

Chapter 3

Trolling Brands and Consumers in the Era of Social Media: The Trolling Phenomenon in Business Contexts

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ABSTRACT

The author of this chapter reviews the literature on the trolling behaviors of online users and proposes a conceptual framework to elucidate the role of the trolling phenomenon in marketing-related contexts. At first, this chapter presents a comprehensive multi-disciplinary investigation that builds upon previous conceptualizations of trolling behaviors. Based on this investigation, the author summarizes the fundamental and distinctive characteristics of trolling acts. Then, this chapter suggests a conceptual framework that explains mechanisms predicting these behaviors and potential outcomes. Finally, this chapter provides a detailed overview of the antecedents and consequences of trolling behaviors by consumers against brands and other consumers in online contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

Consumer misbehavior is a widely known phenomenon in marketing literature. Marketing and consumer researchers have scrutinized this phenomenon since the 90s (e.g., Fullerton and Punj 1993; 1998; Dodge et al., 1996) and conceptualized its types and scope in detail (e.g., Fisk et al., 2010). These behaviors include dysfunctional behaviors of customers such as aggression (Yagil, 2008), sexual harassment (Yagil, 2008), incivility (Walker et al., 2014), shoplifting (Babin and Babin, 1996), sabotage (Harris and Ogbonna, 2009). However, the conceptualizations of these behaviors mostly focus on offline contexts. On the other hand, misbehaviors in online contexts have exploded for about ten years and become a serious issue that harms their targets including not only adults and teens but also companies and their brands (Kähr et al., 2016). Cyberbullying (Slonje et al., 2013), online incivility (Bacile et al. 2018), and illegal downloading (Dilmperi et al., 2011) are some examples of consumer misbehavior that can be observed in online consumption settings extensively.

Trolling is also a type of misbehavior of customers but unlike other types of misbehavior, it has unique characteristics that are only suitable for online consumption settings. Consumers show trolling behaviors mainly aiming to get attention from their targets and other observers in community forums, social media platforms, and other social settings in online contexts. Its deliberative, deceptive, and attention-seeking nature (Golf-Papez and Veer, 2017) has become a serious issue for their targets, including brands and consumers. Therefore, today, keeping the trolling behaviors of consumers under control in online contexts is critical for marketing managers. In this chapter, by reviewing the literature on trolling behaviors, we elaborate on the main characteristics of consumers' trolling behaviors that target brands and their consumers. We also suggest a framework that explains the mechanism behind the trolling behavior and its consequences for brands, managers, and customers of the targeted brands. By doing this, we provide an integrative perspective to further studies on consumers' trolling behaviors.

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE TROLLING BEHAVIOR

Although it is a widespread issue for interactive marketing, literature on trolling behaviors still lacks construct clarity (Dineva and Breitsohl, 2022) because of its multi-meaning, multi-faceted characteristics that include various types of online misbehaviors (Golf-Papez and Veer, 2017). In the non-academic platforms of the 1990s, trolling was used to refer to some types of internet misbehaviors. In early literature, Donath (1999) explained the characteristics of trolls in community mail groups: "A troll can disrupt the discussion on a newsgroup, disseminate bad advice,

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