned in the classifications of consumers misbehaviors include bizarre behaviors, annoying behaviors toward other consumers, mindless horseplay (Fullerton & Punj, 2004), gaining unauthorized access to another consumer’s computer for fun (Freestone & Mitchell, 2004), and rule breaking (Berry & Seiders, 2008). Each of these examples include causing problems in a playful way and constitute a poorly understood misbehavior of online trolling.

**Online Trolling Behaviors**

Trolling behaviors, happening in social settings such as online brand communities, involve “deliberate, deceptive, and mischievous attempts that are engineered to elicit a reaction from the
target(s),” including brands, their community managers, and other consumers (Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017, p. 1339). These attempts, varying in form (e.g., Hardaker, 2013) and perceived severity (Suler & Phillips, 1998), encompass behaviors such as digression, (hypo)criticism, antipathizing, endangering, shocking, and aggressing (Hardaker, 2013). While more overtly antagonistic behaviors such as aggression and online incivility (e.g., Bacile et al., 2018) can constitute trolling, in the context of trolling such behaviors are used as a means to an end—this is to provoke other users (e.g., community managers and consumers) into the reaction. In this view, trolling should not be conflated with cyberbullying and consumer brand sabotage. Whereas cyberbullies intend to inflict harm or discomfort intentionally and repeatedly to a predefined target (e.g., Olweus, 2012; Tokunaga, 2010) and consumer brand saboteurs as hostile aggressors choose activities that will supposedly cause harm to a predefined brand (Kähr et al., 2016), trolls’ intents are less straightforward (Buckels et al., 2014) and undirected, and include fun-seeking (Cruz et al., 2018). The emphasis on the trolling’s deceptive and no-harm intended nature also helps to separate trolling from flaming, which includes uninhibited expression of easily identifiable elements—insults, profanity, offensive language (Alonzo & Aiken, 2004)—in response to a provocation (Hardaker, 2013). Not necessarily resulting from past or anticipated brand experiences, trolling should also be set apart from what would be traditionally conceived as spreading electronic word-of-mouth (King et al., 2014), sharing consumer-generated brand stories (Gensler et al., 2013), and participating in social media firestorms (Scholz & Smith, 2019). Rather than having a real interest in the topic of the conversation (Breitsohl et al., 2018) and sincere brand/cause-related conflicts with other consumers (Dineva et al., 2020), trolls seem to engage in what King, Racherla, and Bush (2014) would call deception for fun. In this sense, trolls do not talk about their real brand experiences, but rather use brands as props that help them fulfil their “programs of action” (i.e., intentions or goals) (Latour, 1992). While scholars continue to attempt to separate trolling from other misbehaviors (Cruz et al., 2018; Demsar et al., 2021;
Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017), it has to be acknowledged that the term itself remains to be defined in a different way and is frequently conflated with other forms of online misbehavior.

As any other form of consumer misbehavior, trolling behaviors impact other consumers, companies and their employees and brands. Within online brand communities, trolls may disrupt discussions (Dahlberg, 2001; Donath, 1999; Herring et al., 2002), influence and reduce the participation of other consumers (Dahlberg, 2001), change the interpretation of the posted content (Anderson et al., 2014), and potentially destabilize marketers’ intended brand meanings (Rokka & Canniford, 2016). Trolling that includes uncivil interactions with other consumers may also negatively impact service recovery evaluations (Bacile et al., 2018). On the other hand, trolling could have positive effects such as reinforcing the community through humor and enabling the communication of less popular opinions (Cruz et al., 2018).

So far there has been little discussion on how marketers can deal with trolling behaviors. Choosing a non-engagement conflict management strategy (Dineva et al., 2020; Dineva et al., 2017) and ignoring the trolls is one of the potential management approaches. Prior research warns against this approach as consumers expect that marketers will protect them from the misbehaviors of other consumers (Fullerton & Punj, 2004) and will address consumer-to-consumer incivility that occurs on corporate social media channels (Bacile et al., 2018). Not responding to the negative consumer-generated brand stories and to online incivility can potentially lead to brand dilution (Gensler et al., 2013) and negative service recovery outcomes (Bacile et al., 2018), respectively. To develop effective managing strategies that will cover both what and how the company responds (van Laer & de Ruyter, 2010) to trolling, marketers have to understand what drives this type of consumer misbehavior.

In explaining trolling, prior research resorts to attributing trolling to ‘problematic’ characteristics of perpetrators (e.g., Buckels et al., 2014; Craker & March, 2016; March et al., 2017; Sest & March, 2017) and/or to the anonymity offered by the Internet (e.g., Binns, 2012; Donath, 1999;
Griffiths, 2014; Hardaker, 2010, 2013). Yet, recent findings challenge such explanations by showing that under the right circumstances anyone can become a troll (Cheng et al., 2017), that the same individual might engage in both trolling and non-trolling within the same channel (Cruz et al., 2018), and that verbal barrages occur within more and less anonymous online places (Ewing et al., 2013). Researching actors involved in trolling behaviours in order to examine the making of trolling (see also Cruz et al., 2018) rather than the nature of trolls could contribute to a more rounded and actionable understanding of these misbehaviors.

An Actor-Network Theory Perspective

To explore the assemblages of actors that allow or perpetuate online trolling, this study employs actor-network theory. Since the time of its origin—in the 1980s (e.g., Callon, 1984; Latour, 1987; Law, 1984) in the context of sociology of science and technology (Law, 1992)—ANT has been called vastly different things, such as “a theory, philosophy, approach, method, sensibility, and/or toolkit” (Thompson, 2012, p. 95). In this research, ANT was taken as a sensibility (Law, 2009), equipping us with a particular interrogative orientation toward the trolling practice. From the perspective of ANT, consumer misbehaviors should be seen as effects of networks of all kinds of actors (Latour, 2005; Law, 1992). These actors “persuade, coerce, seduce, resist, and compromise each other as they come together” (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 4). Something is considered to be an actor as long as he/she/it acts, where to act means to “make a difference” (Latour, 2005, p. 71); it means to influence some other actor’s action. One of the most distinguishing characteristics of ANT is that ANT assumes that both human actors (i.e., people) and non-human ones (e.g., things, objects, icons, programs, tools, documents, ideas) have a potential active role to play within the networks.

ANT offers a promising approach to studying misbehaviors as practices that are in the making. Furthermore, being focused on the interplay of the material (non-human) and expressive/semiotic elements (Canniford & Bajde, 2016), ANT is well suited to study online trolling behaviors that
embody the complex interplay between the human (e.g., troll) and non-human (e.g., computer, Internet) actors. ANT’s proposition that non-human actors are not passive objects but rather have agency too (i.e., they can act) (Latour, 2005) is particularly useful in identifying different types of actors that are involved in trolling.

Methodology

Research Approach

To trace the actors and their associations in the performance of trolling, we adopted a practice-focused multi-sited ethnographic research approach. The focus of the observations was on the socio-material practices (‘praxis’), rather than on the culture (‘ethno’). We drew on multiple case studies (Stake, 2006) that provided insight into different manifestations of trolling behaviors. Following the principles of purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015), we investigated five different cases of trolling: (1) playful trolling (Ollie), (2) good old-fashioned trolling (Alfie), (3) shock trolling (Jon), (4) online pranking and raiding (Flinn and Antonio), and (5) fake customer-service trolling (Otto). To identify potential cases, we conducted keyword searches (for “troll” OR “trolling”) on Google, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and Reddit; we looked for potential trolls when using internet in our daily life; and we asked our professional and social network for referrals to any troll accounts. The five cases that we decided to focus upon were selected for the following reasons. First, all cases represented trolling—they included behaviors that corresponded to the definition of trolling (see Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017). Moreover, they were performed by self-identified trolls—people who, at least once and outside the trolling act, publicly or privately admitted to engaging in trolling or at least did not dispute being called a troll by others. Second, the selected trolling cases exhibited continuity (i.e., the trolling acts were done frequently) and could be observed (e.g., it was possible to trace the trolling activity). Third, to capture a variety of trolling behaviors, the cases varied in terms of trolling strategies (e.g., shock vs. digress) (Hardaker, 2013), channels where trolling occurs (e.g., video games vs. comments...
sections), number of people trolling (e.g., one troll vs. a group of trolls), and who the target of the
trolling was (e.g., online community manager vs. gamer) (see Table A1 in Appendix A). This
sampling approach allowed us to both document diversity of actors and their actions and identify
common patterns that cut across that diversity (Patton, 2015). The cases, carrying the names of
their respective troll(s), who served as a point of departure in our process of following the actors,
are presented in Appendix A.

Data Collection

Our collection of archival, elicited, and reflexive (Kozinets, 2010) data started in October 2015
and concluded in August 2017 (for an overview see Table 1 and Table 2). In contrast to prior
qualitative consumer research, which rarely took secondary data as primary data (Fischer &
Parmentier, 2010), this research predominantly drew on archival data. Our main research method
was non-participant covert and overt, asynchronous and synchronous observation of trolling
practices. During our 330 hours of observation of trolling, the focus was on staying close to the
practices (Mol, 2002) and on following the actors and their associations (Latour, 2005). The
observations were supplemented by seven in-depth, semi-standardized interviews (Arsel, 2017;
Berg & Lune, 2012): five interviews were conducted with the main protagonists of the selected
cases and two interviews were conducted with trolls (i.e., Luke and Eli) who did not belong to the
cases, but exhibited trolling behaviors shown in the cases. All interviews but one were conducted
via instant messaging and revolved around the questions of “what happened and who did what
when” (Langley, 1999, p. 692), providing background information on the context behind the
trolling practices. Interviews lasted from 75 minutes to 111 minutes. In addition to the interviews,
we exchanged short electronic messages with trolls and community managers on Reddit. To
contextualize the data, we collected and reviewed various documents, such as social platforms’
terms of use and community guidelines, trolling-relevant laws, trolling-related newspaper
articles, blog entries, and other materials, including podcasts on online community management.
The data collection was accompanied by extensive field-noting and informed with ongoing data analysis.

[Add Table 1 and Table 2 about here]

Data Analysis

The data analysis started with an in-depth exploration of a single actor-network, treating each case as a distinct representation of trolling. The coding focused on identifying the actors and registering the associations among them. Guided by the principle of following the actors (Latour, 2005), we examined who and what the troll actor associated with (i.e., influencing and/or being influenced by). For each identified association, we noted the type of association and the place of association. Considering all the networks, we identified 300 actors and 1308 interactions between the actors. Table 3 provides an overview of the number of actors coded within each case. To aid the analysis we visually mapped out the networks with the help of the network visualization tool Gephi. An illustrative example of the visualization of the actor-network is provided in Appendix B. Gephi was used as a tool that allowed a different view on the data and not as a tool to analyze the networks in the manner of social network analysis (SNA) (for an overview of differences between ANT and SNA see Venturini et al., 2016).

[Add Table 3 about here]

After identification of the actors and their interactions within a single actor-network, we started comparing and contrasting studied actor-networks. Our cross-case analysis was shaped by the research questions. First, codes were assembled based on being distinct elements of the same construct (Belk et al., 2012). In this regard, the outcome of our analyses was different types of actors performing in trolling. Second, the categorization of the codes was made based on codes representing phases in a trolling process (Belk et al., 2012). In this regard, an outcome of the analysis was the process of how trolling occurs. Third, a final stage of the analysis was concerned
with how the codes can be related based on the premise that some codes can be interpreted as assisting in understanding condition that give rise to a focal phenomenon (Belk et al., 2012). The understanding of how trolling behaviors are sustained emerged out of this type of analysis and interpretation. In general, the analysis process was iterative, including the repeated going back and forth between the raw data, codes, and emerging theorizing (Belk et al., 2012).

To ensure the trustworthiness of our findings we conducted triangulations across data sources (e.g., comparing trolling practices of different informants) and types of data collected (e.g., comparing elicited and archival data) (Tracy, 2010). In the process of triangulation, we paid special attention to comparing and contrasting the data collected from our observations and the data collected by personal interaction (i.e., elicited data). The convergences and disjunctions were examined and provided an opportunity for interpretation building (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994). To further enhance the credibility of our research, we conducted member reflections, inviting our participants to clarify, question, critique, and affirm our emerging findings (Tracy, 2010). In reporting our findings, we focus on descriptions, rather than explanations; this approach is aligned with ANT (Latour, 2005) and observational research.

**Findings: Trolling in Action**

Our analysis reveals that trolling is performed by a collection of human and non-human actors interacting more or less in concert with each other. The following sections present what and who these actors are and how trolling emerges and is sustained through the associations among the actors. The answers to these questions are conceptually captured in a framework presented in Fig. 1 and explained in the sections that follow.

[Add Fig. 1 about here]

*What Actors Are Involved in Trolling?*
Considering all five explored networks of trolling, we identified nine categories of actors participating in trolling: *troll(s), target(s), medium, other trolls, audience, trolling artifacts, regulators, revenue streams,* and *assistants.* These categories are defined and illustrated with data in Table 4.

[Add Table 4 about here]

The categories of actors should be seen as distinct in terms of the role they play in the trolling act (e.g., trolls perform trolling and medium hosts trolling). That said, individual actors (e.g., the like button) can play more than one role in the performance of a trolling act (e.g., in some cases, the like button served as a regulator and a revenue stream) and a particular actor could play different roles in different trolling acts (e.g., a troll in the context of one act can be transformed into an assistant in the context of other act). Overall, our analyses revealed that some actors are essential for trolling to manifest and others keep trolling alive. In different ways, the act of trolling can be interpreted as a side effect—an unintended consequence—of the actions of the actors and their interactions.

*How Does Trolling (Un)intentionally Emerge?*

An assemblage of three associating actors—*troll(s), target(s),* and *medium*—must be in place for a *trolling act to emerge.* For the trolls to accomplish their programs of action (i.e., to troll) they have to first ally themselves with the medium. When asked how I should start trolling, Luke replied: “OK so the first thing you would want to do is find your trolling platform where do you think the easiest place to troll for you would be.” Overall, “the easiest place to troll” was considered to be a place that has *fitting*\(^1\) *technical affordance, discernible*\(^2\) *medium culture,*

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\(^1\) Fitting in a sense that the capabilities of the trolls match the properties of the medium.

\(^2\) Discernible in a sense that is known to the troll.
and/or absent or incapable regulators. It is one of these or a combination of these three characteristics that make a particular medium trolling-friendly.

First, a medium conducive to trolling is the channel that offers attractive features that match the troll’s capabilities. For instance, trolls that lack skills in improvisation will be less likely to choose a platform that is based on verbal communication, as it is illustrated in Eli’s comment below:

In the verbal part of communication, there is the constant threat of revealing oneself by laughing and a constant threat of creating contradictions due to improvisation required in the verbal art. If one is communicating textually, one is given complete control of the engagement. The post can be edited and reviewed, the fine details being corrected and added as needed, and then you may post a verified, convincing post that will fool your enemies. It is not as fine an art as that of the verbal troll, but it is the preferred one.

A medium conducive to trolling is also a medium that has a discernible medium culture—this is a set of shared and easily observable attitudes and practices that characterize a medium. All trolls provided examples of how the knowledge of the medium culture informed their selection of the trolling places and shaped the nature of the trolling. Alfie, for instance, reported that he avoids trolling on Fox News, as people there are “extremely right-wing” and “extremely angry” and it “is harder to turn [the conversation] into something light and silly.” On the other hand, he likes trolling within online brand communities, as community managers “tend to have to respond to everything” and they respond “with this lawyerly,... condescending fake friendliness.” Figure 2 illustrates how Alfie took advantage of this knowledge in communicating with a brand of canned baked beans. Several other trolls indicated that the guarantee of receiving a response and the predictability of the responses make corporate social media channels a good place to troll. Overall, this finding further supports the notion that “trolling performances require an understanding of the idiosyncratic elements of a given community” (Cruz et al., 2018, p. 21).
Finally, a third factor playing the role in the troll’s choice of a channel for trolling was the presence of the regulators who could deter the potential trolling act or delimit the occurring trolling act. Trolls mentioned that some places were particularly good for trolling as they did not employ regulators (e.g., no human moderators) or the regulators were incapable (e.g., human moderators that are too slow in applying their actions). These aspects are illustrated in the comment of one of the raiders, who stated that a particular forum was “made for trolling” as “[t]he Admins go home on the weekends” and “[a]ll the mods can do is lock threads, they cannot ban.”

On a medium, trolls proactively or reactively search for a target—an online user who would take the bait. Our observations of live trolling and interviews with the trolls suggest that trolls do not seem to be guided by elaborate targeting criteria: rather, they look for the first person who would respond (see Figure C.1. in Appendix C). Only an online user who has been deceived is translated into the target. As indicated by Eli: “If there is not a convincing proposition made, there shall not be a victim for the troll, no engagement, and thus, no win.” A deceived online user (i.e., target) is the last necessary actor needed for the trolling act to emerge. The process of emergence of the trolling act through the associations among the troll, trolling-friendly medium, and target, which has been described in this section, is illustrated in the left side of the Fig. 1.

How Is Trolling (Un)intentionally Sustained?

While the presence of troll, trolling-friendly medium, and target are necessary for the trolling act to manifest, other actors (i.e., audience, other trolls, artifacts, regulators, revenue streams, and assistants) through their associations with the punctualized actor (i.e., the trolling act) and with the individual main three actors more or less intentionally act favorably toward trolling. As shown in the right side of the Fig. 1, we identified four ways in which associating actors more or less intentionally support trolling by celebrating it, boosting it, facilitating it, and normalizing it.
These distinct, yet interrelated, practices are defined in Table 5 and presented in the sections that follow.

[Add Table 5 about here]

Celebrating Trolling Behaviors

One of the most surprising findings of our research is that trolling behaviors and their perpetrators are praised and honored, in particular by the actors that correspond to the categories of the audience, artifacts, revenue streams, and other trolls. Some trolls managed to build a strong base of fans—people who were following and liking their work (see Figure C.2. in Appendix C). For example, more than 1,000 people typically tuned in within the first five minutes of Ollie’s livestreaming of trolling people within multiplayer video games. His videos based on the livestreams had, on average, more than 500,000 views each, while one of his videos received more than 10,000 shares and 1.5 million views. Trolls’ fans actively supported trolling by showering the trolls with compliments. Under one of the Ollie’s videos a fan wrote: “First, I’d like to say I’ve seen a fair share of ‘troll’ youtubers. I’ve seen the big ones, the little ones. But you, [Ollie]. You fucking mastered it.” Trolls seemed to appreciate such positive comments, sporadically replying to followers and receiving in return another shot of adulation. “He himself comments on my post! I am so incredibly happy,” wrote one of Alfie’s followers. Being hero-worshipped influenced the trolls to feel indebted to followers and pressured them to create new trolling content. “Lately I’m not a fan of myself due to the low turnout of new content but I’m really trying to change that,” posted Alfie on his Facebook page, apologizing to his followers for his recent trolling inactivity.

A troll’s fans were not the only actors celebrating trolls and trolling behaviors. An important group of actors, which to a large extent unintentionally contributed to the celebrity status of some trolls, was the mass media, which has regularly shared screenshots showing trolling, praised funny trolling examples, and sensationalized the more distasteful ones (see Figure C.3. in
Appendix C). Five of our interviewed trolls—both “glamourous” and “notorious” (Rojek, 2001) ones—reported that being featured in the media “felt good” and made them feel like celebrities. “WE ARE FAMOUS WE ARE FUCKING FAMOUS” cried one of the raiders, celebrating the news that their McDonald’s fire alarm prank call got featured on NBC news. Such findings are in line with the research within the celebrity studies field, which maintains that the phenomenon of celebrity and media are closely linked (Marwick, 2015; Rojek, 2001).

A troll’s public impact through their capacity to generate fans or attract media attention is not something that happens by chance—our observations highlighted a variety of self-presentation practices (e.g., carefully selecting profile photos and social media cover photos, being consistent in the style of trolling) that trolls use to self-brand themselves. This suggests that the term “microcelebrities” (Marwick, 2015; Senft, 2013) does not apply only to the consumers taking selfies with brands (Rokka & Canniford, 2016), political activists (Tufekci, 2013), and fashion bloggers (Marwick, 2013) but also to misbehaving consumers. In this view, trolling thrives within the attention economy, in which the ability to attract attention is a status symbol and people value whatever helps them get attention (Marwick & boyd, 2011).

Boosting Trolling Behaviors

Our analyses suggest that trolling is being supported by the associating actors promoting it. Representatives from all categories of actors have been found to play this role, some of them directly and intentionally, and others indirectly and unknowingly encouraging trolling. Examples of the actors from the first category would be a troll’s followers who demand new trolling content and who are asking the troll to troll them (see Figure C.4. in Appendix C). Some online users went so far as to manipulate their online identity and position themselves as a potential target. Several trolls mentioned how some users “make themselves easy target for ignorant and inexperienced trolls” (Eli) and “feign naivete or weakness with the intention of becoming a target” (raiders). Interestingly, these ‘wannabe targets’ have been noticed in the cases of both
glamorous and notorious trolls. A possible explanation for this is that ‘wannabe targets’ are trolls themselves. Another possible explanation is that such online users, like trolls, engage in microcelebrity practices (Marwick, 2015; Senft, 2013), using trolling to appeal to existing followers or to gain new followers.

The quest for attention is supported by the *infrastructure of the social media*, which offers comparable and quantifiable metrics of one’s success (Marwick & boyd, 2011). Non-humans such as the number of views, likes, shares, and followers act as a currency in this attention economy. A trolling act that is rich in currency—that is being viewed, liked, and shared—sells trolling to other online users and to the trolls themselves, suggesting that this is a potential way of grabbing public attention. Otto, for instance, “started working on [trolling] every day” after he was pleasantly surprised by “how much it got shared and liked.” At the same time, the ubiquity of social media metrics seems to inspire other trolls to push themselves harder. The videos that received many views and presented well-executed raids were the ones that, reportedly, motivated the raiders to engage in raiding in hope of achieving similar or better results. Trolls reported how, in an attempt to outrank others, they had to be funnier, more provocative, or more shocking.

Social media metrics are not the only non-human actors boosting trolling. One unanticipated finding is that *some regulators actually promote trolling*, rather than discouraging it. During our fieldwork, we observed how different regulators’ reactions such as enforced sanctions (e.g., down-voting or deleting trolling comments) actually indicated to the troll that his or her actions were successful. During the interviews, trolls reported that the reward for their trolling is when the target “starts mass banning everyone” (Antonio) or when people threaten them, claiming that “their brother/uncle/neighbor are in the police, cia, have [his] IP, are coming around to kill [him]” (Jon). The regulators’ attempts to stop trolling were often publicly mocked (see Figure C.5. in Appendix C). What is more, even the most severe penalties (e.g., getting your account permanently or temporarily suspended) were considered to be, in Jon’s words, not only “part and
parcel” of the trolling but also a badge of honor. Flinn, for instance, proudly shared with us that he had been 16 times permanently banned from RaidBoard and that this makes him the most banned user on this forum. Several trolls stated that they use the trolling sanctions as a means of further provocation—Jon, for instance, reported that opening new accounts after just being banned was like “waving a red flag to a bull.” Such findings support Herring et al.’s (2002) notion that responses to trolling (e.g., a reply from the brand manager or a trolling sanction) are used as a base for further attacks. Moreover, several trolls reported that they have selected places to troll based on witnessing the responses that other trolls received. In this way, the responses to trolling seem to serve as an invitation to other trolls in the same way that publicly rewarding online complainers may lead to an increase in complainers (Gallaugher & Ransbotham, 2010).

Trolling is also boosted by being a potential source of income. In contrast to Phillips (2015, p. 8), who explicitly stated that “trolling behaviors aren’t rewarded with a paycheck,” our research shows that some trolls, in particular the glamorous and celebrity ones, are being paid for trolling. These trolls were selling their mischievous ways to their fans, who donated money to them. Two of our troll informants, Ollie and Alfie, were both sharing their trolling content on Patreon. Offering his patrons three different packages, Alfie reported he was earning $184 per month. Other reported types of income included money from the ads that YouTube placed within their videos and from collaborations with various businesses. In relation to the latter, Alfie reported that he had been receiving requests “from small business owners asking [him] to troll their page.”

Besides bringing money, trolling behaviors rewarded trolls with an experience of pleasant emotional states, such as feelings of thrill, having fun, relief of boredom, and relief of tension. The ‘fun element’ of trolling was not only mentioned in the interviews with the trolls, but also came across during live observations of trolling, in which the trolls laughed out loud and seemed cheerful and in good spirits. The trolls’ need to have fun seems to stem from their professional lives. Several trolls mentioned the therapeutic value of trolling, with this type of misbehavior
providing trolls an avenue to “wind down after work” (Jon). This can be observed in the case of Otto, who in the media interview talked about how trolling helped him cope with his customer representative job:

I think it stemmed from the frustration of having to work in customer-facing positions being forced to wear a fake smile and be polite to customers, regardless of how entitled or unreasonable or even abusive they are. It was a good way to lighten up what can be a very stressful job.

In this sense, trolling can be understood as a coping mechanism or an unintended consequence of the emotional labor involved in customer-facing jobs, where employees are obliged to interact with consumers courteously, regardless of how the consumers behave (Yagil & Shultz, 2017). In this view, trolling may represent an attempt to attenuate the perceived power imbalance created in the encounters between the customer service representatives and (problematic) customers.

Facilitating Trolling Behaviors

Some of the actors, in particular assistants and regulators, seem to actively and passively make trolling easier. In the process of trolling, trolls use, misuse, and abuse the features and functionalities offered on online platforms. The public display of performance metrics (e.g., showing number of likes or views), quick and easy creation of new online accounts and online groups, ability to tag other users, the option to set alerts so that you are notified when an online user starts streaming, easy sharing of the content, suggestions of ‘similar others’, and permissible revisions of the posted content are only a few of the features facilitating online mischief-making consumer misbehaviors such as trolling. These examples highlight that the functions trolls use for trolling are in their essence no different from the functions other online users use. While, for instance, an ‘ordinary’ Facebook user employs the feature ‘people you may know’ to add new friends, a troll such as Jon uses it to add his troll friends to a fake Facebook group. By mobilizing non-humans that automatically suggest the accounts of other misbehaving consumers, Jon saves
time and simplifies his work. Together this indicates that online platforms have an infrastructure in place that allows consumers to misbehave with minimal effort. In terms of ANT, since online misbehaving consumers typically do not have problems with enrolling the non-humans offered by the platforms, these non-humans ‘must’ have interests that are in harmony with the interests of the troll. It should be noted that such an argument does not imply that the infrastructure of online social platforms enables trolling behaviors. Rather, this study argues that it passively facilitates it. Trolling behaviors such as pranks, practical jokes, and horseplay are not exclusively limited to online worlds, yet it seems that the online world makes such behaviors easier to conduct. One potential explanation for this may be that online environments offer a plethora of options to control the performance of trolling—Eli, for instance, explained that while a troll trolling in the analogue world could be disclosed by starting to laugh out loud, an online troll can use a mute button to hide the revealing laughter from the targets.

The ability to disguise misbehaving seems to be one of the key facilitators of trolling behaviors. One manner in which misbehaving consumers try to disguise themselves is through enrolling into the network actors that help them hide their ‘real-life’ identities. This research to some extent agrees with the scholars who claim that trolling behaviors are facilitated by anonymity (e.g., Griffiths, 2014; Hardaker, 2013). This has been typically observed in the case of notorious trolls, who closely guarded their offline identities. Raiders, for instance, reported that they are using proxy servers or virtual private networks to mask their real IP addresses when trolling. On the other hand, at the same time, this paper further supports Coles and West (2016) in challenging the idea that trolling behaviors can be attributed to anonymity. Some trolls—the glamorous ones and the ones with a strong base of followers—are not particularly worried about being anonymous. In fact, while they are not posting under real names, they make sure that their trolling names are associated with real names via other channels, such as media interviews. While such a finding is surprising, it may be explained by the fact that such trolls have managed to build strong personal brands that they want to protect and nurture. Their trolling behaviors are typically more innocent
in nature and disclosing their real identities allows the trolls to reap the benefits of trolling beyond the online world and to maintain control over their online trolling identities. As Alfie, a comedian by profession, explained during the interview:

…trolling is a comedy job anyway . . .when people start imitating me or there is this rumor that [Alfie’s pseudonym] is like anon, just thousands of people, I just correct the record by saying: no, his name is [Alfie’s real name and surname], for better for worse, he is one person, this is what he does. Just to keep it from turning into meme that I have no control over.

The affordances of the online environment make sociotechnical practices such as trolling behaviors also more *durable*. If offline trolling may be more ephemeral in nature, *online* trolling has the potential to be preserved forever in the forms of screenshots and videos that, as we observed, are circulating through the network for years after an actual trolling event has occurred. This durability of materials is “a relational effect” (Law, 1992, p. 387), supported by the actors, such as assistants who preserve materials, audience members who share the materials, and regulators who by being ineffective in interrupting trolling acts allow trolling to be materialized and/or shared. The seemingly ‘passive’ attitude toward managing trolling behaviors on the part of regulators, particularly human moderators on social media platforms, is not a surprising finding—prior research has shown that *marketers lean toward ignoring consumer misbehaviors* (Berry & Seiders, 2008; Fullerton & Punj, 2004). The problem is that by ignoring misbehaviors such as trolling, particularly in the cases when they are not the targets but the medium for trolling, marketers facilitate trolling by giving trolls free access to the targets. While this would be an example of the actor (i.e., marketers) *actively facilitating trolling*, most of the time the facilitation was passive in nature with actors unknowingly or unintentionally supporting trolls and trolling.
Normalizing Trolling Behaviors

The associating actors, in particular, the trolling artifacts, other trolls, audience, and regulators, play a role in *positioning trolling as an ordinary, taken-for-granted part of the online experience*. The trolling artifacts, representing trolling behaviors that occurred in a variety of online places and in a particular online place on a variety of occasions, insinuate that trolling is a widespread phenomenon. The audience members play an important role in circulating these artifacts, thereby reinforcing this perception of the ubiquity of trolling. One thing that makes the artifacts such as trolling screenshots shareable is that they are easy to understand. They seem to share a similar destiny with memes, which once were only comprehensible by insiders but have now lost their relative obscurity and gone mainstream (Phillips, 2015). That screenshots of trolling are shareable, or as Green and Jenkins (2011) would put it, “spreadable,” connotes that people who share them find the content worth watching and worth sharing.

However, audience members do not normalize trolling only by watching and sharing; they also normalize it by *not* actively condemning trolling or trolls. While we observed situations when the audience members verbally attacked the trolls or tried to help out the targets upon witnessing a trolling act, such attempts were rare. Most of them were badly executed and therefore prone to furthering trolls’ manipulation, or were at least less visible and quickly silenced by the fans of the trolls. Audience support, executed through viewing the video or by blaming the target (e.g., “[the target] totally deserved it, you can’t be that stupid”) helped trolls by neutralizing potential guilt. Receiving upvotes, likes, and shares connoted to the misbehaving consumers that they are engaging in perhaps problematic but certainly acceptable behaviors. As one troll put it: “The audience obviously likes what I’m doing here.”

In saying that the associations between the trolling actors normalize trolling, it has to be noted that this process of normalization was better represented by some online settings than others. To put it differently, trolling behaviors seem to be more expected within the particular online places,
and the same misbehavior that constituted “normal trouble” (Cavan, 1966, p. 18) and were thus ignored within one place were severely sanctioned at another. This suggests that consumer misbehaviors are normalized and localized in place (Cavan, 1966). Such an argument further supports the idea that how misbehaviors, in particular trolling, are received depends on the context in which they are enacted (Cruz et al., 2018; Hardaker, 2013; Kirman et al., 2012; Sanfilippo et al., 2017).

Implications

Theoretical Implications

In contrast to prior studies, which overwhelmingly focus on studying the trolls (e.g., Buckels et al., 2014; Craker & March, 2016; March et al., 2017; Sest & March, 2017), this study shifts the focus from the trolls to the act of trolling itself (see also Cruz et al., 2018). While prior research maintains that trolling behaviors stem from innate factors such as a troll’s personality (e.g., Buckels et al., 2014; Craker & March, 2016) or from situational factors such as exposure to prior troll posts written by other online users (Cheng et al., 2017), this paper suggests that trolling behavior is a relational phenomenon, arising out of the relationships between various actors. In this sense and as suggested by our theoretical model of how trolling comes about and is nourished (Fig. 1), the success of consumer misbehaviors such as trolling depends on the whole network of associating actors. These actors include not only trolls, targets, and medium but also other actors such as regulators, artifacts, assistants, audience, revenue streams, and other trolls who celebrate, boost, facilitate, and normalize trolling. These practices support trolling individually and interconnectedly, where one practice has an effect on another (e.g., the celebration of trolling can lead to the normalization of trolling). In this sense one practice, supporting trolling could be interpreted as a side effect of another practice. Our study identifies other ways in which trolling behaviors could be interpreted as a side effect. While from the troll’s perspective trolling acts are always deliberate, the discussion that follows presents how trolling could be understood as an
unintended but not necessarily unanticipated or undesirable consequence of the interactions between the actors joined in the performance of trolling.

First, our research shows that trolling is supported by actions and non-humans “initiated for other purposes” (Giddens, 1993, p. 765) rather than for intentionally supporting trolls or trolling. In this context, we contribute to research on trolling and consumer misbehaviors by unearthing two previously “invisible” actors in trolling: audience members and non-humans. Extending the prior research that argues that trolling is done for trolls’ amusement (e.g., Baker, 2001; Dahlberg, 2001; Hardaker, 2010, 2013), our findings suggest that trolling behaviors have entertainment value also for their spectators. These spectators exert power “in actu” (Latour, 1984, p. 265): they strongly influence the actions of trolls and other actors and allow the trolls to draw the power from the network (Labrecque et al., 2013) and gain some sort of celebrity status through misbehaving. In the light of our finding that even the most ‘passive’ audience members, consuming trolling vicariously (Hartmann et al., 2015), encourage trolling as their presence is noted and made visible to the troll by non-humans such as the number of views button, we question the relevance of framing users as passive or active (cf. Pagani et al., 2011). Instead, we advocate for thinking about them in terms of their actions being more or less visible.

Making audience members’ actions more visible is only one way how non-humans (various material or technical elements) support trolling. This study enhances the understanding of the role of non-humans (bots, buttons, notifications, tech features) in the performance of trolling and illustrates how misbehaving consumers use non-humans in ways unintended by the marketers. Our contribution lies in showing that trolls as an instance of “creative consumers” (Berthon et al., 2007) do not actually need to adapt, modify or transform non-human entities to further their goal to troll, as many of these non-human entities support trolling by design.

The finding that trolling behaviors are in great measure supported by the affordances of online platforms suggests that trolling is to some extent an anticipated side effect. What is more, our
study shows that trolling could be interpreted as a desirable and thus “permitted outcome” (de Zwart, 2015, p. 295). We demonstrate that consumer misbehaviors such as trolling can positively affect targets, trolls, and their followers, platforms, and bystanders, complementing prior research that has identified positive impacts of trolling on online communities (Coles & West, 2016; Cruz et al., 2018; Herring et al., 2002; Hopkinson, 2013; Phillips, 2015). This the first study to propose that, considering the potential positive impacts of trolling, some marketers might be interested in encouraging rather than discouraging these misbehaviors.

On the other hand, this research contributes by highlighting how mischief-making consumer misbehaviors such as trolling may be exacerbated by the marketers’ efforts to manage them. While within the social marketing field, Peattie, Peattie, and Newcombe (2016) demonstrate that marketing interventions may have negative unintended consequences, and the possibility of counterproductive consumer misbehavior managing strategies has been briefly mentioned by Fullerton and Punj (2004), we add empirical support to the idea that there may be surprising unintended consequences in the context of managing consumer misbehaviors. This empirical finding also provides a new understanding of the role of compliance of the actors in the success of the network. Namely, our study demonstrates that the lack of compliance among the actors (e.g., between regulators and a troll) may stabilize and energize the network, rather than destabilize it, as a classical interpretation of actor-network theory would suggest (e.g., Callon, 1984).

Managerial Implications

A better understanding of the trolling practice allows for the development of more tailored, and arguably more effective, ways to manage trolling. Taking into consideration the presented conceptual model of the manifestation of trolling behaviors (see Fig. 1), individual trolling acts can be prevented or disrupted by removing from the actor-network at least one of the three key
actors that are needed for every trolling act to occur: the troll, the trolling-friendly medium, or the target.

First, to remove the troll from the actor-network, managers need to act on an understanding of what attracts trolls to trolling and what spoils trolling for them. While our research has not focused on examining what motivates trolls to troll, our findings suggest that some trolls used trolling to blow off steam after finishing their work as a customer service representative. Such a finding indicates that active management of the emotional labor of service employees could play a role in preventing trolling. Another way trolls could be deterred from trolling is by putting them under unreasonable pressure by asking them to troll more or in a particular way, as good trolling requires planning and inspiration and trolls were found to be discouraged by unrealistic demands. Trolling as a form of play or mischief-making is a “free activity” and “[o]ne plays only if and when one wishes to” (Caillois, 2001, p. 7).

Besides removing the troll from the network, trolling acts may be stopped or interrupted by making the online place less or not at all friendly to trolling. As can be seen from Fig. 1, an online place that has a fitting technical affordance, discernible medium culture, and/or absent or incapable regulators represents a trolling-friendly place. Considering that the technical affordance and medium culture are difficult to change, the most practical approach to make an online place less friendly to trolling is by employing regulators—human and nonhuman actors (e.g., human moderators, autoblock feature) that are capable of dealing with trolling. Our observations of how trolling is (not) enacted suggest that regulators should give the impression that a particular channel is actively monitored (e.g., displaying the online moderator’s status as online) and that sanctions for trolling are applied swiftly (e.g., auto-banning users who keep trolling after being warned once).

Third, managers can disrupt trolling by designing strategies that minimize the chances of a person becoming a target of trolling. In this regard, the actor-network within which a trolling act is
performed may be disrupted by removing one of its obligatory points of passage through which an ‘ordinary’ online user becomes a target of trolling—this is deception. In this sense, managerial and public policy mechanisms that are designed to help recognize trolling and trolls are of key importance. An example of such a mechanism would be to introduce troll badges that would mark online users as trolls and warn their potential targets. Such a tactic would be appropriate for cases when a target of the trolling is a consumer. In the case of brands being the targets, online community managers should be trained to identify (il)legitimate complainants, in order to make sure that they are fair to consumers with genuine complaints (Reynolds & Harris, 2005) who exhibit some troll-like characteristics.

While removing the troll, trolling-friendly medium, or target would, theoretically speaking, break the network and prevent trolling acts from occurring and/or continuing, we have to acknowledge that these strategies are not always practical, workable, or desirable in practice. In particular, we challenge the effectiveness and feasibility of focusing on removing the trolls, as among all the actors in the network, trolls may be the most difficult to manage: they are difficult to both identify and catch. There is an additional challenge with the removal of the troll from the network in the sense that this does not necessarily lead to the collapse of the network. The trolling networks consist of many other actors the trolls did or did not intentionally enlist who, at least temporarily, continue associating in the absence of the troll. Together, this suggests that marketing practitioners who exclusively concentrate their efforts on deterring perpetrators of trolling-like misbehaviors are, at best, only temporarily solving the problems of misbehavior and most likely only displacing those behaviors to other times and places.

A better option to manage misbehaving consumers would be to manage the socio-technical networks that allow and feed these misbehaviors. The findings of this study suggest that without managing the audience and other, at first glance invisible, actors, it will be difficult to stymy trolling behaviors. To break the networks within which trolling exist and thrive, marketing
practitioners should develop and employ actions that do not unintentionally support trolling by celebrating it, boosting it, facilitating it, or normalizing it. An example of a trolling-management tactic in the spirit of suppressing the celebration of trolling behaviors would be to hide the viewing metrics on the trolling content. Demonetizing trolling content by marking such content as advertising-unfriendly is an example of a marketing tactic that would not boost trolling. To stop facilitating trolling, marketers of platforms should re-introduce friction for creation of new accounts. Last, to stop normalizing more distasteful and notorious trolling, brand community managers should be quick and decisive in imposing sanctions (e.g., sending warnings, banning users) for trolling that violates their community rules and could negatively impact brand performance or the experience of other online users.

While eliminating trolling entirely might not be possible, our research suggests that some brands and online communities might strive to encourage trolling in anticipation of positive side effects such as increased traffic to their communities. In any case, managers should avoid completely ignoring trolling and other similar misbehaviors, as management inaction violates consumers’ expectations that marketers will address these misbehaviors (Bacile et al., 2018; Fullerton & Punj, 2004) and could impact brands adversely (see Gensler et al., 2013). In selecting strategies to address trolling, managers need to balance the need to protect users from potential harm of trolling and “the need to enable a diversity of expressions – including ironic, disruptive, or playful ones – to emerge” within their communities (Cruz et al., 2018, p. 26).

Future Research Opportunities

Future research should continue to examine the relationships between the different actors involved in trolling. One fruitful area for further work would be to examine systematically the (un)intended effects of online trolling on the targets of trolling (i.e., brands and consumers) and its observers. Firms would benefit from understanding how trolling affects brands differently. A particularly interesting and currently unexplored research topic would be the investigation of
trolling in the context when a brand is not the target or the medium but rather the perpetrator of trolling, mocking their competitors, person-brands, or public (e.g., Future Proof Media, 2019). Future research could also investigate the management of trolling, especially from the perspective of how different actors independently and collaboratively attempt to deal with trolling. It would be useful to better understand how management of trolling on the part of one actor impacts other actors’ actions, their (community) engagement, and their attitudes toward the community/brand or medium where trolling occurs.

Most of the limitations of our research (e.g., focus on more successful or renowned trolls, silencing other actors’ points of view by taking the trolls as a point of departure in exploring the network, and small number of interviews) could be addressed in future studies. One limitation, however, is unavoidable and an unintended consequence in itself. By reporting about trolling, this study unintentionally celebrates, potentially boosts, facilitates, and normalizes such misbehaviors. At best, our research expands our knowledge of this poorly understood phenomenon. At worst, it is a guide on how to troll.
### Tables

#### Table 1
The outline of data collection techniques employed in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of data</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Case#1 (Ollie)</th>
<th>Case#2 (Alfie)</th>
<th>Case#3 (Jon)</th>
<th>Case#4 (Flinn &amp; Antonio)</th>
<th>Case#5 (Otto)</th>
<th>External context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elicited Reflexive</td>
<td>In-depth interviews</td>
<td>1 troll</td>
<td>1 troll</td>
<td>1 troll</td>
<td>2 trolls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elicited Reflexive</td>
<td>Short electronic exchanges</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 trolls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival Reflexive</td>
<td>Review of trolling-related documents</td>
<td>Trolling-relevant laws in UK, AUS, NZ, and USA</td>
<td>Trolling-related newspaper articles and blog entries</td>
<td>Social platform’s terms of use and community guidelines</td>
<td>Podcasts on online community management</td>
<td>YouTube clips on trolling</td>
<td>1 troll + 3 community managers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

330 hours of non-participant covert and overt observation of trolling behaviors
Table 2
Specification of the utilized methods and data sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of data</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Data sources</th>
<th>Case connection</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archival data</td>
<td>Continuous observation of trolling practices (Time period: October 2015-August 2017)</td>
<td>Alfie’s subreddit, Alfie’s Facebook page, Alfie’s Twitter page, Alfie’s Tumblr page, Alfie’s media interviews, Alfie’s posts on Yahoo News, YouTube, and Facebook brand pages</td>
<td>Alfie</td>
<td>To gain a rich understanding of the trolling in the making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival data</td>
<td>Continuous observation of trolling practices (Time period: October 2015-August 2017)</td>
<td>Ollie’s subreddit, Ollie’s Facebook page, Ollie’s Twitter page, Ollie’s YouTube channel, Ollie’s Twitch channel, Ollie’s Patreon channel, and Ollie’s media interview</td>
<td>Ollie</td>
<td>To gain a rich understanding of the trolling in the making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival data</td>
<td>Sporadic observation of trolling practices (Time period: October 2015-August 2017)</td>
<td>Jon’s Facebook profiles, Jon’s posts on Facebook, Jon’s trolling web-page, and Jon’s media interviews</td>
<td>Jon</td>
<td>To gain a rich understanding of the trolling in the making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival data</td>
<td>Sporadic observation of trolling practices (Time period: October 2015-August 2017)</td>
<td>Raid Board online community, Raid Board’ members postings on YouTube, and Raid Board’ members activity on Twitch</td>
<td>Flinn and Antonio</td>
<td>To gain a rich understanding of the trolling in the making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival data</td>
<td>Sporadic observation of trolling practices (Time period: October 2015-August 2017)</td>
<td>Otto’s Facebook page, Otto’s posts on Facebook, and Otto’s media interviews</td>
<td>Otto</td>
<td>To gain a rich understanding of the trolling in the making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival data</td>
<td>Sporadic observation of trolling practices (Time period: October 2015-August 2017)</td>
<td>Subreddit intended for posting trolling requests (created by Luke)</td>
<td>External context</td>
<td>To gain a rich understanding of the trolling in the making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival data</td>
<td>Sporadic observation of trolling practices (Time period: October 2015-August 2017)</td>
<td>Reddit Armie subreddit and Reddit Armie’s members posts on YouTube</td>
<td>External context</td>
<td>To gain a rich understanding of the trolling in the making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival data</td>
<td>Sporadic observation of trolling practices (Time period: October 2015-August 2017)</td>
<td>Daily mail comments sections</td>
<td>External context</td>
<td>To gain a rich understanding of the trolling in the making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival data</td>
<td>Sporadic observation of trolling practices (Time period: October 2015-August 2017)</td>
<td>David Thorne’s webpage (<a href="http://www.27bslash6.com">www.27bslash6.com</a>), David Thorne’s book, and David Thorne’s media interviews</td>
<td>External context</td>
<td>To gain a rich understanding of the trolling in the making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival data</td>
<td>Sporadic observation of trolling practices (Time period: October 2015-August 2017)</td>
<td>John Lindsay’s webpage (<a href="http://www.don'tevenreply.com">www.don'tevenreply.com</a>)</td>
<td>External context</td>
<td>To gain a rich understanding of the trolling in the making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of data</td>
<td>Method</td>
<td>Data sources</td>
<td>Case connection</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elicited data</td>
<td>In-depth online video interview (Skype)</td>
<td>Twitch channel of a troll gamer</td>
<td>External context</td>
<td>To understand the research context. To contextualize the observations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Facebook Safety page</td>
<td>External context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gaming forum (Blizzard)</td>
<td>External context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Trolling-relevant laws in UK, AUS, NZ, and USA</td>
<td>External context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Media-generated articles and blog posts (Google Alert for keywords troll and/or trolling in the title)</td>
<td>External context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Social platform’s terms of use and community guidelines (Facebook, Reddit, Twitch, Twitter, YouTube, 4chan)</td>
<td>External context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Podcast on online community management (Community Signal)</td>
<td>External context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>YouTube videos on trolling (free search)</td>
<td>External context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Encyclopedia Dramatica (satirical website of Internet-related issues)</td>
<td>External context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In-depth interview over IM (Facebook Messenger)</td>
<td>Alfie</td>
<td>Alfie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ollie</td>
<td>Ollie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jon</td>
<td>Jon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In-depth interview over IM (Skype)</td>
<td>Flinn</td>
<td>Flinn and Antonio</td>
<td>To understand trolling practices from the trolls'/community managers’ perspective. To clarify or enrich the understanding of trolling practices, especially the processes involved in trolling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In-depth interview over IM (Google talk)</td>
<td>Antonio</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In-depth interview over IM (Stinto chat)</td>
<td>Luke</td>
<td>External context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In-depth interview over IM (Skype)</td>
<td>Eli</td>
<td>External context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 online community managers of religion-related subreddit</td>
<td>External context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexive data</td>
<td>Fieldnotes</td>
<td>Alfie, Ollie, Jon, Flinn, Antonio, Otto, and external context</td>
<td>To describe observations and to capture researcher’s thoughts and reflections about the observations, research process, and theorization.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research log</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3
Number of coded actors within a particular actor-network

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Number of coded actors</th>
<th>Number of coded interactions between the actors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ollie</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfie</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jon</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flinn and Antonio</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otto</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In total</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>1308</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fig. 1. Trolling in action: Actors and associations enacting trolling
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of actors</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples of sub-categories of actors</th>
<th>Empirical illustration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Troll(s)</td>
<td>Performer(s) of trolling</td>
<td>Troll’s identity</td>
<td>Although trolling under pseudonyms, Alfie and Otto presented themselves with their full names in the interviews they gave for the media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Troll’s psychographics</td>
<td>Interests mentioned by the troll informants were playing video games and coding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Troll’s skillset</td>
<td>The ability to hold back laughter was mentioned as an important strategy in deceiving the target in trolling in prank calling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Troll’s belonging to a team</td>
<td>Raids are usually done in teams of five to ten members, who agreed to take on a particular role (e.g., identifying the target, social engineering, recording the trolling).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target(s)</td>
<td>Person(s) and businesses/brands that are experiencing trolling</td>
<td>Brands</td>
<td>Raiders were prank calling businesses (e.g., they called McDonald’s and convinced the employee to unintentionally pull the fire alarm).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Consumers</td>
<td>Trolling was experienced by the players of video games such as Rust and DayZ, by the users of the platforms Twitch and Facebook, and by the buyers of the brands such as Target, Doritos, Victoria’s secret and Pizza Hut.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Channel on which trolling occurs</td>
<td>Video game</td>
<td>Ollie has been seen trolling within video game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Facebook page</td>
<td>Otto has been seen trolling on Facebook page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Livestream chat</td>
<td>Raiders have been seen trolling in livestream chat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Phone call</td>
<td>Raiders have been seen trolling during phone calls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Comments section</td>
<td>Alfie have been seen trolling in comments sections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>All the channels were trolling occurred required an internet connection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other trolls</td>
<td>Other people engaging in trolling</td>
<td>Competitors</td>
<td>Trolls are competing with other trolls for the targets and the attention of the audience (in the form of likes, shares, views, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Role models</td>
<td>Each interviewed troll mentioned at least one other troll who he or she is following and admiring. “I’ve got inspired by charliezzz’s character Esteben Winsmore who makes funny “troll videos” for Second Life. I figured I could give my own take on it, and made one video for it” (Ollie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dissociative trolls</td>
<td>The trolls that one does not want to be associated with. “I wouldn't necessarily call it [being called a troll] an insult, it's more like it waters down what I'm actually trying to do. Since there are so many people on YouTube making videos where they just make people mad over VOIP in games like Call of Duty, that's some of the most uninspired &amp; boring things you can do.” (Ollie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category of actors</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Examples of sub-categories of actors</td>
<td>Empirical illustration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>Spectators of trolling watching asynchronously or synchronously</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troll baits</td>
<td></td>
<td>Informants reported that some individuals pretend to be a target in order to attract trolls. “They make themselves easy target for ignorant and inexperienced trolls who, craving for experience, will attempt to grab this low-hanging fruit.” (Eli)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewers</td>
<td></td>
<td>While it cannot be said for sure how many people have seen the fake ad that Jon posted in the London buy and sell group, the fact that this group had more than 45,000 members suggests that at least some of these members have seen his posts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fans</td>
<td></td>
<td>Some followers demand new content. “That demand will never go away as long as people still like what I do… It would be great if there was a little less expectation of new stuff.” (Alfie).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upstanders</td>
<td></td>
<td>“THE GOD HAS UPLOADED! MORE FREQUENTLY NOW PLEASE” (commentator on Ollie’s YouTube video).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td></td>
<td>Some members of the audience witness trolling and get involved. “There was this one time I made this Rust video, and I was going after this person and then one of his clanmembers got in and said he knew my vids. That shit is always annoying.” (Ollie)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td></td>
<td>Our informants were mentioned in the media and these articles were passed around by the trolls themselves and fans.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videos</td>
<td>Materialised byproducts of trolling</td>
<td>In the case of trolling within video games, trolls and fans are making short videos encapsulating the instances of successful trolling. The videos are then shared on social media.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screenshots</td>
<td></td>
<td>Trolls and fans are making screenshots of trolling acts and sharing them on social media.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livestreams</td>
<td></td>
<td>Audience members watch live streams of trolling. For instance, one of Ollie’s trolling broadcasts has been watched by more than 1,000 people.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriated materials</td>
<td></td>
<td>A fan made the ringtone from a siren that Ollie used for trolling.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media articles</td>
<td></td>
<td>Several screenshots of trolling are provided in the article titled “Trap the sicko: Facebook troll hijacks mum’s profile and ‘offers’ her children for sale to paedophiles”.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulators</td>
<td>Actors engaged in managing online experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downvote button</td>
<td></td>
<td>Audience’s downvoting does not seem to discourage trolling. “I always get downvotes…It’s funny when people downvote somebody that’s so obviously stupid anyway” (Alfie)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-human online moderators</td>
<td></td>
<td>Twitch users can set up AutoMod which checks for potentially problematic text in chat.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ban button</td>
<td></td>
<td>Being banned is a signal of successful trolling. “We know raid is successful when the person either ends stream or starts mass banning everyone.” (Antonio)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category of actors</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Examples of sub-categories of actors</td>
<td>Empirical illustration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction buttons</td>
<td>Turn off button, for instance, enabled a targeted Twitch streamer to turn off his computer, hastily finishing the livestream. A similar function was played by close window button.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police and court</td>
<td>While not having personal experiences with police or court, the informants reported about other trolls who were prosecuted and even arrested for trolling.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business proposals</td>
<td>Trolls are receiving requests for trolling from businesses. “I had small business owners asking me to troll their page…” (Alfie). Also, one of our informant has landed a deal to publish a book on trolling.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donate button</td>
<td>While watching livestreams of trolling, fans use the donate button to donate money to the troll. Viewer commentators encourage other viewers to donate money to the troll.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subscription button</td>
<td>Audience members want to be informed about new trolling acts. One of our troll informants has his own dedicated subreddit with 245,626 subscribers, more than 70,000 likes of his official Facebook page, and more than 52,000 followers on Twitter.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of views button</td>
<td>Trolls, fans, and media are checking how many times a particular live stream or video has been viewed. Trolls use the number of views to compare themselves to other trolls.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicity</td>
<td>One of our informants was included in a magazine’s list of the 30 most influential people on the internet. Another troll received an award from a social media platform for posting the most inciteful comment.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant emotional states</td>
<td>For Jon, trolling was a way to entertain himself and relax after work: “I’ve never been one for watching tv, done all the video games, was playing call of duty, and injured my arm (not playing xbox) so couldn’t play for months – and wound up doing this. Its just entertainment, or a way of winding down after work. – for me anyhow.”</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardware</td>
<td>Alfie is using a physical recorder to record his prank calls.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborators</td>
<td>Experienced trolls mobilize new actors to enact their agenda. Raiders had ordered 50 pizzas and asked the pizza company to deliver them to the target’s home address.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Software</td>
<td>Experienced trolls mobilize new actors to enact their agenda. “Say for example, a user sees a post on Reddit of which he is suspicious. All he needs to do is click on your username and see that the account is a few hours old, and he instantly realises that it is a throwaway account, simply made for trolling…The obvious solution is to make a large number of accounts on one day and let them age.” (Elis)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Trolls advise others on how to troll. One of the informants published a trolling tutorial online titled “The Art of Trolling.” The tutorial covers Laying Plans, Deceiving the Victim, Variations in Stratagem, Bait, Counter-Trolling and Anti-Trolls, and the Troll on the Move.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fig. 2. An example of Alfie trolling brand community manager on Facebook corporate channel.
Table 5
Overview of the interrelated practices supporting trolling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the practice</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Actors* most likely to be involved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Celebrating trolling</td>
<td>Actors praise and honor trolling behaviours and trolls</td>
<td>Audience, trolling artifacts, revenue streams, other trolls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boosting trolling</td>
<td>Actors promote and encourage trolling</td>
<td>Audience, regulators, revenue streams, assistants, other trolls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating trolling</td>
<td>Actors make trolling behaviours easier to perform</td>
<td>Assistants, regulators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normalizing trolling</td>
<td>Actors position trolling as an ordinary, taken-for-granted part of the online experience</td>
<td>Trolling artifacts, other trolls, audience, regulators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Troll, target and medium are present in all trolling acts.
Appendices

Appendix A. Presentation of Cases

Ollie

Ollie is performing playful trolling. He is trolling within multi-player video games such as Second Life, Rust and DayZ. His trolling is occasionally livestreamed on Twitch and/or edited into the short videos of trolling highlights, posted on YouTube or other social media channels. Ollie himself describes his trolling as an “experiment on people in videogames whilst doing low brow comedy.” Some of his trolling activities include locking people in their own virtual houses and calling the police under the pretension their houses are being robbed, as a virtual taxi driver dropping customers off at deserted places and driving the taxis into the water and annoying other players with driving around in his virtual truck and playing loud and repeating jingles. In the most basic sense, his trolling includes using, misusing or abusing the basic game features, while acting like he is doing nothing wrong. One of his followers described Ollie’s method of trolling as “so direct but indirect at the same time, just blissful ignorance. It takes a genius to be that stupid.”

Alfie

Alfie is performing good old-fashioned trolling. Alfie describes his online troll persona as a “good-hearted, sweet geriatric moron.” His trolling resembles the type of trolling from the early days of the Internet, when trolling included posting intentionally incorrect messages in a non-blatant way in order to lure others into a response (Donath, 1999; Herring et al., 2002). Similarly, Alfie posts ill-informed comments under the news articles on Yahoo News, on Facebook brand pages and Yelp profiles. Alfie, for example, intentionally misunderstands the content, pretends that he does not know how to use a computer or other technology, or simply plays ignorant. The following comments published on the Subway Facebook page epitomize his typical light-hearted style of trolling.

Alfie: safe for folks who are on a free gluten diet?
Subway: Hi [Alfie], thanks for asking, we are currently testing some gluten free products in select stores. The test is only happening in few cities, but we’ll let all of our fans know how it all turns out. Stay tuned…
Alfie: thank you. my doctor, says I can eat gluten as long as it don’t cost nothing, will you have free gluten in your local store?
Jon

Jon is performing shock trolling. His trolling content is provocative at best and morally offensive at worst. Jon’s trolling is limited to Facebook. In particular, he trolls by creating Facebook events and posting comments within Facebook buy and sell groups. An example of his trolling included inviting member of online animal welfare groups to his newly created Facebook event of Christmas dog-punching party. Another example of this shock trolling is Jon’s classified advertisement that was posted in the public Leeds Buy Sell Swap Facebook group, stating:

Darkies wanted for dog fight training. £10 per day and free chicken. White kids that speak like a coon because they think its cool . . . need not apply.

Flinn and Antonio

Flinn and Antonio are performing online pranking and raiding (i.e., strategically invading other online users’ channels). They both belong to Raid Board, an online community where users discuss and plan raiding activities. Most of these activities are conducted on Twitch—a livestreaming video platform, where raiders such as Flinn and Antonio spam comments sections, hijack the user’s livestream, and try to convince users to do something that would damage their computers. These activities are, according to Encyclopedia Dramatica, a satirical wiki site, carried out at a specific time and from a specific location. They are, typically, livestreamed on Twitch and/or recorded for later editing and viewing. The raiders’ case, embodying organized/group trolling, provides an additional variety to our dataset that consists of trolling that does not seem to be a coordinated activity.

Otto

Otto is performing fake customer service trolling. Better understanding of this type of trolling is particularly relevant for marketers, as it occurs on Facebook brand pages. Pretending to be a customer representative, Otto provides a response to an online customer who posted a complaint. This response ranges from being light-hearted to purely offensive. The following excerpt, taken from Arby’s (i.e., American fast food sandwich restaurant) illustrates Otto’s style of trolling:

Customer: Dear Arby’s, Your BLT looks NOTHING like on Tv or on your signage. This is fraud!!!
Otto pretending to be Customer Service: Hi [customer], The food in our commercials are like a Tinder profile picture. Everything looks great until you see it in person. Hope that explanation helped!
**Luke and Eli**

While Luke, an Anonymous member, was an expert in raiding, sms bombing, and site editing, Eli described his/her trolling expertise as “posting unpopular opinions . . . and getting people to believe [s/he] actually held those opinions.” Luke and Eli correspond to what is called in this study an external context—the data sources that were not a part of our case studies but informed their understanding.

**Table A.1. Overview of the key characteristics of the selected cases**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Main trolling strategy (Hardaker, 2013)</th>
<th>Trolling channel</th>
<th>Number of people trolling</th>
<th>Trolling target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ollie</td>
<td>Digress, Antipathise</td>
<td>Video games (Second Life, Rust, and DayZ)</td>
<td>One troll</td>
<td>Gamers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfie</td>
<td>Digress, Antipathise</td>
<td>Facebook brand pages, Online news sites (Yahoo News) and Reviews sites (Yelp)</td>
<td>One troll</td>
<td>Online community managers, visitors of Facebook brand pages, news sites and review sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jon</td>
<td>Shock, Aggress</td>
<td>Facebook Events and Facebook buy &amp; sell groups</td>
<td>One troll</td>
<td>Facebook users, members of Facebook buy &amp; sell groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flinn &amp; Antonio</td>
<td>Endanger, Agress</td>
<td>Livestreaming platform (Twitch)</td>
<td>Group of trolls</td>
<td>Users of livestreaming platforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otto</td>
<td>Hypocriticise, Mock</td>
<td>Facebook (brand) pages</td>
<td>One troll</td>
<td>Online community managers, people visiting and posting on Facebook (brand) pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke (external context)</td>
<td>Endanger (and various non-trolling strategies such as hacktivism and cyberbullying)</td>
<td>Mobile phone (sms), 4chan, Yahoo Answers</td>
<td>One troll &amp; Group of trolls</td>
<td>Visitors of 4chan, people posting questions on Yahoo Answers, Firms, Ex-friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eli (external context)</td>
<td>Antipathise</td>
<td>YouTube comments</td>
<td>One troll</td>
<td>People uploading videos on YouTube, people posting and commenting on YouTube videos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B. An illustrative example of the actors participating in trolling

Figure B.1. Interactive visualization of the actors performing in Flinn and Antonio’s network

Figure B.2. Visualization of the actors performing in Flinn and Antonio’s network
Appendix C. Additional illustrative data examples

Figure C.1. A data example demonstrating the absence of elaborate criteria in selecting trolling targets (Flinn and Antonio’s case)

Figure C.2. High number of people following, liking and commenting on Alfie and Ollie’s content posted on YouTube, Reddit and Facebook

Figure C.3. Examples of media headlines covering trolling

‘usband’ Strikes Again! 40 Hilarious Comments From The Internet’s Biggest (And Funniest) Troll

45 Times husband Was A National Treasure For Amazing Acts of Trolling

Sick husband Facebook page pulled down after 20,000 animal lovers sign petition against vile husband
Figure C.4. An example of a fan asking Ollie to troll him

Figure C.5. Facebook post and cover page of a troll mocking the regulators’ attempts to stop trolling (Jon’s case)
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