

Features of Trolling in Online Comments to the News Article

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Abstract

In the present study, we objectify the timeliness of studying trolling as a type of communicative behavior during Internet discourse. Different approaches to the concept interpretation are being considered. Trolling is defined by the author as a purposeful and motivated communicative behavior, aimed to the media scene destabilization. The comments under one of the French news article demonstrate two basic techniques of trolling: subject-oriented and object-oriented ones. Within the frameworks of object-oriented technology there are the offtopping tactics and elfing being analyzed. The subject-oriented technique is based on the individual discrediting of the person: pointing out and highlighting the incompetence of the interlocutor, the ironic expression of disagreement with his point of view, and elfing. Studying various methods of trolling makes it possible for us to distinguish four types of trolls in Internet comments: a provocateur troll, an offtoper troll, a demagogue troll and an elf troll. All of them have the same single goal to stir up the flame and enjoy the commentator's feedback. One makes a conclusion about the necessity of a selective approach to reading the comments, with the purpose to avoid trolls, who choose their speech tactics depending on their intentions.

Keywords: Internet-linguistics; Internet-commentary, Speech behaviour.



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1. Introduction

At the present stage of linguistic research, the issues devoted to Internet communication are becoming especially topical. We take under consideration the genre diversity and linguistic features of virtual communication (Abdullina *et al.*, 2014; Koit, 2015; Orimaye *et al.*, 2013), strategies and tactics of speech behavior during the Internet discourse (Buckels *et al.*, 2014; Cruz *et al.*, 2018; Lumsden and Morgan, 2017), among which more attention is devoted to Internet trolling. When talking about trolling, some researchers mean a specific type on malicious online behavior, intended to aggravate, annoy or otherwise disrupt online interactions and communication (Binns, 2012). Trolling may be understood not only as an unpleasant behavior, but as an unethical one, which holds the potential to do great harm. Bulatova, in turn, specifies that trolling should be understood not only as an intentional escalation of aggression, but also as a kind of language game in the spirit of tricksterism, during which trolls reveal painful social problems, reproduce the perverse logic of that cultural environment they live in, destroying it, thus fulfilling the function of renewal through denial (Bulatova, 2017). Other researchers suggest that trolls in the political and news forums seek to polarize discussions and stoke arguments, which generates outrage (Phillips, 2015). The English-speaking researcher Herring defines trolling as “*involving people in a meaningless and time-consuming discussion*” (Herring *et al.*, 2002). Having regard to the said above, we will adhere to the following definition: trolling is a purposeful and motivated communicative behavior aimed at destabilizing both the emotional state of commentators and the media space in general (Antúnez *et al.*, 2014).

2. Material and methods

The approach to the Internet comments analysis is to identify a system of constitutive comments' features, basing on which makes it possible to analyze the trolling features in the comments to the news article. Among the constitutive features we distinguish the following:

1. Psychological aspect, which reveals the issues of emotional attitude to the content, users' perception types formation and changing; touches on the users motivation; techniques for creating a self-image through online comments.
2. Sociological aspect as a constitutive feature of the Internet discourse reveals the Internet users' intentions diversity to leave a comment under newspaper articles, or comments by other users.
3. Cognition demonstrates a deep connection between the work of human mind and the Internet comments generation. The description of cognition implies considering the links between Internet comments as part of the whole chain of comments for one news article.

4. Interactivity shows the users involvement in the process of forming the information field of comments (Nurbekova *et al.*, 2018).

5. Variability indicates that the Internet comments contain alternate information, various strategies and tactics.

The use of the approach with the constitutive features mentioned above allows us to carry out a deep analysis of Internet comments, highlighting various techniques and strategies for trolling. Let us analyze the trolling speech techniques on the basis of the French-speaking comments (207 units) to the article published on the site of the French edition of *Le Monde* on September 26, 2017. The article examines the key proposals of French President Emmanuel Macron on reforming the European Union (the title of the message is *Les principales propositions d'Emmanuel Macron pour relancer le projet européen*).

3. Results

We distinguish two basic trolling techniques: object-oriented and subject-oriented. Object-oriented technique refers to trolling, aimed at the information content of the article or commentary. Within the frameworks of this technique, we distinguish the following tactics:

1) offtopping is a thematic shift, performed with the desire to take the addressee further from the topic of the article. For example:

jea.vie: Quoi qu'il en soit rien de tout cela n'est possible si l'Allemagne n'en veut pas. Elle tient le nerf de la guerre (...). Sur qui Macron et notre pays encalminé dans sa dette pourra-t-il s'appuyer pour avancer? Anyway, all this is impossible without the participation of Germany. It regulates the monetary system (...) who does Macron and our debt-ridden country count on? It is obvious that the troll is trying to change the discussion topic from the Macron reform program to Germany's leading position, prompting further argument and debate, and the provocative question at the end of the commentary serves us as an evidence of that. The presence of feedback and reaction from other commentators (Pierre-Marie Muraz: *Sur l'Allemagne ... rien ne dit que l'Allemagne restera un nain politique ... / Speaking of Germany ... it's not a fact that Germany will remain in the role of a political dwarf; aloes: L'Allemagne est au top de sa puissance économique mais les perspectives de ce pays sont moins favorables sans l'Europe / Germany is at the height of its economic power...*) also proves that point.

As a rule, such mission creeps can be caused by author's dissatisfaction, disagreement or judgment of the speech subject. In this context, trolls often appeal to irony or sarcasm, which is not unnoticed by the interlocutors. For example, Michel Marie : *Suite à ce discours des millions d'europeens sont descendus dans les rues pour manifester leur enthousiasme et exiger la tenue d'un sommet européen. Les Suisses ont décidé par référendum d'adhérer à l'UE. L'académie Nobel a décidé de se réunir en urgence pour décerner tous ses prix à Macon y compris les maths et la physique. / After this speech, millions of Europeans went out to the streets to show their enthusiasm. The Swiss decided to join the EU by referendum. The Nobel Committee decided to have an urgent meeting to award all its prizes in mathematics and physics, including Macron. Tambouille: J'adore votre sens ironique de la moquerie / I adore your ironic style of mockery.*

2) elfing is a tactic of trolling, based on deliberate exaggerated praise of the article object being commented with the aim of inciting flaming among opponents of this point of view. The purpose of the feigned praise of the elf is to have fun, provoking a negative reaction from the interlocutors. The following example serves as a confirmation. Pierre-Marie Muraz: *Certains disent il se prend pour le roi soleil ... merci à ce Roi d'avoir apporter le soleil à la création de l'Etat Français! / Some people say that he thinks of himself as of a Sun King ... Thanks to the King for the Sun in the creation of the French state!. gio53 @Pierre-Marie Muraz: Mon dieu, mais c'est de l'idolatrie.../ Oh Lord, this is an idoltry...*

In response to associating Macron with the king (Roi), the troll named Pierre-Marie Muraz received accusations, on which the troll immediately responded, and, as a result, the flame erupted. The second technique is subject-oriented and is directly related to the personal attacks (Latin: *argumentum ad personem*), implying discrediting the opponent's argumentation by discrediting him or her and/or his or her words, and thereafter provoking an inappropriate response. A negative comment towards a person can concern his personal traits. For example, Goliarda: *Bravo la brosse à reluire vous allez finir par perdre toute crédibilité dans votre adulation. En service commandé sur Libé, payé par le nouveau chef. / Bravo, you bootlicker... eventually, you will lose all the trust for your flattery. These are ordered comments on Libé, paid by the new boss. Also, the troll may point out the opponent's incompetence in the topic of discussion or highlight lexical or grammar mistakes. For instance, in the following example the commenter emphasizes that his interlocutor is insufficiently informed, because Macron's statements are the opposite.*

Aloes: *Avant de se jeter sur votre tablette pour descendre Macron, que vous n'aimez pas, mieux vaut lire ou écouter, son propos était à l'inverse de vos affirmations! / Before rushing to the tablet to deflate Macron you dislike so much, it is better to read or listen, cause his statement was the opposite to your statements. In the following example, the author points out that there are too many grammar errors in the interlocutor's speech. Christelle Strub: Veuillez à relire vos articles avant publication: les erreurs grammaticales piquent les yeux! / Would you be so kind to read your own articles before publishing: grammar errors offend the eye! Within the frameworks of subject-oriented technique, the methods of irony or sarcasm aimed at the addressee-commentator himself are also possible. Bravo: Emmanuel Macron a déjà fait plus de réformes en trois mois que ses prédécesseurs durant tout leur mandat ! On espère que cela clouera enfin le bec à tous les pisse-vinaigre qui souhaitent son échec et que surtout rien ne change! A trolling installment*

Tchoupi: *Vous n'utilisez jamais de vinaigre? Bravo hopes, that Macron, due to his reformist spirit, will shut mouths (French colloq. Clouer le bec à qn) of all the wimps (фп. пазр. Pisse-vinaigre), craving for his failure.*

According to the etymological analysis of the word *pisse-vinaigre*, it is formed from two words *pisse* and *vinaigre*, which allowed Tchoupi to express his or her disagreement using a sarcastic question *do not you ever use vinegar?* There is also *elfing*, when one commentator demonstrates agreement with the viewpoint of another commentator, emphasizing his or her competence on the matter, without adding any objective information on the article topic to the comment. Aloes: +100 *Merci pour votre commentaire qui témoigne que vous l'avez réellement écouté. Je partage votre analyse/ +100 thank you for the comment, proving that you have definitely listened to him.*

4. Discussion

Based on the statements made above we can distinguish the following types of online-trolls in the internet-news articles comments:

1. A provocateur troll, urging his interlocutors to aggression, condemning their point of view or insulting them. Creating an unfavorable emotional environment brings satisfaction to the troll.
2. A demagogue troll, leaving detailed comments on the subject in order to drag attention. This type of trolls is absolutely confident about its erudition and willingly gets into a dialogue with the aim to raise its self-esteem.
3. An offtopper troll, leaving provocative comments, not connected to content in the article.
4. An elf troll, inclined to excessive praise of the subject or object of speech with the aim to incite a discussion.

The choice of particular tactic and technique of trolling in Internet comments determines the type of troll to which the commentator fits the most (Solnyshkina *et al.*, 2018).

5. Summary

The conducted research allows us to come to a conclusion, that the trolls' speech behavior is aimed at satisfying such needs as the desire to be a participant in extreme communication, the desire to increase self-esteem, drag attention, express themselves and at the same time have fun. To implement these needs, the troll commentator appeals to subject and object oriented techniques, with messages of a provocative nature, curses, insults, disagreements being a common occurrence. These methods are aimed at stirring the flame, which brings pleasure and increases self-gratification of the troll commentator.

6. Conclusions

Thus, among the Internet comments under the news article, along with messages from users who sincerely want to share their views in the network, there are posts from trolls that intentionally distort the perceptions of events in reality and manipulate the minds of the interlocutors to involve them in a communicative game. The main thing in this game is to not yield to the troll psychological attack, not to react to his or her insults and remarks, since any feedback only fuels the troll's pride and he or she feels important from the process of controlling other people's emotions. It is also necessary to develop countermeasures - educational, disciplinary, scientific - basing on sublimation methods that can help redirect the energy of trolls' affective actions to more worthy activities.

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