

Savage Minds

Notes and Queries in Anthropology

How Trolls make Arguments better (!)

🕒 December 15, 2009

👤 ckelty

This is the most incredibly awesome analysis of trolling ever.

📄 Blog post

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8 thoughts on “How Trolls make Arguments better (!)”



December 16, 2009 at 1:07 am

John
McCreery

Chris,

Are we missing a link here?



December 16, 2009 at 11:32 am

Carl

I thought the analysis completely missed the point. It's a matter of elementary logic, using their own data:

1. There were trolls in the past: Socrates and the Sophists
2. Socrates and the Sophists are all dead

Therefore, conclusion so obvious only an idiot could miss it:

3. There are no trolls in the present.

;-p

special knowledge lacked by the profane masses;
demonstrating this is an act of devotion.



Hugh Jarvis

December 17, 2009 at 8:20 am

Agreed, it is the best I have seen yet.... But that' snot saying much. Much of the essay reinforces the limited construct that trolls are just argumentative people, and perhaps even serve a useful purpose, shoring up other people's arguments and social skills.

I agree there are disruptive people on any forum, but trolls and other sociopaths are a different animal entirely. They are uniquely motivated to destroy any rational or constructive discourse. This knowledge is noted in fragments throughout the piece, but it seems the authors' desire to befriend their subjects overtook their analysis.



Hugh Jarvis

December 17, 2009 at 8:27 am

ps. the article Chris cites is "Conversation Hackers":
[http://www.cognitionandculture.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=559:conversation-hackers-trolls-argumentation&catid=32:oliviers-blog&Itemid=34] by Olivier Morin and Sophie Claudel.



Hugh Jarvis

December 17, 2009 at 8:29 am

Textile is rather silly. "Here's another attempt to embed that URL.":http://www.cognitionandculture.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=559:conversation-hackers-trolls-argumentation&catid=32:oliviers-blog&Itemid=34



John
McCreery

December 17, 2009 at 8:36 am

Textile is, let's face it, an absolute pain in the ass. Most sites I go to come equipped with formatting buttons. And three common HTML commands for links, blockquotes, and italic are enough for most purposes. Yes, one could try to learn textile. But why bother, when it's never used anywhere else? Can we get our Pensée Sauvage around that?



MTBradley

Have the comments in this thread been trollish by design?



Carl

December 17, 2009 at 10:48 am

Hugh, I agree that the true vocational troll is more than just an extraordinarily argumentative person. There's a threshold on the continuum. But what I liked about the article (which I did find a little superficial, I must admit, but it's a blog post so ideally the nuances come out in the commentary there, here, and anywhere else the conversation gets taken up) is the refusal to reflexively defend a purified image of discourse by ritually casting out the Evil Other. And trollery is therefore taken to be a strategy of intervention rather than an essence of persons, which I think is correct.

In one sense trollery is no more than a matter of perspective: any of us may appear trollish in the heat of argument (and there are ways of deflecting or withdrawing that are every bit as trollish in their subversion of the dialogic project). Perhaps this shouldn't even be called trolling, as they say. I don't know how well they do at drawing this out, but true trollery is interesting as a perversion of empathy: on the one hand, the perspective of the other has to be taken to determine what strategy will most successfully infuriate and derail them; on the other hand obviously that project is not empathetically mindful of the other.

I think they're right that it's generally a power game. But again I think they miss the religious element of special knowledge, and therefore their analysis won't quite open out into a consideration of how trollery, like so many other aspects of net life, might be a 'natural' outcome of modern anomie.

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