

Are you an Internet troll?

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Do you know what a troll is? Have you ever got upset, enjoyed, or being fooled by their “inflammatory” messages?

In a quick and simple internet search we found that a troll is a man or woman who posts provocative messages online in certain communities: discussion forums, chat rooms, blogs, social networks like *Facebook* or *Twitter*, or digital media.

The goal of those offensive comments may vary; namely, to generate a common climate of opinions, to insult, confuse, discredit, or camouflage reality for pure entertainment or evil intentions.

In general, they use false identities to “stir up” the web anonymously without risk of being identified.

“Secrecy” is precisely what makes these annoying users “valiant”. It causes a psychological effect named **online disinhibition** (they dare to say or write things they could not say or write face to face).

### **Troll Psychology**

Some experts support the idea that a troll is not able to sense others as human beings. What’s more, they see others as a target or a sort of digital abstraction due to the lack of physical dialogue.

Psychologists from the Canadian Universities of Manitoba, Winnipeg, and British Columbia recently released a research on Troll's psychology. They recorded that trolls vent their sorrows in the internet. Likewise, experts advise to ignore them. Thus, they are not "fed" anymore and they are forced to leave since their degree of satisfaction is null.

However, in Whitney Phillips' view (She is professor at the State University of Humboldt and wrote a book —pending edition— on her experience studying misconduct online) "while the internet keeps on operating on the basis of an economy supported by a clique, trolls will be always there because they are fully equipped to exploit the way media are spread these days".

### **Attraction for Famous People**

The research also shows that some trolls feel attracted to famous people due to the attention generated by the yellow press and some users.

It happened with Robin Williams' death (suicide), which made headlines for some days, exciting trolls' morbidity. They did not stop until American actor's daughter was forced off social media.

Some newspapers revealed Zelda Williams was forced off *Twitter* and *Instagram* after receiving some edited pictures of her father's corpse and negative comments of some users allusive to suicide.

At the end of 2012, another troll caused panic among some sport celebrities by revealing on *Twitter* their phone numbers. In matters of minutes, such private information became accessible to the public. Some media also echoed this information, and Gerard Pique and Cristiano Ronaldo's private phones did not stop ringing.

Woodhouse was another well-known case. He was a former English football player and boxer in present days. At the end of 2013, he lost his mind because of a troll (@Jimmyob88) who attacked him every day on *Twitter*.

In one of those bad days some people have, Woodhouse lost an important fight and his troll called him a coward. According to *The Telegraph*, the boxer, sick and tired of those attacks, posted a message offering 500 British Pounds to the one who gives him information about the address of his troll house. Five minutes later, he had the information. He drove his car more than 50 miles until he reached the neighborhood of his digital aggressor.

"First he thought I was kidding, and kept on sending me more cruel messages, but when I got to his street, I took pictures of a signboard near his house and he realized I was really close. He then started to eat his own words, saying he was sorry, basically crying on Twitter", Woodhouse added.

### **False Profiles**

Although it is a simple joke, many users have seen compromised their dignity when trolls create false profiles on their behalf. And that is another troll's characteristic, named online spoofing.

They are prone to falsify identities of popular people, from politicians to celebrities. They even write messages as if they were the celebrity spoofed aiming to gain other users' trust.

To minimize the adverse effects of such fraud, some place have taken measures. In California there is a law since 2001 that prohibits Internet spoofing. Those involve may face fines up to 1,000 USD or one year jail.

The law sets that any person who impersonates a real one through a website or any electronic media with the purpose of offending, intimidating, threatening, or deceiving other person is guilty of a minor crime.

But not all states or countries have these laws and reality shows criminals are not always caught.

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