

Trolling Affordances

To troll is to, "make a deliberately offensive or provocative online post with the aim of upsetting someone or eliciting an angry response from them." We can find abundant examples of trolling behavior in certain online spaces. Argue for what specific affordances (2 or more) of online platforms, as discussed in this weeks readings (Boyd 2010; Tufekci 2017; and Bernstein et al 2011), could explain trolling?

Affordances and Trolling

Through the lens of searchability, online platforms such as Twitter that utilize a “report-and-takedown” governance model have baked an affordance into the design of the system that encourages trolling. In this model, it is up to users to search, find, and report inappropriate content. Of course there are reasons why this schema developed; companies want to keep costs low and legally protect themselves from being responsible for the nature of content on their platforms. However, such a system “puts the burden on the user, a notion that may make sense for small communities but breaks down when hundreds of millions of people or even more are using a platform.” (Tufekci 2017, p. 181). This is because on Twitter, content persists. As an act of deliberate provocation, trolls feed on reaction, and the fact that content has to be individually discovered, and that content remains until it can be individually reviewed and processed, creates a lag in governance that allows trolls to flourish.

The design of 4chan’s “bumping” mechanism to prolong the persistence of content on the site is another design affordance that propagates trolling. This is because trolls seek reaction, and the more vitriolic the content, the longer that content

stays on the platform. Such a design affordance yields “not necessarily...what individuals want to have scaled or what they think should be scaled, but what the collective chooses to amplify” (Boyd 2010, p. 9). Further, in the world of bits, there is no way to differentiate and/or protect original content once it begins to evolve via bumping and comment threads. This replicability is still subject to the rules of persistence, creating an environment where offensive or provocative behavior is encouraged and rewarded.