Chapter 10
The Psychology of Trolling and Lurking:
The Role of Defriending and Gamification for Increasing Participation in Online Communities Using Seductive Narratives

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ABSTRACT

The rise of social networking services have furthered the proliferation of online communities, transferring the power of controlling access to content from often one person who operates a system (sysop), which they would normally rely on, to them personally. With increased participation in social networking and services come new problems and issues, such as trolling, where unconstructive messages are posted to incite a reaction, and lurking, where persons refuse to participate. Methods of dealing with these abuses included defriending, which can include blocking strangers. The Gamified Flow of Persuasion model is proposed, building on work in ecological cognition and the participation continuum, the chapter shows how all of these models can collectively be used with gamification principles to increase participation in online communities through effective management of lurking, trolling, and defriending.

INTRODUCTION

The study of online communities has led to such colourful expressions as trolling, flaming, spamming, and flooding being developed in order to describe behaviours that benefit some people while disrupting others (Lampe & Resnick, 2004). Since the proliferation of technologies like the '*circle-of-friends*' (COF) for managing friends lists in online communities (Romm & Setzekom, 2008), the use of the Internet to build online communities, especially using social networking services

has grown – but so has the amount of Internet abuse on these platforms. Facebook is currently one of the more popular COF-based websites (Davis, 2008). In addition to this, microblogging, such as Twitter, have 'status updates', which are as important a part of social networks Facebook and Google+, as the circle of friends is. These technologies have made possible the instantaneous expression of and access to opinion into memes that others can access quickly, creating what is called, 'The public square' (Tapscott & Williams, 2010) . The public square is the ability to publish and control editorial policy, and is currently available to all with access to and competency in using the Internet and online social networking services.

It is clear in today's age that there are a lot of demands on people's time, and they have to prioritise which social networking services, or other media or activity they use. This is often based on which is most gratifying and least discomforting. It has become apparent that introducing gaming elements into such environments, where they would not usually be – a concept called 'gamification' – can increase interest and retention in them. Such systems can promote positive activities by members and reduce the number of people not taking part, called 'lurkers' (Bishop, 2009c; Efimova, 2009). It can also promote activities like 'trolling' where content is created for the 'lulz' of it – that is for the fun of it. These can have upsides and downsides, but it is clear gamification can play a part in managing it.

The Problem of Lurking and Trolling Behaviour

Besides social software, gamification and consumerisation have been identified as the big themes for cloud applications (Kil, 2010). Gamification offers online community managers, also known as systems operators (sysops), the opportunity for a structured system that allows for equitable distribution of resources and fair treatment among members. Finding new ways to makes ones' website grow is a challenge for any sysop, so gamification may be the key. Often this is looked on in a technical way, where such platforms are encouraged to move from simple resource archives toward adding new ways of communicating and functioning (Maxwell & Miller, 2008). It is known that if an online community has the right technology, the right policies, the right content, pays attention to the strata it seeks to attract, and knows its purpose and values then it can grow almost organically (Bishop, 2009c). A potential problem stalling the growth of an online community is lack of participation of members in posting content, as even with the right technology there is often still a large number of 'lurkers' who are not participating (Bishop, 2007b). Lurkers are defined as online community members who visit and use an online community but who do not post messages, who unlike posters, are not enhancing the community in any way in a give and take relationship and do not have any direct social interaction with the community (Beike & Wirth-Beaumont, 2005). Lurking is the normal behaviour of the most online community members and reflects the level of participation, either as no posting at all or as some minimal level of posting (Efimova, 2009). Lurkers may have once posted, but remain on the periphery due to a negative experience.

Indeed, it has been shown that lurkers are often less enthusiastic about the benefits of community membership (Howard, 2010). Lurkers may become socially isolated, where they isolate themselves from the peer group (i.e. social withdrawal), or are isolated by the peer group (i.e. social rejection) (Chen, Harper, Konstan, & Li, 2009). Trolling is known to amplify this type of social exclusion, as being a form of baiting, trolling often involved the Troller seeking out people who don't share a particular opinion and trying to irritate them into a response (Poor, 2005).

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