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Names, pseudonyms and anonymity in online interactions: a study of name policy on news24, the daily Maverick, and 4chan.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Since its beginning in the 1960s as a scientific research tool, the internet has grown to become central to many people's lives today. From the early days of the internet, its disembodied nature has lent itself to anonymous interactions. The comic artists, Peter Steiner, famously stated that, "On the internet nobody knows you're a dog" (qtd. in Cavna). Although created in 1993, Steiner's cartoon still holds relevance today, and this potential for anonymity online brings with it a host of implications, many of which are positive while others are negative. The use of real names versus pseudonyms in online interactions is contentious, with issues regarding identity, anonymity and privacy core to the debate. This paper discusses some of the successes and failures of real name policies and anonymity online. The aim of the paper is to answer the question of what are the advantages and disadvantages of anonymity on social networks.

While many early internet interactions made use of pseudonyms and their associated anonymity, the rise of Facebook and other social network sites (SNSs) saw the online use of real names becoming not only commonplace, but strongly advocated for in some sectors. Furthermore, in reaction against the disembodied and anonymous nature of online communication, many sites require that users use their "real names." Some have gone so far as to claim that users should have a real name and uniform identity across all applications online that would function like a "driver's license" (Geist). This has led to alarm amongst some scholars about the endangerment of online anonymity. According to Robert Bodle, "Anonymity online is increasingly at risk of becoming extinct due to a host of converging developments" (Bodle 22). While statements such as this are startling, and possibly overly alarmist, there remain a large number of active online communities that thrive on anonymity, suggesting that these claims may be excessive. Advocates of the real name web link anonymity to a lack of accountability, integrity, and trust (Geist). However, this view is actively contested by some researchers (e.g. Hogan, Bodle and boyd), and many authors hold the view that anonymity has certain advantages over real name usage online.

Various events over recent years have brought some of the central themes of the debate to light. For example, Michael Brutsch, known as Violentacrez on Reddit[1], was well known for posting images of scantily clad underage girls on a "Jailbait" subreddit, (a sub-thread in which sexualised photographs of underage girls were posted) (Milner) as well as posting close ups of women's body parts, without the subjects' knowledge that they were being photographed. Violentacrez was doxxed[2] and his real name revealed (Chen). This caused heated debate amongst the online Reddit community with questions around Brutsch's rights opposed to those of the subjects of the images. Many applauded the doxxing, saying that because Violentacrez had not respected the rights of the women he photographed, his rights should not necessarily be respected. Others expressed concern about the breach of his privacy (Milner). The incident sparked a debate regarding privacy and anonymity online, how far freedom of speech should be allowed to extend, and how seriously privacy issues should be taken (Milner).

The computer gaming giant, Blizzard, created controversy when they decided to implement a real identity (ID) policy which would display people's real names on their forums. Gaming culture in general has placed a large emphasis on pseudonyms, and the decision to use real names caused severe backlash (Albrechtslund). One employee, known as Bashiok, posted under his full name, Micah Whipple, in an attempt to lead the charge towards real names. Within a few hours people had doxxed Whipple and had information on his family, phone numbers and address as Blizzard's Battle.net community aimed to prove a point about the vulnerabilities of real names, the importance of pseudonyms for safety, and their role in online gaming (Albrechtslund). This incident also created concerns about identity theft, harassment, and backlash from employers (Crenshaw & Nardi, 9). Furthermore, in what is often a male-dominated space, many female gamers were worried about the revelation of their gender through their real names (Albrechtslund).

Google+'s reinforcement of their real name policies sparked the "Nymwars" - a debate among bloggers and journalists around real names, anonymity, and pseudonyms online (Bodle 23). The backlash against their newly enforced real name policy was so severe that Google+ relented and restored deleted accounts. However, Google's chairman, Eric

[1]Reddit is an American news aggregation and discussion website in the form of a bulletin board. Users tend to be anonymous with persistent pseudonyms (Duggan and Smith 2)

[2]Doxxing is the process of retrieving, hacking and publishing other people's information, including names, addresses, phone numbers etc. and may be targeted towards specific people or organisations https://www.techopedia.com/definition/29025/doxing

Schmidt, issued a public statement explaining that the real name policy was important as Google+ was an identity service. Despite the claims to being an identity service, many perceived the policy as an abuse of power, and expressed concerns regarding the perpetuation of the single identity on Google+ or any platforms that require real names. This highlighted issues regarding safety and the appropriateness of real names in online contexts (boyd, The Politics of Real Names). Google+ eventually relented, announcing that their policies would change to allow users to use any name (Galperin and York). Despite this, however, their heading "Important tips for Google+ profile names" clearly states that first and last names are recommended, with the layout strongly suggesting that a real name should be used as two boxes are available and both must have content in them.

The debate around anonymity online is not new and can be traced back to Sherry Turkle's study on user behaviour on bulletin boards and Multi-User Dungeons, Dimensions or Domains (MUDs) in her book *Life on Screen* (1995). Bulletin boards, and particularly MUDs, which were limited to text messages, allowed experimentation with identity and social roles. This involved experiments with gender, sexuality, and personality, with participants exploring both pro-social characters (e.g., being more outgoing than they are in real life (IRL)), as well as anti-social behaviour such as rape. Contrasting with this, anonymity was not permitted in The WELL (Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link), which was one of the oldest online bulletin boards. In The WELL, it was feared that the perceived lack of accountability associated with anonymity would result in the online community being ruined if people freely insulted each other (Bodle 26). In contrast to the WELL, the scandals on the anonymous muds are often cited as a result of their anonymity, and that socially acceptable behaviour and self-censorship would in turn be a result of real name usage (Bodle 26).

The lack of accountability that is perceived to come with anonymity is often blamed for the bad behaviour that takes place online (Bodle 26). Anonymity also provides safety from accountability. This allows for nefarious and illegal behaviour, including illegal pornography, abuse, swatting, illegal gambling, and black market human and drug trafficking (Bodle 25). These offences range from extremely vile, to seemingly mild forms of trolling (discussed in detail later, but understood most simply as posting in order to get a reaction). While it is often seen as hateful, trolls do not believe what they say, and are acting simply to provoke a reaction, such as in name calling. While some claim that trolling is "just words," words can have serious consequences for people's lives. Hateful messages, online rape

threats, murder and bomb threats, doxxing, and swatting [3] have serious consequences for victims and their families. Various figures, such as Jonathan Weisman (editor of The *New York Times)*, have withdrawn from Twitter due to the kinds of messages they have received (Stein), while feminist writer Jessica Valenti left social media after her daughter was threatened. Victims have also moved houses, changed cell phone numbers, left social media, considered quitting their jobs, and experienced intense mental distress (Stein). While these activities could have been performed under real names, it can be more difficult to trace and hold accountable people who use pseudonyms (Stein). Mainstream media has also been quick to associate trolling with negative outcomes and often seem to confuse it with genuine hate speech or abuse.

The real name web has been presented as the solution to the problems mentioned above. This notion has existed since the WELL was established, and has been carried forward to more recent times, with Facebook Founder Mark Zuckerberg subscribing to this view. A response to the perceived problems of anonymity online has been for various websites to require users to log in or interact with their real names through Facebook Connect, or to find other ways to enforce real name usage.

Real names are perceived as creating trust, cooperation and accountability, whereas anonymity has been blamed for rendering communication impersonal and undermining credibility (Bernstein et al, 50). However, some scholars have argued that a more ephemeral web with anonymous contributions can be desirable (Bernstein et al, 50). Furthermore, the dynamics and nature of the online interaction (from Blizzard gamers, to Reddit's Violentacrez, to debates online) will influence whether users choose to use a pseudonym. Some areas online it is considered commonplace or expected to have a "username" or pseudonym. In other places, particularity in a country with a difficult past (such as South Africa), certain topics of debate are sensitive, which may influence people's decisions on what name to use. Thus, a user who uses a real name in one case, may use a pseudonym in another. In this paper, I will critically examine the dominant arguments regarding real name policies and pseudonym usage on the internet. This spans looking at username norms from the inception of the internet in the 1960's, through to contemporary use in 2016. These

[3] Swatting is the action of making a hoax call to the emergency services in an attempt to dispatch a large number of police officers to the victims location https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/jan/13/gamergate-hits-new-low-with-attempts-to-send-swat-teams-to-critics

arguments are located in the context of concerns regarding anonymity and privacy against a background of commercialism and technological capabilities. I argue against the dominant view of anonymity as necessarily being negative and real name policies as always being positive.

I do this by examining existing literature and conducting two case studies. The first case study includes two South African news sites (*News24* and the *Daily Maverick*) and the second focuses on the American image board site, *4chan*. This is done over several time periods depending on the case study. *News24* and the *Daily Maverick* are examined retrospectively over a period of several years from their online debut in 1998 for *News24* and 2009 for the Daily Maverick, to early 2017. It seemed logical to include two sites with a similar purpose (i.e., providing news) as the sites' purpose could influence the appropriateness of naming policies. The *Daily Maverick* and *News24* both allowed pseudonymous comments before switching to real name comments, citing trolling and abusive behaviour as the reasons. *4chan*, contrasts with these in terms of its aim and naming policy. It uses completely anonymous posts and is notorious for the content it generates, and the study of its policies and developments is examined from 2003 until early 2017. While 4chan is not a news site, it provides an example of a different mechanism for commenting and moderation that, unlike *News24* and the *Daily Maverick*, has proved to be successful despite having been strongly at odds to what the news sites attempted to enforce regulation. The case studies involved an examination of relevant literature and a semi-structured interview with two employees of *News24*.

In this paper, I argue that the rise of the real name web is a concerning development that should not be applied simply as a means of enforcing good behaviour. Although trolling and other forms of abuse are often morally reprehensible and sites understandably want to prevent them, they have a place within society and allow critique through satire. To limit what people are allowed or willing to say through enforced self-censorship by real name policies, is problematic. Anonymity and pseudonyms can also be problematic and open to abuse, but they maintain important roles, and are not necessarily antecedents to bad behaviour.

Chapter 02: Names, Identity, and Disinhibition

This chapter examines how real names and pseudonyms can affect the perception of content and individual users, and where each naming practice may be appropriate. It also discusses the links that names have with online identity, user participation, trolling, and the problems and benefits of online disinhibition.

2.1 Real names, pseudonyms, anonymity, and social networking

In reaction against the disembodied and anonymous nature of online communication, many sites require that users use their "real names." However, the definition is not always clear; one interpretation is that it is the name given at birth and on legal documents, and another name that people know you by in your everyday life ("What names are allowed on Facebook"). They typically consist of a surname and first name in the Western context (Pfitzmann and Hansen). This definition is problematic for those whose names do not conform to the expected standards such as transgender people, or from a culture in which ones real name may change multiple times in a lifetime as is the case in certain African cultures (Mandende 194).

According to Hogan, "Pseudonyms are a practice which is often meant to facilitate non-identifiable content" (4). The use of pseudonyms does not, however, always mean that the user is anonymous and their real names are not known. There are disposable and non-disposable pseudonyms. Disposable pseudonyms have no real value or reputation, while non-disposable pseudonyms can become linked to a strong persistent online identity (Hogan, 1). A disposable pseudonym may over time gain enough reputation to become non-disposable. Hogan provides three reasons: situational, where an external motivating force compels people to hide their real name identities; functional, in which pseudonyms denote a specific social or technical function such as official titles; and personal, where an internal drive to adopt a different persona makes pseudonyms useful (Hogan 1).

Anonymity is a term that falls along a spectrum. Steve Matthews expands the definition of anonymity to include "a suite of techniques of nonidentifiability that persons use to manage and protect their privacy" (Matthews 1). Kathleen A. Wallace in "Ethics and Information Technology," defines anonymity as "noncoordinatability of traits in a given respect … one has anonymity or is anonymous when others are unable to relate a given feature of the person to other characteristics" (24). Based on this, the ability to create relationships between online data that initially may seem to be unrelated is important. It also shows that depending on the information that is revealed, the degree of anonymity varies. Andreas Pfitzmann and Marit Köhntopp state that "anonymity is the state of being not identifiable within a set of subjects, the anonymity set" (2). The size of the anonymity set influences the degree of anonymity obtained. For example, if five people cast a vote, the anonymity set is very small, and thus the individuals are less anonymous than when a nation votes. The "anonymity set" is the set of all subjects which might cause an action. Therefore, someone may be anonymous only within a set of potential senders (2).

The struggle over real names has become intensified with the rise of Social Network Sites, most notably Facebook. A social network site (SNS) is a web-based service that allows individuals to create public or semi-public profiles within a bounded system (boyd and Ellison). Users of the system can select and articulate selections of individuals with whom they share a connection (variations of this exist, such as Facebook where both users must agree to the connection, or Twitter or Instagram, where one user may 'follow' the other, and the second persons approval is not required) and connections can be viewed between yourself and other individuals (boyd and Ellison, 2). One should also note that boyd and Ellison distinguish between social networking sites from social network sites which focus on connections between individuals who are within their real world social sphere, and social networking sites which focus on meeting strangers with whom one has no real world connection (2). In general the definition between this two will be used interchangeably. However, it is important to notice the shift in content between the two, and how one focuses on individuals already known to the user by their real name.

2.2 A time and a place

Research into real name versus pseudonym usage has included sites that are used for different purposes, such as news, social networking, games and bulletin boards. It is possible that the appropriateness and implications of real name usage differs across these contexts (Hogan, 9). Different sites are used for different purposes, and I argue that the name policy of the site should reflect the site's purpose. Sites need to consider whether they want engagement to be related to *issues* and *content*, or *people*. This is an important distinction because the name policy can influence the nature of interactions between users. Real name usage tends to shift the focus of arguments to the people involved. Consequently responses tend to be based on characteristics that can be assumed from participants; names, such as race, gender and political affiliations, rather than the content of the arguments that these individuals are making. Real names can distract from the content of the discussion, potentially degrading the quality of discussion due to biased perceptions of messages and obstacles to free speech (Ruesch and Märker 112). This applies to e-participatory sites (online forums, boards etc.), where it is the *message* and content at the heart of the sites (Ruesch and Märker 112). It would also apply to news sites which provide a forum for information and diverse viewpoints.

Contrasting with content focused sites, *people* are at the heart of other sites, such as SNSs including Facebook (Ruesch and Märker 112). Here, the focus is on individuals' lives and users are often interacting with people they know. Real name policies make sense in these contexts. Beyond SNS sites however, it is important that sites do not enforce real name policies simply for the sake of supposedly enforcing good behaviour as this can have negative consequences, detracting from the content of posts.

2.3 A place for identity performance

The online and offline worlds contrast strongly in terms of their relation to our bodies and the identities that are related to our physical characteristics. Consequently the online

world offers potential for different identities that cannot be equalled in the real world. The possibilities for identity exploration online are enormous as individuals become separated from their physical bodies. Identity concerns "the qualities, beliefs, etc., that make a particular person or group different from others" ("Identity"). Bodily characteristics include the nature of our physical bodies themselves, the clothes we wear, body language, tone of voice, the kind of hair we have and hygiene. Bodies indicate a lot of information about an individual (boyd "The Politics of Real Names" 2). Online, however, we are no longer restricted to real bodies and may construct new ones. Some people are able to create "personas," characters that they use to embody themselves online, and which are not restricted to any gender, age, or even species (Maase ix). These characters can help users "get out of their box" and take on a character that frequently allows them to be more outgoing when interacting with others (Maase 18). In *Life on the Screen,* Sherry Turkle explores MUD users and how they experimented with various identities separate from their real life ones. Individuals were able to play with identity, sexuality, gender, personality, as well as a host of positive and negative traits.

I argue that Identity is performative and that the internet lends itself to this performance. Identity as performative was theorised by Erving Goffman and has been used by many scholars, including Turkle, Pearson, Hogan, and boyd ("Taken Out of Context"). According to Goffman, there are signs that are *given* naively or unconsciously and signs that are *given off* in an intentional manner. These intentional and unintentional aspects perform identity (Goffman 3). Turkle, in *Alone Together,* notes that many people prefer texting to phone calls or other face to face communication, as text provides time to think about and carefully construct responses, resulting in more controlled identity management. Social media platforms' interfaces promote unconscious self-expression and enable conscious self-promotion (Van Dijck 201). Users consciously construct their profile and post information, enter search terms, and click on links. Underneath that, algorithms capture unconsciously created behavioural data that indicate desires (Van Dijck 201). These are then turned into data and additional algorithms that can be sold on to advertisers, lending a commercial aspect to performed identity. In this manner, our identities are performed and recorded in ways online that are impossible offline.

The identity that is being performed may be fully believed by the performer, or to them it may be just a performance in which they don a mask. The internet troll is such an

individual who dons a mask and plays the role of the cynic who takes delight in identity play and frustrating people, while often playing with expectations and norms.

2.4 Identity as multiple

Usernames play an important role in the performance of identity. Some usernames can be compared with pseudonyms which have been used prior to the invention of the internet. Pseudonyms have long been used by artists, writers and public figures for a host of reasons, including evasion of persecution or rejection (e.g., Jewish authors during WWII, 19th Century female authors), segmented personae (e.g., Lewis Carrol and Charles Dodgson), appealing to certain demographics (e.g., J.K Rowling altering her name to encourage young boys to read her work) (Lapp 2; Hogan 5, 6). These reasons for using pseudonyms have carried over into online activities.

SNSs that require real names to be used limit individuals to the specific, single identity associated with the real name. As Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook claimed, "You have one identity. The days of you having a different image for your work friends or co-workers and for the other people you know are probably coming to an end pretty quickly… Having two identities for yourself is an example of a lack of integrity" (Kirkpatrick 199). This assumption is the basis for real name policies on social networks such as Facebook. Van Dijck, however, claims that most people have different personae for the workplace and social situations (Van Dijck 200). This implies that many people have multiple personae tailored to different aspects of life, and this is contrary to Zuckerberg's stance. Users have begun to understand the "art of online self-presentation" and the importance of SNSs as tools for professional self-promotion and identity performance (Van Dijck 200). The layout of sites, however, can be biased towards certain presentations of identity. This was discussed in Carmen Schaeffer's (2010) research on Facebook's characterization techniques. For example, Facebook's timeline standardises the way in which members present themselves. The uniform or "idealised" self is reinforced by integrating the principles of connectivity and narrative into the interface (Van Dijck 200).

This has shifted the focus of SNSs away from community oriented platforms towards connectivity, using architectures that encourage people to explore narrative and personal story telling in a certain way. A shift has also occurred towards monetising data and maximising lucrative data traffic between people, things and ideas (Van Dijck 200). The influence of the interface architecture on the presentation of identity (Cunningham 5) raises questions about whether people can present their "true" identity online. The specific architecture of SNSs, such as Facebook, limits the extent to which individuals are able to engage in identity experimentation (Cunningham 89).

Whether a singular online identity is possible, is questioned when one considers that online "self-presentation is a process that becomes an ever-changing cycle through which individual identity is presented, compared, adjusted, or defended against a constellation of social, cultural, economic, or political realities" (Cunningham 5). This was illustrated in Carmen Schaefer's paper "Facebook as an implied author: an investigation into the characterization techniques employed by users of the social networking site, Facebook, through a comparative study with Jane Austen's Emma." Schaefer illustrates how Facebook gives its users clear and unavoidable guidelines to aid their characterization through its layout, norms, and architecture. This "self" that is presented is a character; the "networked self." The identity of the networked self is performed by the profile, the Friends list, status updates and other public commenting tools (Schaefer 38). Where SNSs capture, save and share identity performances, real name policies emphasised particular identities and productions of self, despite people having multifaceted selves (Cunningham 89).

People create content for an "imagined audience" online (e.g., their friends or potential employers), and can fall into the trap of believing that it is the imagined audience who will see their content, forgetting that others may also have access to it (Litt and Hargittai 1). Users are often interacting with people beyond their intended audience and their content often reaches further than they realise. This occurs, for example, when users wish to share with one group, but do not change their privacy settings, making the post available to everyone, while believing that somehow their post will reach only their imagined audience (Litt and Hargittai 2).

All parties involved in a platform have different goals at stake, and this influences how online identities are shaped and controlled as those users, employers, and platform owners try to control how identity on a site is pushed. Sites, such as Facebook, benefit

financially when users have a single identity which creates maximum transparency, giving advertisers "truthful" data (van Dijck 200). The use of a single identity enables the continual release of behavioural data and personal information which is considered to be fairly accurate and is therefore valuable to advertisers (Van Dijck 200). It is important not to forget this fact when debating real name identity online. Users are able to log in to other sites through Facebook, or third party apps are able to access users' data. This provides more specific information about users, and the more specific and detailed information is, the more valuable it is. This is a point that real name advocates often fail to mention when pushing for real name use.

I argue that online interactions naturally lend themselves to multiphrenic identity. Not only do people tend to post with particular imagined audiences in mind, but online interactions require what Kendall refers to as "split attention." This split attention results in the ability to multitask between various online interactions, media and the offline world at the same time (Kendall 8). Turkle and Kendall's works both see the online environment as a place in which fragmented postmodern identities are realised (James and Busher 73).

> *"The split of attention between online and offline, and between multiple windows online has caused, some have argued, for the self to be seen as a multiple. Online spaces, where one can keep their identity secret are often a great space for identity exploration. People create online personae and explore parts of their lives they feel they are missing."* (Turkle 141)

Kendall and Turkle propose that using multiple windows on a computer allows one to view multiple online spaces. Alternatively, one's attention may be split between the computer and elements in the real world. The computer itself is used for multiple tasks and roles. In 1995, Turkle adopted a term 'cycling through' – running several different programs at once, moving between roles while doing so. While Turkle coined this term before the advent of SNSs, I argue that it remains relevant. Fragmentation of identity including, but not limited to, social, political and economic structures of association are "produced and perpetuated within a dynamic system of mediated and social interpretations" (Wilkins 151). People cycle through Twitter, Reddit, Facebook, Instagram, and a host of other websites, often keeping multiple tabs open within a single window, and sharing with different imagined audiences. Identities connect individuals to larger social groups. Within these groups there are boundaries that invite, include and exclude people (Wilkins 154).

The computer by its very nature allows separate spaces to be created through multiple windows. According to Turkle, "Windows have become a powerful metaphor for thinking about the self as multiple, disrupted system. … In the culture of simulation, cycling through is coming to be the way we think about life itself" (Turkle 174). The postmodernist perspective, however, sees the self not as a single entity but as decentred, fluid and multiple (Turkle 51). When logging onto a computer, people may find themselves playing multiple roles, either subtly, attempting to come off as more successful, or more popular, or in a more radical manner, exploring other identities, personalities or genders (Turkle 51). But with Social Networking Sites such as Facebook or Google+, this can also be true. Social networking is used to "be ourselves." However, the maintenance and interactions on these sites can become performative, and these online performances can take on lives of their own (Turkle 148).

Each of these identities is expressed and enabled or inhibited by the platform on which it is expressed. Facebook is important because of its extensive and influential reach, but it does not prevent people from using other platforms. However, other platforms risk being smaller, and consequently reaching a smaller audience, and users are able to make fewer real life connections on them. "The self is not a monolith construction, but rather a more fluid set of multiple socially constructed roles shaping and adapting to diverse contexts" (Wilkins 156).

At times, multiple identities are needed for survival, as demonstrated in one of boyd's case studies in which she describes a young black man who was applying for an Ivy League university. The application included an essay in which the man claimed that he wanted to leave the gangs in his community and attend the institution. However, a Google search of his name led to his MySpace profile which contained crass language, gang symbolism and references to gang activities (boyd "It's Complicated" 29). Upon further research, boyd proposed that the man was not lying in his essay. Rather, the content on the MySpace profile was posted as a survival technique to prevent himself from becoming a target. He probably had not imagined universities looking at his MySpace profile, and had instead expected his audience to be classmates, family and community members (boyd "It's Complicated" 29).

2.5 Anonymity and democracy

In addition to providing for identity play, the anonymity that the online can offer extends to allowing a more robust and democratic discussion. There have been cases when anonymous complainants have raised issues about a political figure, only to have the figure retaliate and attempt to take them to court and unmask them, as was the case with Phyllis Morris, mayor of Aurora in Canada. Morris took severe offense at criticisms levelled against her. The judge deemed the criticism to be "pointed, but legitimate" (Hogan 2). Real name usage would have put the critics into trouble legally, and could have endangered their families and friends, as their real names on SNSs could have revealed their relationships. Rueschand Märker stated that anonymity is the only thing that "can ensure that critique can be expressed without fear" (116).

Using real names can also decrease participation as social pressure could prevent people from engaging in constructive dialogue and representing their opinions because participants may fear repercussions from neighbours or other individuals (Ruesch and Märker 116). Problems around privacy, identity theft, the cost-intensive nature of real name verification, along with concerns about the real name policy could make people less likely to participate (Ruesch and Märker 116). This means that norms or dominant views are not necessarily challenged in ways that they should be, and real names further act as barriers to vulnerable groups (Ruesch and Märker 120). In addition to the layer of protection that anonymity online provides, pseudonyms shift the focus of the argument onto the *content* rather than the *user* (Ruesch and Märker 116).

2.6 Disinhibition online

While online experiences, interactions and identity allow for creativity, productivity and democracy, the freedom from accountability that comes with anonymity can, and often does, lead to negative online consequences, such as flaming and trolling. This is largely attributed to the online disinhibition effect. Real names are commonly thought of as a way to

counter this, but they comes with a host of problems and is not always effective (Ruesch and Märker 120).

Online relationships are often seen as having weak ties, which decrease the sense of social presence along with the lack of paralinguistic and non-verbal cues. Social presence theory was originally defined as the degree of "being there" between two communicators using a communication medium. The quality of being there is thought to influence the kind of interactions that occur. Social presence itself is conceptualised as a quality of a communication medium that determines the way people interact and communicate, with high social presence making a medium warm, sociable and personal (Lowenthal 114). Media such as video calls are defined as having a high degree of social presence. Other media, such as audio calls, have a low social presence. The decreased social presence in online interactions reduces individuals' self-perception, encourages deindividuation, disinhibition, and impersonalises communication (Whitty 1838; Bernstein et al. 55). Deindividuation has been related to mob behaviour, as well as a lack of self-moderation, and can result in crude or offensive content (Bernstein et al.). Disinhibition allows people to express themselves more freely.

Decreased social presence, deindividuation, disinhibition, and concerns regarding online communications' lack of richness and the associated hostile behaviour, typically cast online communication (anonymous and non-anonymous) in a negative light. Certain other theories emphasize the positive aspects of online communication in comparison with face-to-face communication. As people become increasingly anonymous online, they become more inclined to be emotionally honest and open, and to disclose more personal information about themselves than they would in face-to-face situations. They may be more likely to post information about their feelings, fears, and problems, rather than posting more superficial information (Whitty 1838). 'Hyperpersonal theory' suggests that online relationships can not only overcome the lack of cues that are present in online interactions, but can also lead to more intimate and close relationships (Whitty 1838).

Net friends can sometimes offer greater emotional support and empathy than their offline counterparts (Whitty 1839). Disinhibition can be positive, providing a way for more open and honest conversations, and encouraging experimentation (Bernstein et al.). Many argue that online experiences are impoverished and do not equal face to face interactions due to the lack of non-verbal cues. However, Walther, Slovacek and Tidwell argue that many of

the problems resulting from the lack of non-verbal cues and verbal inflections can be overcome over time. Various methods have been created to mitigate the lack of non-verbal cues and tone, such as emojis.

The disinhibition effect is not always positive and its negative effects are often emphasised. Some people use the anonymity and freedom of the internet to engage in harmful behaviour (e.g., cyber stalking, flaming, trolling). Others seek information on the internet that they would not access without a level of anonymity (e.g. violent pornography, information about medical conditions, etc.) (Whitty 1838). The online disinhibition effect is often blamed for swearing and other uncivil behaviour (Kwon and Cho 1, 2).

2.6.1 Disinhibition and trolling

The online disinhibition effect is strongly linked to trolling. Trolling is an online behaviour that can be playful, self-reflexive, satirical and at times extremely rude and harmful. Internet trolling has changed its meaning since its inception in the 1990's. Initially it meant posting messages on the internet in order to provoke a reaction. More recently is refers to the posting of provocative or offensive messages in a more general sense (Bishop 9). According to Bishop, trolling has changed in meaning from provoking others for mutual enjoyment to abusing others for one's own enjoyment (Bishop 10). Despite this, trolling does not have a single definition, and has grey areas and different meanings for different individuals. Trolling is usually associated with anonymity; however, trolls do not necessarily need to be anonymous (Phillips).

Trolling uses "the logic of lulz" which conveys itself through distanced irony and critique, often at the expense of core identity categories. Milner argues that "the logic of lulz" facilitates both dominant and counter points, facets reliant on irony and critique. This is expressed through text and images. The common thread through definitions of trolling is the use of humour and antagonism to shift the content and tone of the conversation, and usually to evoke angry responses (Milner). However, it can also be used to build bonds between users and for the consensual enjoyment of communities (Bishop 10).

Flame trolling is abusive and not intended to be humorous. It is exemplified by the scenario of a troll initiating a thread with a conversation starter or question, with the ultimate goal of drawing others into pointless discussions. On the other hand, "kudos trolling" is more frequently based on transgressive humour, and its intention is to entertain others. It can, however, be difficult to draw the line, as what may be grossly offensive to one party, may be humorous and entertaining to another. Trolling remains, however, a predominately white male dominated practice" (boyd "for the lolz"). Many trolls have multiple accounts and personae which may be male or female, giving the illusion of there being many female trolls. Despite this, the puppet master behind them is usually male (Phillips). Trolling, as can be seen, has a multitude of purposes and intentions, some being more harmful than others. It is a nuanced practice often with a large culture behind it (Phillips).

While some trolling involves real life elements such as calling an S.W.A.T team to a person's house, most of it does not evolve beyond words. As stated by a troll interviewed by Joel Stein, "These people [trolls] are all sound and no fury" (qtd. in Stein). What was meant by this is that trolls themselves are unlikely to take action, regardless of what comments they make. Stein, however, raises the concern that "maybe, in the information age, sound is as destructive as fury" (Stein). An anonymous poll of writers at TIME magazine found that 80% of them had avoided discussing topics because they feared the online response. Despite the internet being hailed as the information age, the backlash of discussing particular topics is causing self-censorship (Stein). Trolling has a light hearted, creative and satirical side, but it can also impact people's lives in extremely negative ways.

2.6.2 Media and trolling

Fuelled by mass media organisations looking for ways to create moral panic, countries around the world have adopted the term "trolling" to communicate ideas around forms of internet misuse and abuse (Stein). The case of Rachel Bryk is an example of this type of panic. Bryk, a transgender game developer, jumped off a bridge after discussing wanting to kill herself on social media. The article published in The Washington Post is titled *"'Killed myself. Sorry': Transgender game developer jumps off bridge after online abuse."* It details how Rachel had faced online abuse regarding her transgender status and how trolls

encouraged her suicide (Miller 2015). The article mentions, but subsequently ignores, the gravity of the fact that the victim was chronically ill and in excruciating pain, and attributes her suicide to trolls (Miller). Despite the blame being placed on trolls, the article also quotes Rachel's mother who stated that online harassment was "NOT" the reason she committed suicide (Miller). This is an example on the focus and blame that trolling receives, as the author quotes the victim's mother who gave a reason for her suicide and also states that it was not online abuse that caused it. Despite this quote being included, the article's title and content remains fixated on this tragedy as a singular consequence of trolling. A quick search on Google displays many more articles with similar content (fig. 01). Despite no official stance being provided by the relevant authorities the denial from Bryk's mother that trolls triggered the suicide, the difficulties of living as a transgender person, and the permanent pain that Bryk experienced from her chronic illness, the headlines all scream at trolling as the cause of her suicide.

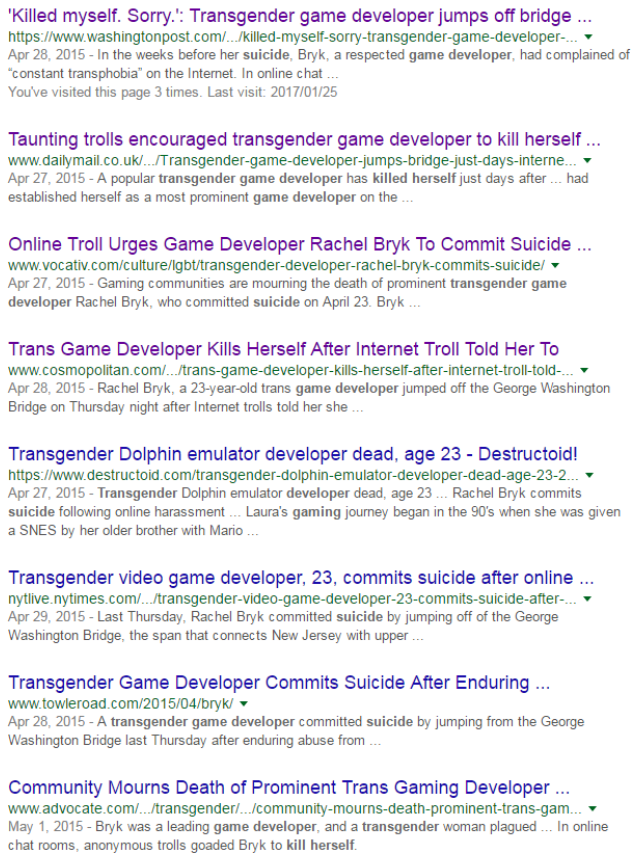


Fig. 01: The front page of Google search results with the keywords: game developer, Suicide, Rachel Bryk, Transgender. The search reveals many articles pointing towards trolling as the cause for suicide. Source: "Google." Google,

www.google.co.za/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=rachel+bryk+suicide&*. Accessed 13 Mar. 2017.

A recent development regarding trolling is that celebrities have begun using the term "troll" to refer to negative internet users, creating a "Lolz not trolls" campaign. Bishop, however, labels this as a problematic campaign because it brands all forms of trolling as negative and abusive, which is not the case. Bishop argues that "lolz" is directly linked to trolling in a non-harmful manner, while "lulz" is linked to the more harmful flame trolling. This makes the phrase "trolling for the lulz" distinct from "trolling for the lolz." Therefore the campaign should rather have been called "lulz not trolls." The distinction between lolz and lulz is further described by danah boyd when she states that "lulz highlights the negativity (since its trolling at someone else's expense) while lolz focus on generalized laughter, not always hurtful laughter" (boyd, "for the lolz"). Trolling is a much more nuanced practice than it is given credit for, and is not always negative. Media hype surrounding trolling however gives it a bad name, and blankets the practice without acknowledging that it is multifaceted, and in addition to being abusive, it can also be satirical, self-reflexive and offer social commentary. These nuances and more positive sides to it become lost in the association of trolling with only cyber bullying, and hate speech.

Chapter 3: Names and Places - The Rise of the Real Name Web

The stance towards real names and anonymity on the internet has changed over the years, as have the norms around them. This section explores how these norms have shifted over the years as the internet has grown in size and types of use and has been increasingly incorporated into our lives. The structure and functioning of sites such as Facebook have altered the way that names online are thought about. This chapter also examines the concept behind real names which is both practically and ideologically flawed.

3.1 A history of names online

The internet was created in the 1960s as a military initiative so that computers could communicate with each other (Leiner). This resulted in the development of the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET), funded by the Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). ARPANET was a multi-million dollar computer network that used packet switching to share data. In 1972, electronic mail was introduced to the small community of researchers that was using the internet, and was further developed to be able to read, file, forward, and respond to messages (Leiner). Email later became an important creation and was the largest network application for over a decade, paving the way for the "people-to-people" traffic that is so commonplace on the Web today (Leiner). By 1979 there were a few hundred ARPANET users, mainly consisting of academics interested in computer research (Whittaker 16). During these times, the community was small, mostly scientific, and the communications taking place were collaborative and academic in nature. It was necessary to know people with whom one was communicating, and the community was extremely small, therefore real names were typically used.

By 1973, three-quarters of the traffic on the Net was electronic mail, a large part of which was "chat" rather than the sharing of academic resources (Whittaker 19-20). Email was typically sent to an already known user, again making real names practical. Mosaic, a graphics browser, contributed to the popularisation of the WWW as it allowed for the sharing

of images. Once Mosaic was adapted to different operating systems by the end of 1993, it increased the Web's potential for activities other than academic research (Whittaker 20).

As computing moved away from the centralised mainframe and terminals towards personal computers, the internet expanded both across the globe and in its capabilities (Whittaker 18). New networks were created, and USENET, introduced in 1980 (Whittaker 18) was open to anyone who had the appropriate hardware and software, and encouraged the spread of information in an autonomous and uncensored way. With the exception of BITNET and USENET, the early networks (ARPANET included) were created for and restricted to closed communities of scholars. With the creation of the Domain Name System (DNS), any network could access a computer anywhere on the globe.

USENET was a network that, unlike most of its predecessors, was not built for academics and researchers, and it still has a large active community (Leiner et al.). USENET allowed asynchronous Bulletin Boards where users could post, view and reply to messages in a chronological sequence. This allowed users to create topical groups. Its unrestricted access allowed anyone to join as internet access and email were being sold to non-academic users by the first commercial internet service providers (ISPs), and its focus moved away from academic collaboration to communication for communication's sake on any issues. Sites like USENET could be argued to be the precursors to social networking sites, as they appropriated the internet as a purely social phenomenon (Lewis 25). Entities such as USENET, the ability to use graphics, and e-mail all contributed to the increasing popularisation of the internet. By 1990, ARPANET ceased to exist. Despite the rise from a few hundred to over a hundred thousand users in 1989, the internet remained the realm of nerds, geeks and scientists (Whittaker 19). It was only in the 1990s, due to email and the World Wide Web, that the Net became a wider communication medium (Whittaker 19).

As the internet grew and was used by significantly more people, it was no longer restricted to small communities. No longer did people necessarily know the people they interacted with on screen in real life as well. As usage moved further away from solely researchers and more towards a growing general populace, pseudonyms were used more frequently as a safety precaution. Furthermore, its user base included many sub-communities, where pseudonyms became common for the same reasons as they were often used historically, to protect user identity, and to explore with identity. The numerous MUD communities, bulletin boards and other communities generally used pseudonyms as a safety

precaution. While many people expressed fondness for early online communities, others saw bulletin boards as areas characterised by "flaming" [4] (Turkle 231). Pseudonyms and their associated anonymity are often seen as the reason for flaming, as people are able to say what they would not dare say to a person's face.

As a result of these developments, by the end of the 1990s, many people were interacting with strangers on the internet. Interactions were usually based on topics of interest, rather than real life connections, or networking with other people as is the case with SNSs (boyd and Ellison 6). As a general rule, people used pseudonyms in their interactions. This was very different from the days of ARPANET which included a small, known community who used their real names.

The rise of social media in the early 2000s began to change the norms regarding name usage online. What had previously consisted mainly of MUDs, bulletin boards, and other places where pseudonyms were the norm, new sites (e.g., MySpace, Friendster and Facebook) prioritised sharing information and connecting to RL friends. The emphasis shifted from role playing, exploring identities, and discussing topics of interest, to the interest being focused on individuals behind the role played characters and shared real life connections. Where the main modes of online communication and exchange had previously been organised around interest, they were now organised around individuals and relationships (boyd and Ellison, 5)

These sites also brought a significant shift in the perception of online activities. The use of the internet to communicate with others shifted from being seen as pertaining to subcultures, to being seen as normative, and even expected (boyd 4, 7). Today, vast numbers of people frequently use SNSs and other social media. Prior to the rise of social media, the emphasis had been on content. Pseudonyms played multiple roles in safety, privacy, and identity. Real names did not make sense under these circumstances. However, SNSs focus on *people* rather than *content*. The move towards real names was not a smooth path, but the nature of linking individuals together based of real life connections rather than focusing on content shared between people with no real life connection caused real names to make sense; although real name policies were not always strictly adhered to by users. The shift in norms

[4]Flaming can be defined as uninhibited hostility towards another individual or group. It is not done to get a response (as is the case with trolling) but simply expresses hostility and aggression (Mungeam 5).

that occurred with the popularity of SNSs, particularly Facebook, also corresponds with an increasingly negative view of anonymity (Bodle, 27).

The ability to connect to RL friends created the shift in focus that brought online sites such as MySpace, Friendster, and eventually Facebook into the limelight and mainstream culture (boyd 4). These sites were based on the idea of meeting new people with shared interests. Specifically, they were created so that users not only met new people, but that these people were often the friends of friends. This networking with people whom they either knew already or with whom they had indirect ties was fundamental to the sites' operation and success. As the emphasis changed from sharing common interests with strangers, to interacting with real life friends, pseudonyms aimed at protecting users from unknown stranger became pointless. Furthermore, real names assisted in identifying friends already known in real life. The advent of social networking and similar sites also introduced the practice of putting personal information on the internet, in the form of personal profiles and lists of Friends (Boyd and Ellison). Depending on the site and settings used, other people could access this information (Boyd and Ellison).

Several SNSs made their debut. SixDegrees.com was the first SNS with public profiles and articulated friends lists. However, members had small networks of friends, were not interested in meeting strangers and had little to do on the site. The site was unsustainable and closed in 2000 (boyd and Ellison). A variety of other sites emerged from 1997 with combinations of public profiles and articulated friend lists from 1997. These allowed the creation of personal, professional, and dating profiles (boyd and Ellison).

Friendster was the next big SNS that was launched in 2002. Unlike most dating sites that were designed to introduce people to strangers, Friendster was designed to help friends-of-friends meet, with a "four degree" rule, in which people were unable to view profiles of others further than four friends away. Fakesters (e.g., profiles of celebrities, universities), however, were created which allowed users to circumnavigate the four degree rule and befriend those with no connection to them, a practice that was exacerbated by Friendster's "most popular" feature (boyd and Ellison).

From 2003, many new SNSs were launched, the majority of which were profile-centric. These SNSs had various foci: socialising, professional sites such as LinkedIn, and "Passion-Centric" sites such as Dogster which helped strangers to connect based on shared

interests. As social media content and user-generated content grew, sites that had previously focused on media sharing (e.g., Flickr and YouTube) began implementing SNS features and becoming more like SNSs themselves, despite the fact that neither site encouraged users to use their real names and the norm was pseudonym usage (boyd and Ellison).

MySpace, unlike Friendster, was not averse to accounts created for various entities rather than real individuals. Launched in 2003, MySpace was looking to attract Friendsters estranged by a suddenly enforced real name policy. Unlike the Facebook to come, MySpace allowed users to craft their profiles by adding HTML into the forms framing their profiles (boyd, "Social Network Sites: Definition, History and Scholarship" 8). Compared to Facebook's standardised format, MySpace users could express identity through their page's layout. Eventually three distinct groups of users formed - musicians/artists, teenagers and post-college users (boyd, "Social Network Sites" 9).

Until 2005, the site lacked mainstream culture and media coverage despite its growing popularity, when News Corporation purchased MySpace and attracted mass media attention (boyd and Ellison). After this, MySpace was plagued with negative media reports regarding safety issues. The site was implicated in a series of sexual interactions between adults and minors, and moral panic around online sexual predators spread quickly. While it appears that the media's claims were exaggerated, the fear of strangers behind the screen on MySpace remained (boyd and Ellison).

Facebook is the most popular SNS to date, with over a billion users ("Topic: Facebook"). Launched in February 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, it was based loosely on a hard copy photo album of incoming freshmen at Harvard University and was available initially only to students at Harvard (Gershon 871). The moral panic that MySpace had generated from the faceless unknown person behind the screen was not particularly worrisome with Facebook which was implemented in a small community where people knew each other (Gershon 871). From there, Facebook spread to other colleges, and only college students could join. This was enforced by Facebook which initially required an official college email account for the participant to be admitted (Acquisti and Gross 3). This created a closed, trusted community, in which people used their real names without fear of an entirely unknown stranger from a different social context, being on the other side of the computer screen (Acquisti and Gross 3).

When Facebook was first launched, people were willing to provide their real names, because Facebook was acting as an extension of their campus life (boyd "The Politics of 'Real Names'"). Furthermore, in this small, intimate environment, people were less concerned about privacy issues. As Facebook grew and expanded, new users adopted the norms and practices of Facebook's earlier adopters (boyd, "The Politics of 'Real names'"). In 2005 Facebook became available to high school students, and from 2006 anyone with an email account could join it (Gershon 871). This opening of Facebook to people with a broad range of demographic characteristics caused much concern. The issues of public and private information are at the heart of the controversies (Gershon 871). According to boyd, as Facebook grew in size and expanded out of universities and into the general public, later adopters were "far less likely to use their given name" (boyd, "The Politics of 'Real Names'"). Facebook's real name success lay in its small beginnings, creating a small community that seemed separate from the kinds of issues and moral panic that enshrouded MySpace.

In the context of the current research, Facebook stands out from certain other SNSs. Its enormous user base has yielded a staggering amount of personal information which is personally identified (Acquisti and Gross 3). It also has a very specific policy around transparency which enforces real name usage. Zuckerberg's vision for Facebook includes complete transparency, where people cannot use pseudonyms, and the site itself enforces a single identity (Kirkpatrick 224). The development of Facebook Connect allows people on other platforms and websites to sign in and comment using their Facebook profiles. This makes it easy for other sites to create real name policies while relying on Facebook to enforce the policy. This means that a person will have to use their real name across multiple sites, all of which are linked to their Facebook account. This further promotes the single identity, and provides Facebook with specific, accurate data on its users.

Facebook benefits financially from this data and therefore has a vested financial interest in maintaining its real name policy (Van Dijck 201). Facebook's real name policy may have evolved from the real life equivalent of a college photo album which uses real names, however, this resemblance to an album diminished as Facebook grew. As this occurred, Facebook's financial interest in continuing to shift and dissolve privacy norms while pursuing a real name policy is also likely to have grown.

3.2 Collapsed context, contextual integrity and the digital footprint

3.2.1 Contextual integrity

The Net has created an enormous capacity for capturing, stockpiling, retrieving, analysing, distributing, displaying and disseminating information (Nissenbaum 33). Online activity has become deeply integrated into everyday life and activities that could be accomplished via telephone or face-to-face are often performed online. Online content, experiences, interactions and services are generated by a host of parties, including individuals, corporations, communities and institutions. These groups constantly generate new information about online users and this information is a valuable form of currency. This is enabled by the ability to digitally track and store information, with the information often travelling far from its original context (Nissenbaum 33). According to Nissenbaum, all is well when information flows in expected and normative ways. The entrenched norms provide "contextual integrity" (Nissenbaum 33).

The flow of information to third parties is often complex and difficult to account for in privacy policies (Nissenbaum 33). The corporately created cookies, latencies, clicks, IP addresses, reified social graphs and browsing histories are not the only ways that privacy can be violated online. Information is shared when one receives goods and services, and friends, sometimes unwittingly, repost photographs, videos, or other content on homepages that often cannot be removed by anyone but the original poster.

When information flows in unexpected ways, contextual integrity has been violated. In the real world, information that is provided at a doctor's office presumably remains within that doctor. Online, this is not always the case. Information is searchable and stretches across time and audiences. How, what, and with whom information is shared, is determined by technical capabilities rather than ethical considerations (Nissenbaum 33). In order to protect privacy, one must ensure the appropriate flow of personal information in any context (online or offline). Contextual integrity requires that the online counterpart be evaluated against the equivalent standards offline (Nissenbaum 40).

3.2.2 Collapsed context

The flow of information on the web is easy disrupted due to collapsed contexts, which boyd defines as "the lack of spatial, social, and temporal boundaries" (boyd, "Taken out of Context" 34). Collapsed context is not to be confused with taking information out of context, but rather occurs when acts performed online become "persistent, replicable, scalable and searchable" (Keats and Humphrey 3). As Poole explains, Google+ attempted to address the problem of sharing the same content with a collapsed audience. One can divide friends into "circles," allowing the sharing of certain posts with only those circles.

Facebook attempted to address the problem with smart lists in 2011 (Elsami et al. 2). Some of Facebook's smart lists are already created for the user, based on their education, work and home information. Users can also create smart lists with particular friends added to them. Only users on the smart list can see posts made to them. However, the number of users who use smart lists is limited, with one study showing that only five percent of users took advantage of this feature and had created at least one. The smart lists place a large burden on the individual in verifying every friend individually (Vitak 467). Users often find it difficult to create groupings due to existing hierarchical structures, with different friends having multiple roles within their lives (Elsami et al 3). Furthermore, the lists that members created personally and the lists created by algorithms tended to vary significantly (Elsami et al. 2).

Poole emphasises that "it's not who you share with, it's who you share as and your context within that group" that counts (O'ReillyMedia, "High Order Bit' Talk"). People on smart lists could potentially share the post, or take a screenshot and share it in other contexts. The imagined audience problematizes this as well, as users often believe that they are sharing certain things with their imagined audience, forgetting that it is available to a much broader audience. This means that they believe that they are sharing "as" one role with an imagined audience, but in reality they are sharing with a multitude of audiences. Different pseudonyms for different audiences can help in limiting the audiences, with which posts are shared,

reducing context collapse. With real names, everything can potentially be traced back to the individual holding that name. [5]

3.2.3 The digital footprint

To add to the complexity of posting opinions online, posts often remain on the internet permanently, and can circulate beyond a user's control. This can result in problems such as posts being interpreted out of context, being used many years after they were made, and potential negative consequences for people. It also means that no matter how an individual may have changed over time, what they believed in the past can be raised again. For example, after Trevor Noah was appointed as the host of the Daily Show (A popular American show which had 1.7 million views per night under its previous host) at Comedy Central in 2015, people began combing through Noah's 8000-plus tweets (Cuccinello). Any new face on the Daily Show would have garnered attention from its audience, but Noah's nationality as a South African rather than an American won him particular attention. Of Noah's over 8000 tweets, six were found that were deemed anti-Semitic, or mocking fat women or sportswomen (Brown). Some of these tweets were from 2009, and were being re-visited in 2015, 6 years after they were made. Although Noah was in the spotlight due to the Daily Show, this can happen to normal citizens as well.

The digital footprint can compromise an individual's privacy, and it binds a user to anything that s/he has ever posted. A single careless post, "like," or "share" can be referred to by another person at a later date. A person who uses a single account for many years will leave a large digital footprint. For example, an adult who created a Facebook account as a teenager many years ago is still bound to that content, despite having changed opinions and outlooks. Hogan describes how this limits our freedom by stating, "We are not free if we are bound to all of our past content, regardless of context. Neither are we free if we can be subject to abuse by a cruel and faceless Internet mob" (Hogan 2). The use of real names

[5] Most Social Network Sites such as Facebook have privacy settings. These setting should in theory help prevent collapsed context by limiting the people who are able to view the profiles. This also applies to the settings users can apply with the various varieties of Friends List. Users are also not always aware of privacy settings (particularly users with low technological familiarity) and even those who do adjust their settings often have a skewed understanding of the implications (boyd & Hargittai).

makes us accountable beyond the years when we are alive, because even after death, the digital footprint lives on. To have to be held accountable for every single interaction that one carries out online for the rest of one's life and beyond is a rather daunting prospect (Hogan, 5).

Digital footprints are being created from babyhood, as parents upload baby photos and other information (Kumar 1). Some users experience a paradoxical concern regarding the needs for privacy and retaining an archive (Kumar 1). As Khumar emphasises, from a privacy perspective we worry that photographs uploaded to Facebook will never disappear, however, from an archival perspective we worry that they will disappear (9). SNSs, such as Facebook, hold people forever accountable for what they say, and while real name supporters believe this to create "good" behaviour, this approach contains the potential for danger. It fails to acknowledge the growth that individuals can undergo.

The wealth of information that is stored online may stigmatise or endanger people. The digital footprint is left not only on social media sites, but in any interaction that one makes online, either with others, or with the site's interface. Search terms, visited websites, online purchases, all leave a footprint of some sort. In addition, privacy is easily breached when no item in the digital footprint is ever erased.

Pseudonyms that can be linked to real names help to mitigate problems regarding digital footprints. At times pseudonyms are linked to real names, but the link needs to be found, and may not necessarily be immediately apparent through a simple search. On the other hand, entirely anonymous users, or users who have taken steps to ensure that their pseudonyms can in no way be linked to their real names, have the benefit of being able to keep their digital footprints separate from their real names. This has the advantage of preventing people from being able to associate any past posts with them.

3.3 Online and offline names

According to boyd, there is an implicit assumption that because someone uses their real name in RL, they should use them online (boyd, "The Politics of 'Real Names'").

Facebook product design manager, Julie Zhuo, argued in the *New York Times Online* that until the age of the internet, anonymity was rare. If a person spoke in public, people in the area could look and see who was speaking (Zhuo). This naive claim discounts the fact that people were able to communicate through other mediums such as writing. It also makes a dangerous assumption that the effects of names online are the same as offline.

When someone enters a space in real life, s/he reveals certain aspects of him/herself, but is able to hide others. The body reveals information about gender, age and race. Fashion and body language convey information about aspects such as sexuality, socio-economic status, religion, ethnicity and tastes (boyd, "The Politics of 'Real Names'"). While information can be hidden, the body is used to initiate conversation in face-to-face scenarios, not one's name. Name sharing is a ritualised practice in relationships that displays politeness and openness (boyd, "The Politics of 'Real Names'"). Additionally, in everyday real world social conversations, interactions are not recorded and there is little risk of collapsed context or the digital footprint. People simply passing by in real life do not know others' real names, thus everything that one says cannot be linked back to the individual in the way that it can be online. Real name usage online and offline is not simply interchangeable (boyd, "The Politics of 'Real Names'"). The different ways of retaining data mean that the off and online contexts need to be treated differently, unlike that implied by real name policies.

Names are also culturally specific, and reveal certain information about the user. In a Western context, a real name gives relatively little information (boyd, "The Politics of 'Real Names'"). It ties you to your family, and may give some indication of your ethnicity and socio-economic circumstances (boyd, "The Politics of 'Real Names'"). In an African context, names can work very differently. The exact practice behind name giving varies from culture to culture. African personal names, however, all have meanings, and are used to provide a short history of the family or community, with the meanings depending on the context and culture (Mandende v). In some cultures, such as Vhavenda, teknonymy (parents and grandparents are addressed by the personal names of their children and grandchildren) is used, and some members of the community may not even know their real names (Mandende v). This is problematic when a standardised Western policy is applied across the board.

A Muvenda person is likely to have more than one name during the course of their lifetime, as children are named at birth and then bestowed with new names through the course of their lifetime (Mandende 193). Some sites have "waiting periods" after a name change,

preventing further name changes. Within Muvenda tradition, it is a sign of insubordination and disrespect if the former personal name is used when an individual has acquired a new one (Mandende 194). This could be problematic if a person is unable to change his/her real name to reflect this change online. Belief also plays an important role with names in an African context, as in some cultures (e.g., Sotho and Batswana) a person's name holds great spiritual power, and can be used by those will ill intent to cause harm. Thus people may have multiple names, to hide the birth name, in order to keep themselves safe (Fitzpatrick 25).

While the name whereby one is addressed is very important in some cultures, keeping one's name private is important in others. It is claimed that Facebook has failed to attract large numbers of members in Japan because of its real name requirements (Tabuchi). Japanese online culture revolves mainly around pseudonymous websites, with even famous bloggers posting under pseudonyms. This is due to concerns about privacy, both from strangers and from those with whom one works (Tabuchi). The Western trend of using Facebook to recreate real life social relationships online is not one that is common in Japan, where users use the anonymity of the web to express themselves, free of the pressure to fit into the workplace (Tabuchi). In the case of Japan, privacy is so highly valued online that Facebook is struggling to find a foothold, and there is a clear particular cultural stance towards naming and anonymity that runs against the spirit of sites like Facebook.

3.4 Conforming to real name policies

Real name policies are undermined when users do not conform to them. This contributed to Friendster's downfall, where people manipulated the system in order to have as many friends as possible and use features like "most popular." To expand their reach, Friendster's users circumnavigated the intended design. They began collecting Friends and acquaintances beyond the four degree rule (people within four degrees of another friend). To further extend reach, Fakesters came into being. Fakesters created profiles allegedly for celebrities, popular fictional characters, universities, concepts, and other entities. By "friending" a Fakester, one could see the profiles of everyone else who had friended the Fakester, allowing friending of them and circumnavigating the four degree rule. Some Fakesters, such as "Brown University," provided useful ways for people to find and connect

with old classmates, while others were surfed for entertainment value (boyd and Ellison). This sparked a form of "real name policy" policing on Friendster, as the company retaliated with a mass and active deletion of Fakesters and genuine users who did not use realistic photographs of themselves. This breached trust between users and the site (boyd and Ellison). Fakesters were deleted, irrespective of whether they were pages for entities such as universities or people using pseudonyms.

Sites' interfaces can be used to help or hinder trolling. Ironically, the "friends list" feature created on Facebook along with the news feed allow friends to find each other and keep up to date, but also create a perfect setup for networks of trolls. The public surfable friends list on Facebook can also be used by trolls. The friend option allows troll profiles to befriend other troll profiles, and the news feed creates the perfect platform for showing what was being trolled and by whom. The Facebook accounts allowed the creating of a more persistent identity and an "anti-social" network of sorts formed, allowing the establishment of social ties that would have been impossible for example on the shifting anonymous forums of *4chan'*s /b/ (Phillips).

3.5 Real name policies fail technically and ideologically

Real names supposedly enforce self-censorship. When anonymous, people are able to voice their thoughts and feelings with significantly less fear of retaliation or reprisal than when using their real names. For Zuckerberg, this is a strong concern. Poole, however, sees anonymity as a gateway to creativity and free speech online. ''The cost of failure is really high when you're contributing as yourself'' (qtd. in Hogan 4). The disinhibition experienced online (under real names or pseudonyms) as well as the ability to speak without self-censorship that anonymity offers, has led to various sites implementing real name policies, and in the case of South Korea and China, nationwide identity verification policies (Cho et al., 3041). In South Korea, user ID and real name policies became required of sites over a certain size and were applied over 146 websites. The case has more subtleties than can be covered in this paper. However, it is important to note that legal enforcement initially dampened participation, but eventually became irrelevant to participation (Cho et al., 3047). The study revealed that users strongly preferred participating pseudonymously, and that links

to real names were likely to reduce the use of offensive words (Cho and Acquisti, 1). However, the reduction was minimal (0.9%) (Chosunilbo & Chosun). The lack of overall effectiveness of the real name policy along with concerns that citizens were more vulnerable to cyber hacking, led to the closure of the online registration law (Chosunilbo & Chosun). The real name policy was a failure, as were the real name policies introduced by the news sites in the case studies of Chapter 04.

The limitations that real name policies can impose when used in the wrong context were also highlighted by the Gütersloh Second participatory budget. The first budget had allowed anonymous interactions, but had resulted in strongly heated debate. Real names were seen as the solution. Arguments against real names are focused largely on the negative quality of dialogue that anonymity is seen to produce, a lack of self-policing resulting in profanities, and increased personal defamation (Ruesch and Märker, 110). However, the real name policy was argued to be a failure, resulting in lower participation, decreased democracy as people were afraid of retaliation and thus did not speak out, and a changed focus to that of the person rather than content (Ruesch and Märker, 111). Enforcing real name policies was also taxing on resources (Ruesch and Märker, 112).

Zuckerberg has argued that having multiple identities indicates a "lack of integrity." His sister, Randi Zuckerberg, has argued that anonymity online should be completely eradicated from the entire internet due to it encouraging antisocial behaviour. This reflects a harder line than that taken by Mark Zuckerberg. Facebook product design manager, Julie Zhuo, argued that online anonymity leads to antisocial behaviour which "pollutes" discussions (Zhuo, 2010). Zhuo points to social pressure from the knowledge that those you know in real life may see your comments and posts as a way of deterring trolling behaviour (Zhuo). Zhuo claims that the social pressure from real name policies works because most trolls do not have the gall to say to people face-to-face what they are willing to say over the internet. But anonymity online is about far more than just trolling. It is about identity, free speech, non-homogenised content, and privacy, all of which are aspects that real names affect, often negatively.

Anonymity is also seen as being associated with swearing and incivility. This received a strong focus in the South Korean study. Swearing itself can set the stage for more of the same, with audiences more likely to respond to comments that include swearing with foul language of their own (Kwon and Cho, 1, 2). This implies that stringent moderation is

needed to ensure that no swearing appears to other users. Swearing can also be linked to heightened emotions, rather than simple rudeness (Kwon and Cho, 3).

It has been argued that it is impossible to have a passionate debate without a lack of politeness, and that the internet can be a strong proponent for the "democratic merit of robust and heated discussion" (Papacharissi, 259). However, Papacharissi does not see this as a negative factor. The internet becomes a place where the public sphere can be revived with heated discussion that is not necessarily polite (Papacharissi, 259). The distinction between civility and politeness is an important one for Papacharissi. She emphasises that "polite manners are a condition necessary, but not sufficient, for civility. And yet, civility is misunderstood when reduced to interpersonal politeness, because this definition ignores the democratic merit of robust and heated discussion."

Papacharissi argues that it is not civility holding back democratic conversation; it is the confusion between politeness and civility, which results in tepid, unspontaneous conversation. Conversation to her needs to be more robust, rude and self-absorbed. She defines "politeness as etiquette related, and civility as respect for the collective traditions of democracy" (Papacharissi 259). Situations that do not allow spontaneity and are too polite, do not capture the conditioned illogic of human thought. While flaming (fragmented, nonsensical and enraged discussion) (Papacharissi 260) can be a prominent and ugly feature of online debates, this is not always bad for democracy. Too much regulation of discussion content and topics would restrain diversity, and render it more homogeneous (Papacharissi 267).

The fluidity of online identity encourages dissent, and its anonymity removes all real world status markers that may affect how people interact with others (although on site status markers might be present, such as a moderator, or a member with a high number of contributions). Papacharissi suggests that the online world naturally lends itself to more rude conversations. However, she also suggests that despite the commonly held belief that rudeness online is negative, it may work in positive ways as well.

3.6 Identity theft

SNSs have become a basic tool for and a mirror of social interaction, personal identity and network building. They have been widely adopted into many people's everyday lives, and have become an integral part of life. A pervasive technology, such as these sites can be dangerous. Once they have been widely adopted, they tend to become invisible, ubiquitous, taken for granted and no longer questioned (Debatin et al. 83). The result of this is that users are usually not conscious of the various issues around privacy. This can lead to unintended consequences, for example, threats to privacy and a changed relationship between the public and private spheres (Debatin et al. 83). Issues around privacy on SNSs have included inadvertent disclosure of personal information, damaged reputation, unwanted contact, harassment or stalking, surveillance-like structures due to backtracking functions, use of personal data by third parties, and hacking and identity theft (boyd and Ellison; Debatin et al. 83).

Chapter 4: Case Studies

News sites, with their need for rational and civil discourse have attempted to control online tendencies on them towards negative speech in their comment sections through real name policy. This chapter examines two case studies. The first includes two South African news sites: News24, and the Daily Maverick. Both of these sites have unsuccessfully attempted to control the online tendency towards negative speech through real name policies. An interview with News24 is included as a way to understand the sites motivations and experiences with its policy's at a deeper level. By contrast, the second case focuses on 4chan which is an American image board site with a notorious reputation for trolling, illegal activities and shenanigans. Despite its troublesome nature, 4chan's design allows for effective moderation, and provides a juxtaposition of moderation methods and user interaction to the news sites.

4.1 Case study 1: *News24* and the *Daily Maverick*

4.1.1*News24*

News sites have developed with the widespread use of the internet, replacing, or working in conjunction with traditional newspapers. News sites frequently have commenting sections, and opportunities to write "Letters to the editor," a feature carried over from traditional print news media. Anonymous comments and letters have been commonplace and accepted amongst these contributions. News sites, as well as other online forums and places that allow direct and indirect political discussion, create more heterogeneous political discussion than face-to-face and traditional news media have (Brundidge 695). However, this varies between online environments, and usually does not happen because people are seeking out opposing views (Brundidge 695).

News24 was started in South Africa in 1998 (Rossouw) and is an online newspaper that forms part of the 24.com network. On their "About" page, *News24* states that "Centered on *News24*, 24.com is dedicated to creating and sustaining uniquely African online and

mobile communities. As South Africa's largest digital publishing house, the network welcomes over 6 million local unique browsers monthly" ("24.Com Jobs and Vacancies - Careers24.") The 24.com group includes *MyNews24*.com, property24, and careers24. The above statement refers to the 24.com groups, and not specifically to *News24.com*, as there does not seem to be a specific page for that. Due to both its massive audience and history of attempting various approaches to managing comments on their site, *News24* makes for a relevant case study. As part of my research I interviewed two people at *News24* who are responsible for moderating the comments on *MyNews24* and on the *News24* Facebook page.

Initially *News24* used a fully moderated system where all comments were scrutinized. However, this stifled comments and user engagement which was seen as "one of our main priorities at *News24*" (Momberg). In 2010, *News24* switched to a community moderation system, which required all users to log in with a social network or their own 24.com log in. These log in were still allowed to be anonymous, they simply made commenting harder, and caused it to be linked back to either a *News24* account, or a social media account. The aim of this was to improve the quality of user interactions and to weed out internet trolls (Momberg). Trolls were defined and problematized as follows:

> *"As online users we know the trolls as those angry and usually anonymous users that frequent our and other websites' commenting sections with the main aim of shocking and annoying other users.… Abusive comments on news websites are a worldwide issue and in the South African context, with our troubled history, the problem is exacerbated"* (Momberg).

In the interview with employees from *News24*, it was stated that trolls were usually identified by "instinct" and when users made the same kind of comments repeatedly (Anonymous and Anonymous). Both trolling and hate speech were considered to be equally problematic and neither was tolerated. The definitions given by Momberg of trolling when compared with that of the interview are slightly different. However they both do little to distinguish between hate speech and trolling, which is in line with the site viewing them as equally problematic. No research was performed or records kept by News24 on how many of the problematic comments were believed to be trolling versus genuine hate speech. Trolling, hate speech and swearing were not tolerated (Anonymous and Anonymous). During the interview, the word "Trolling" tended to be used interchangeably with other terms that implied abusive comments. Little distinction was made between trolling where people were

provoking a reaction and genuinely abusive comments. The interviewees tended to refer to all abuse as trolling, which is in line with Momberg's statement.

The system of requiring users to sign in via a social network or *News24*account was not sufficient to prevent abuse. In October 2011, *News24* posted an article stating that it had switched to the Facebook comments signing in system, with the result that people would have to use their real names. "In short, if you aren't an FB account-holder you will not be able to leave comments" (Momberg). *News24* seemed to be taking a hard line on real name policy. The change also meant that *News24* could promote itself amongst Friends of users on Facebook. Facebook was thus used both as a moderator (through real name usage) and as a marketing strategy. *News24* believed strongly that removing pseudonyms, and enforcing real name behavior would create a better behaved community (Anonymous and Anonymous).

News24 attributed the excessive trolling and hateful comments that had been made on their site to the fact that they were the largest news portal at that time, causing it to "bear the brunt of the trolls" (Momberg; Anonymous and Anonymous). The move towards implementing the policy of signing in via Facebook triggered several responses. Some users applauded it, calling for the shutting down of trolls, while others lamented what they perceived as a loss of freedom of speech and ability to voice minority opinions. This is illustrated in the extracts below[6].

Abe - 2011-10-16 09:07

That's rich... If it wasn't for anonimity and pseudonyms we would still think that the world was flat and that the sun and moon rotated around the earth. We would still be burning witches and killing people for being heretics. It is only natural that those who are politically correct or inline with mainstream views would not care much for anonimity. But unfortuantately, in this day and age people still get prosecuted and victimized for their views especially if it differs from the mainstream or the views of the ruling party. Here is some food for thought: "The opposite for courage is not cowardice, it is conformity. Even a dead fish can go with the flow."- Jim Hightower

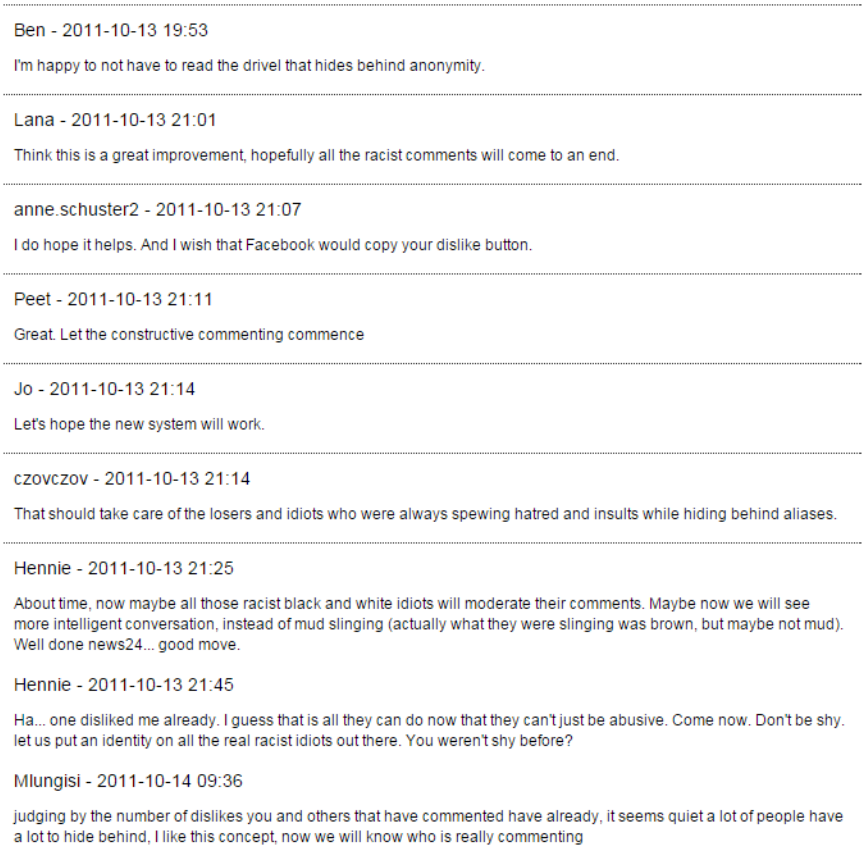
Myth - 2011-10-18 16:49

Clearly your literary insight is as low as the News24 policymakers. The nom de plume has been used for yonks, it's the moderation which has fallen over. Old time editors would read the letters prior to publication, here they probably want to maximise profits.

Fig.02. A screenshot of comments on the *News24* article "News24 comments get a makeover. Source: Momberg, Jannie. "News24 Comments Get a Makeover." News24, 13 Oct. 2011,

[6] A decision was made not to blank out the usernames of posters, regardless of the kind of name used. The comments are available in the public domain to any individual who visits the website, with no privacy barriers (such as log in or privacy settings) present. Therefore there is no need for confidentiality. Anonymity was however given to the two individuals who participated in the interview in an attempt to prevent bias or discrimination against them. Only *News24* was available for an interview.

www.news24.com/Columnists/GuestColumn/News24-comments-get-a-makeover-20111011?cpid=2. Accessed 13 Mar. 2017.



Ben - 2011-10-13 19:53

I'm happy to not have to read the drivel that hides behind anonymity.

Lana - 2011-10-13 21:01

Think this is a great improvement, hopefully all the racist comments will come to an end.

anne.schuster2 - 2011-10-13 21:07

I do hope it helps. And I wish that Facebook would copy your dislike button.

Peet - 2011-10-13 21:11

Great. Let the constructive commenting commence

Jo - 2011-10-13 21:14

Let's hope the new system will work.

czovczov - 2011-10-13 21:14

That should take care of the losers and idiots who were always spewing hatred and insults while hiding behind aliases.

Hennie - 2011-10-13 21:25

About time, now maybe all those racist black and white idiots will moderate their comments. Maybe now we will see more intelligent conversation, instead of mud slinging (actually what they were slinging was brown, but maybe not mud). Well done news24... good move.

Hennie - 2011-10-13 21:45

Ha... one disliked me already. I guess that is all they can do now that they can't just be abusive. Come now. Don't be shy. let us put an identity on all the real racist idiots out there. You weren't shy before?

Mlungisi - 2011-10-14 09:36

judging by the number of dislikes you and others that have commented have already, it seems quiet a lot of people have a lot to hide behind, I like this concept, now we will know who is really commenting

Fig. 03. A screenshot of comments on the *News24* article "News24 comments get a makeover. Source: Momberg, Jannie. "News24 Comments Get a Makeover." News24, 13 Oct. 2011, www.news24.com/Columnists/GuestColumn/News24-comments-get-a-makeover-20111011?cpid=2. Accessed 13 Mar. 2017.

A dominant trend amongst the commenters regarding the Facebook sign in policy was to celebrate the perception that trolls and racists could no longer hide behind anonymity (see fig. 02 & fig. 03). Simultaneously, however, a concern was voiced that opinions that did not conform to dominant social norms would be attacked or endangered, turning people into "sheep.". Some users used obvious pseudonyms, others used what may have been their real name, and quite commonly, users used what may be their first name only.

Despite *News24*'s efforts to curb trolls through a real name policy, they closed their comments section completely in 2015, four years after switching to Facebook's sign in system. The real name system had had a substantial length of time to prove that it could

ensure good behavior, and it had failed. The former *News24* editor, Andrew Trench, explained the decision on 11 September 2015:

> *"Each day the tone and substance of many of our comments appear increasingly at odds with the mission of editorial excellence which we have set for ourselves. Many commentators insist on pushing the boundaries of free speech available to us in South Africa. Comments tediously drift towards hate speech at worst and, at best, are often laced with prejudice. Interesting and considered contributions are drowned out by a cacophony of insults from a minority of users. This is not the experience we wish users to have in our home. The internet is awash with social media platforms which allow unfettered free speech and increasingly are the more comfortable home of online conversations."* (Trench, 2015).

Much of the focus of undesirable comments was race related (Anonymous and Anonymous). This occurred despite people having their real names attached to the comments, and being posted on a public forum. The idea that real names would enforce good behavior was clearly not realised to the degree that *News24* had hoped. The policy had failed to enforce good behavior. Where the previous announcement of switching to real name only had been hailed with a fair bit of hope and positivity, the announcement to close the comments section entirely with met with a large amount of hostility (see fig. 04). Many people claimed that *News24* had "sloppy" journalism (fig. 04, 05, 06), and that the comments played a vital role in balancing out bad journalism. People also found value in their engagement with others and there was a strong need in people to be able to comment and add their input to the journalism as seen in fig. 04.

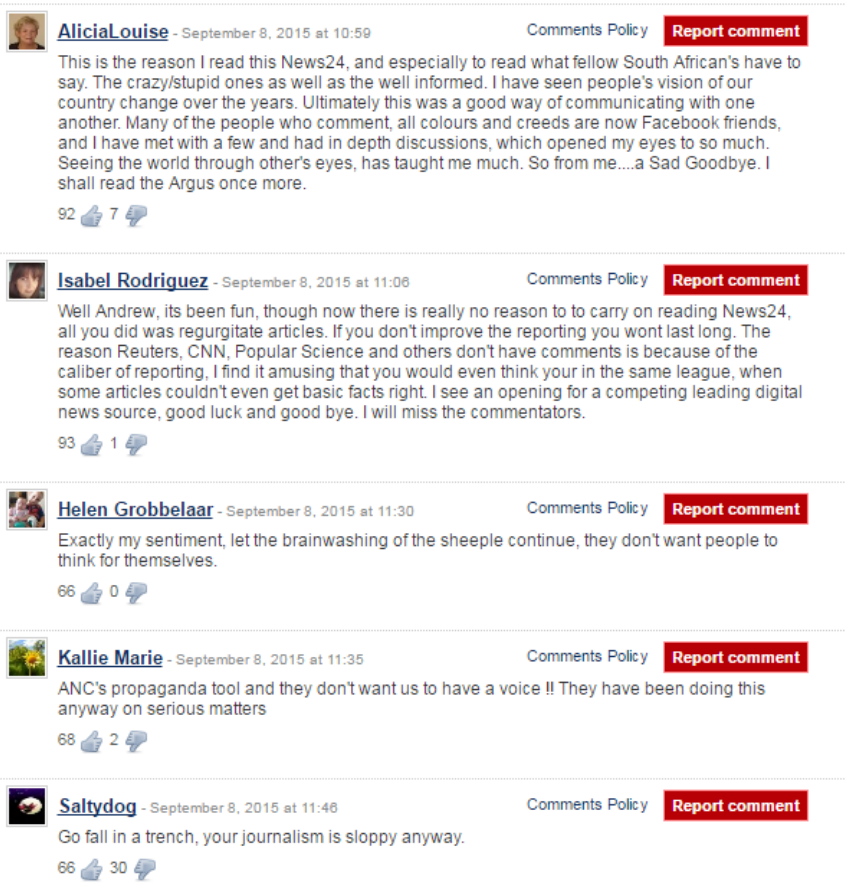


Fig. 04. Commenters on the article announcing that *News24* would be shutting down its comments. Source: Trench, Andrew. "Farewell to Comments: Why We Are Making a Change." News24, 8 Sept. 2015, www.news24.com/Columnists/AndrewTrench/Farewell-to-comments-Why-we-are-making-a-change-20150908. Accessed 13 Mar. 2017.

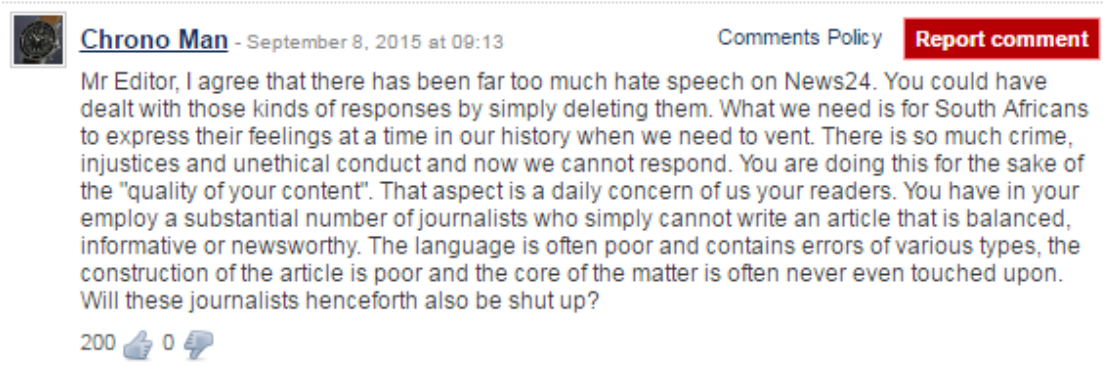


Fig. 05: Commenters on the article announcing that *News24* would be shutting down its comments. Source: Trench, Andrew. "Farewell to Comments: Why We Are Making a Change." News24, 8 Sept. 2015, www.news24.com/Columnists/AndrewTrench/Farewell-to-comments-Why-we-are-making-a-change-20150908. Accessed 13 Mar. 2017.

The above comment (fig. 05) on “sloppy journalism” managed to garner 200 likes, and no dislikes, suggesting that a large number of people agreed with this sentiment.

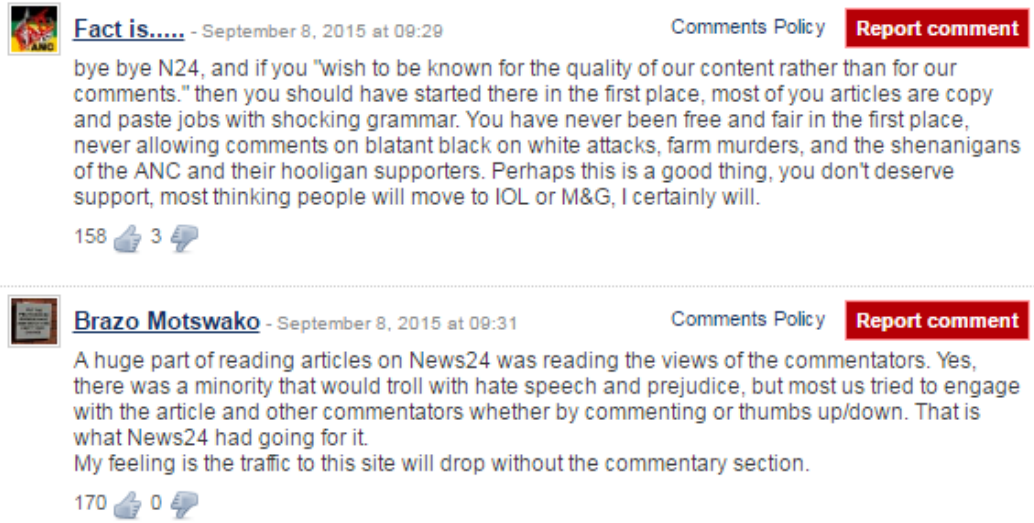


Fig.06. More commenters chime in on their opinion on the quality of News24’s articles and the importance of the interaction on the site that the comment section provided. Source: Trench, Andrew. “Farewell to Comments: Why We Are Making a Change.” News24, 8 Sept. 2015, www.news24.com/Columnists/AndrewTrench/Farewell-to-comments-Why-we-are-making-a-change-20150908. Accessed 13 Mar. 2017.



Fig.07. Commenters continue to add their input onto how much they value the comment section, and concerns over shutting down comments. Source: Trench, Andrew. "Farewell to Comments: Why We Are Making a Change." News24, 8 Sept. 2015, www.news24.com/Columnists/AndrewTrench/Farewell-to-comments-Why-we-are-making-a-change-20150908. Accessed 13 Mar. 2017.

Again, reactions regarding the credibility of *News24* articles and the important role of comments in correcting them and highlighting other points of view garnered huge support, with 158 likes to only 3 dislikes (fig. 06). This trend was echoed in comments expressing the importance of *News24* as a platform for discussion.

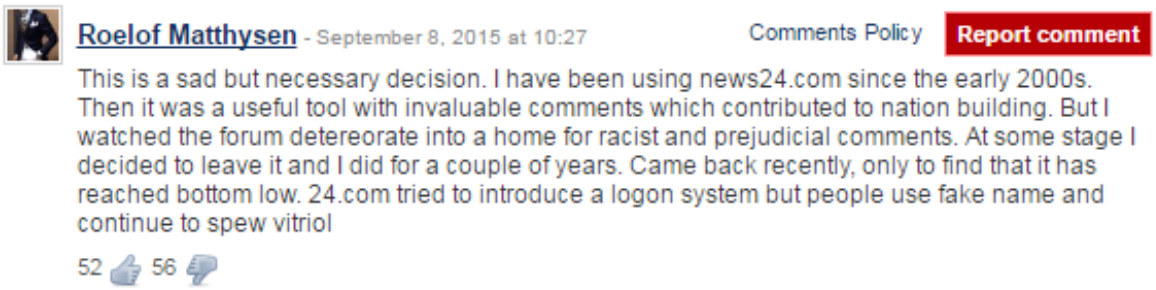


Fig. 08. Comments that are supportive of the shutting down of the comments section of *News24* receive a much more equal ratio of likes to dislikes than those that are against it. Source: Trench, Andrew. "Farewell to Comments: Why We Are Making a Change." News24, 8 Sept. 2015, www.news24.com/Columnists/AndrewTrench/Farewell-to-comments-Why-we-are-making-a-change-20150908. Accessed 13 Mar. 2017.

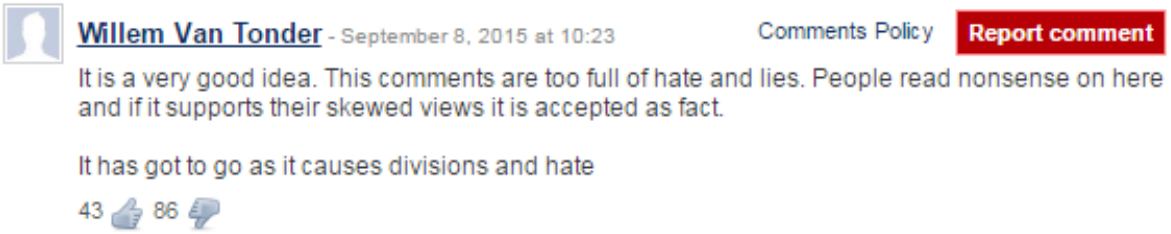


Fig. 09. Comments that are supportive of the shutting down of the comments section of *News24* receive a much more equal ratio of likes to dislikes than those that are against it. Source: Trench, Andrew. "Farewell to Comments: Why We Are Making a Change." News24, 8 Sept. 2015, www.news24.com/Columnists/AndrewTrench/Farewell-to-comments-Why-we-are-making-a-change-20150908. Accessed 13 Mar. 2017.

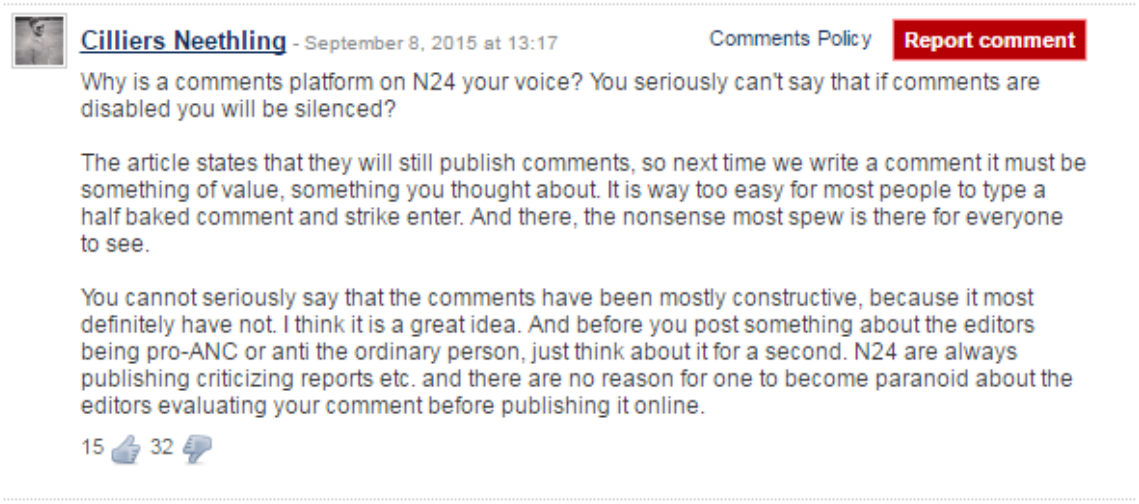


Fig. 10. Comments that are supportive of the shutting down of the comments section of *News24* receive a much more equal ratio of likes to dislikes than those that are against it. Source: Trench, Andrew. "Farewell to Comments: Why We Are Making a Change." News24, 8 Sept. 2015, www.news24.com/Columnists/AndrewTrench/Farewell-to-comments-Why-we-are-making-a-change-20150908. Accessed 13 Mar. 2017.



Fig. 11. Comments that are supportive of the shutting down of the comments section of *News24* receive a much more equal ratio of likes to dislikes than those that are against it. The above comment receives over double the dislikes to likes. Source: Trench, Andrew. "Farewell to Comments: Why We Are Making a Change." News24, 8 Sept. 2015, www.news24.com/Columnists/AndrewTrench/Farewell-to-comments-Why-we-are-making-a-change-20150908. Accessed 13 Mar. 2017.

Comments that applauded the shutdown of the comments section were not approved as often as opposing comments, and often had a similar number of likes to dislikes, with a few receiving many more dislikes. This suggested that many people were opposed to the shutdown. Despite the interviewee stating that readers tended to agree with the shutdown

(Anonymous and Anonymous), the comments that were posted and the likes to dislikes ratios are at odds with this. Many commenters also stated that they would boycott *News24*, but if they did, this had little impact. *News24* noticed little difference in traffic, which is not surprising as commenters had only made up about five to ten percent of their readership (Anonymous and Anonymous).

Despite the policy of signing on with real names via Facebook being a failure, *News24* still maintains that anonymity causes problems and that real names mitigate this. With the closing of comments on *News24* came the invitation for users to post on *MyNews24*. This is a separate section that only contains user generated content. *MyNews24* allows users to post stories, and upload photographs, but not to comment (although if one clicks on a user's profile or looks at the top users, there is a comments statistic, a remnant in the code from when users were allowed to comment (Anonymous and Anonymous).

MyNews24 adopts a different approach to content whereby contributions have to be a minimum length of 200 words. This is much longer than most comments that had been posted in their earlier comments section. The minimum length was implemented in an attempt to prevent people from responding quickly, impulsively and with disinhibition. It was aimed at making users stop and think about what they want to say and why, without simply reacting (Anonymous and Anonymous).

This has created a more controlled process, both in the mind of the commenter, and for moderators who have fewer comments to moderate. Content that responds to columns on *MyNews24* tend to be longer than those on short news articles. This is attributed to columns themselves being longer, and users therefore having to invest more time in them and consequently becoming more invested in their contributions. Comments' having a minimum word limit also means that people need to invest a lot of time into a conversation, possibly encouraging more involved and invested, and less reactionary behavior. Encouraging certain types of behavior in this way is possibly more effective than merely implementing a real name policy.

In addition to these measures, *News24* moderates the content on *MyNews24*. The social media team actively checks Facebook for offending comments. *News24* has persistent and returning commenters who they get to know and recognize. This has the spin-off of saving time for moderators (Anonymous and Anonymous). Furthermore, once a good

comment stream gets going, it may be delayed due to moderation, but people come back to it, supposedly due to their investment in the stream (Anonymous and Anonymous). The investment is attributed in part to the minimum length of contributions, which means that participants must devote time to both replying and reading others' posts.

One has to log into *MyNews24* via Facebook, which then defaults to the user's Facebook display name and profile. A user can, however, change both avatar and display name to whatever s/he wishes.*MyNews24* adopts a mixed approach to usernames. People have to create an account by logging in with Facebook. *MyNews24* requests several permissions, but only needs access to one's public profile. The other requirements are friends lists and email addresses, which are automatically selected unless one clicks on the little blue "edit this" option. By going to "edit this," people are able to choose whether they wish to share their friends list and/or email address. It is, however, an "opt out" rather than "opt in" system.

Once signed in via Facebook, users have the option to customise their profile. Their display name and avatar are automatically taken from their Facebook page, but can be changed to a wide selection of names. As was revealed in the interviews, this was not due to a new found consideration for pseudonyms, but is a relic from the time when *News24* originally allowed accounts to be created with pseudonyms. Allowing pseudonyms that were linked to real names was seen as a way of easing the transfer of old pseudonymous *News24* accounts to the Facebook logins. Since then, changes simply have not been made, allowing surface level pseudonyms to continue should users' desire. Certain measures have been put in place so that the deliberate misspelling of profanities does not occur (e.g., fuck, fuc, fuk, f4ck, f4k are all unavailable). This is not entirely foolproof and can be worked around, as I discovered after some experimentation.

It is interesting to note that several of *MyNews24's* top users have varied names, some of which seem to conform to what Facebook would consider to be a real name, while others are clearly not real. Despite all accounts now being linked to Facebook so that display names and real names are linked, not all Facebook accounts appear to be genuine.

Two suspicious accounts that I came across amongst top *MyNews24* users were "No Ohno" and "dramoswomensclinic768." These are clear examples of non-real names. dramoswomensclinic768's real name on their profile leads to a fully private page on

Facebook. No Ohno's "real name" remains No Ohno on Facebook and is available to the public. It has no friends or likes. The only information it provides is that No Ohno worked in London, United Kingdom, and that s/he has changed the profile picture cover picture once. These two images are the only ones uploaded onto No Ohno's profile. The lack of activity, combined with a lack of friends and the suspicious name, marks No Ohno as likely to be an account created specifically to log into sites such as *MyNews24*, effectively allowing the user to comment and post anonymously.

My interviewees took a strong stance against anonymity due to the notion that people with pseudonyms can say anything, are disinhibited, are not held accountable, and do not necessarily own what they say. However, the interviewees accepted that the Facebook login was not perfect and would at times put pseudonymous users at the top of the user page. They acknowledged that some users could be protected by pseudonyms, such as vulnerable users or those who may suffer negative consequences for speaking out. However, they believed that the arguments against anonymity far outweighed those for anonymity, and that they cannot cater to everyone (Anonymous and Anonymous). The fact that anonymous users seemed to frequently make it to their "Top Users" list on the front page was brushed over during the interview, and the interviewees retained their strong stance against anonymity.

Moderation on *MyNews24* was done by an extremely small team (usually two people), who needed to moderate comments for the website and the Facebook page. The Facebook page was reportedly more difficult to moderate, as people were able to make comments on older articles and the moderation team would have to go back to the old articles and find the comments. Comments posted to *MyNews24* have to be approved before being submitted. Any comments with swearing are not accepted. Consistency is seen as being important, and swearing is seen as encouraging other swearing, a view which is in line with Kwon and Cho's findings (1, 2). This has created some difficult scenarios for moderators. For example, one column had a quote from parliament that contained swearing. Commenters who quoted with the profanities had their comments rejected in order to adhere to the principle of consistency (Anonymous and Anonymous).

Being a large website, *News24's* audience is diverse, with a fifty percent split between male and female, and black and white (Anonymous and Anonymous). Based on gut feeling of the interviewees, however, the majority of commenters are white. This was based on the number of posts that defended white people and the belief that when columns are critical of a

particular race, that race would rush to defend itself (Anonymous and Anonymous). Much of this is exacerbated by South Africa's difficult history which lends itself to content that refers to race, apartheid and decolonization. *MyNews24* still seemingly struggles to devote sufficient time to moderation, particularly on their Facebook page which requires moderators to manually go through all the articles. They are unwilling to dedicate more resources to moderation (Trench). On a whole, the interview argued that the approach was working. However, Facebook pages presented problems in moderating comments, and *MyNews24* has to have every individual comment moderated and approved. This is time intensive, and delays conversations between commenters, as moderators do not work over weekends and need to approve a comment for it to be posted (Anonymous and Anonymous). Despite that, commenters seem to still be willing to come back to the conversation in spite of the delay.

4.1.2 *Daily Maverick*

The *Daily Maverick* is a South African news site which consists of a "blend of news, information, analysis and opinion" ("About Us.") Rather than employing journalists, the *Daily Maverick* has "Opinionistas," many of whom have other jobs simultaneously ("Opinionistas"). Like *News24*, the *Daily Maverick* believes that real names should be used on their site to create better behaviour. Similarly to *News24*, they were disappointed. However, when *News24* closed their comments section, the *Daily Maverick* responded on 8 September 2015 with an article. They stated that many international news sites have discontinued online comments, and made suggestions on how to handle trolling online through from Facebook logins and moderators. However, they did recognise that the online environment lends itself to aggressive comments and trolling, and the difficulty in financing and maintaining adequate moderation. They claimed that a combination of anonymity, distance between commenters, and the opportunity to speak at length were factors that created negative comments (Davis). Davis concluded that:

> *"News24's decision will doubtless cause some soul-searching in other South African newsrooms as to whether continuing to host comments is more trouble than it's worth.* Daily Maverick *CEO Styli Charalambous says the matter is certainly not set in stone.*

> *"'At this point (at Daily Maverick) we don't want to shut down comments to crack down on a few trolls who spoil the party for others,'" Charalambous says.*
>
> *"Comments are important, and help build a community around a brand. But if they degenerate to a level where hate speech and vitriol outnumber the good comments, you need to adopt new measures. What those measures are may be very different from one news publisher to the next."* (Davis)

This conclusion expresses a desire to keep comments open, but simultaneously foreshadows the closing of comments on the *Daily Maverick*. The article also notes that there are a "few" trolls who "spoil the party for others," suggesting that it is not in fact the majority of their audience's behavior which causes the *Daily Maverick* concern. Despite the "few" who "spoil the fun" and the importance of creating a community, a few months later on the 11th January 2016, the *Daily Maverick* made a post titled "*Editorial: We tried. We really, really did*." The title itself seems full of regret, woeful of what had to be done. The article starts by highlighting The *Daily Maverick*'s vision when it first started:

> *"We hoped that our comments section would play a central role in fostering healthy, robust, sharp-edged debate — a town hall in which all were welcome, regardless of the usual caveats. We felt that South Africa could be a lodestar for this sort of thing: our differences would melt away in the fire of intellectual engagement, and we'd forge a new, coherent identity because we were all so damned smart. It hasn't quite turned out that way*." (Daily Maverick Editorial Team)

Given the tendency for disinhibition to occur on the internet and associated negative behavior, combined with the *Daily Maverick*'s own comments regarding *News24*'s decision to shut down its comments section, this statement from the *Daily Maverick* about their ideal comments section seems naïve. Comments online can reflect intellectual and critical debate, but they are also frequently brief (positively or negatively), prejudiced, hateful, off topic, or contain trolling. The *Daily Maverick* urged readers who felt slighted by their new policy to investigate options such as Twitter, Facebook, and *4chan* among other sites which have "so successfully offered voices to the voiceless" (Daily Maverick Editorial Team). Users are still able to react to articles as useful, inspiring, surprising, interesting, maddening or concerning, and can write letters to the editor.

The *Daily Maverick* seemingly recognizes the value of this moderation as they are "suspending our comments section until such time as we can either moderate away those who feel entitled to spew hate speech on our property" (Daily Maverick Editorial Team). But moderation is not always seen as the most financially sensible option, or the best way to allocate resources. It appears that the *Daily Maverick* and *News24* do not prioritise allocating extensive resources to moderation, as the then editor-in-chief of *News24*, Andrew Trench, said "The volume and demands on our team are immense" … "I think they can be better utilised producing interesting journalism." (qtd. in Davis).

The withdrawal of comments from the *Daily Maverick* caused an uproar over freedom of speech, but the *Daily Maverick* pointed out that its readers have the right to express themselves freely, but they are not obligated to create a platform for it. "There is nothing in the unwritten, unsigned contract between a website and its readership that remotely implies a 'right' to comment," it said (Daily Maverick Editorial Team). "It may be your 'right' to say what you want. But it's our right not to want to host it." (Daily Maverick Editorial Team).

Like *News24*, the *Daily Maverick*'s attempt at a real name policy failed. Real name usage is simply not sufficient to enforce good behaviour as was clearly displayed in the cases of *News24* and the *Daily Maverick*. Users continued to be abusive, and in some cases to circumnavigate the real name policy by creating fake Facebook profiles. However, the presence of clearly fake profiles amongst the top users of *MyNews24* suggests that these profiles manage to garner sufficient attention from the public to push them up the ranks. Significantly, this attention cannot be due to negative behaviour, as all comments on *MyNews24* are moderated, and ones that do not conform to the expected standards are not published.

4.2 Case study 2: 4chan

Identity representation and archiving strategies are central features in designing many online communities. It is often assumed that the design of online websites must include data permanence and user identity. This is often exemplified by sites that utilize tools such as Facebook Connect, or allowing users to create an account. *4chan* does none of this and is

instead almost entirely anonymous and extremely ephemeral (posts are not archived and only remain accessible for short periods), making traditional reputation systems unusable (Bernstein et al 50). *4chan* is an image board site created in 2003 by the then teenage Christopher Poole, known online as "moot." The site today is a "discordant bricolade" (Knuttila) of pornography, memes, in jokes, humour, geek culture, general offensiveness and many other things.

4chan is an example of an anonymous community due to its enormous size, web presence, and role in the creation and propagation of internet culture, much of which is memes (Trammell). *4chan*'s original purpose was to create a space where anime fans could share and discuss images. What started as an image dump for a small community, quickly grew to "22 million page impressions every day and 9.5 million unique users each month" (Potts and Harrison). It is also a prolific meme factory, and the origin of memes such as LOLcats[7] and rickrolling[8] (Bernstein et al 50). It is also the origin point of the highly active hacktivist group Anonymous (Knuttila). *4chan* users have also participated in highly visible offsite activities, including manipulating a Time Magazine poll to elect Poole as "World's Most Influential Person" (Voice 8). This use of inside jokes reflects *4chan*'s values of disruption, play, counter-culture, creativity and humour (Voice 8).

The demographics of the users, as reported by *4chan*, are ages 18-34, 70% male, with the majority of users come from the United States (47%), the United Kingdom (8%) and Canada (6%) ("Advertise"). However, the demographic percentages total 79 instead of 100%. There is no mention of countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. How *4chan* obtained this demographic information when their users are supposedly only tracked via IP address for a short period of time is not stated.

4chan's design is straightforward, consisting of several image boards, each with varying rules of what may and may not be posted to them. There are seven themes which the boards fall under: Japanese Culture (probably stemming from *4chan*'s origins as a site based

[7]LOLcats are deliberately misspelled, grammatically incorrect, cute collection of humanized cat commentary, usually in the form of text over the image of a cat, the most well-known being the "I can Has Cheezburger." (Leigh, 131)
http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.943.2675&rep=rep1&type=pdf#page=131

[8]Rickrolling consists of a bait and switch in which a link to Rick Astley's single "Never Gonna Give You Up" is disguised, and people are tricked into clicking on the link believing that it will lead them to something else, and instead have their time wasted with Astley's song (Liu, 3)
http://writingandrhetoric.cah.ucf.edu/stylus/files/2_1/stylus2_1-liu.pdf .

on anime fandom), video games, interests, creative, other, miscellaneous and adult. Each theme has multiple boards, coming to a total of 69 boards. Users post threads to the boards, and posts that begin threads are required to have images. Images in replies are optional. There are 10 pages per board. These feature threads from newest to oldest, and a selection of replies. To access all replies, users can click on an "expand" button. Not only does *4chan* require no registration process or login, but no registration process is available ("FAQ"). The only requirement is that users accept a Disclaimer warning users that the content is mature, that you accept that content is posted by *4chan*'s users, and that you will comply with the rules (fig. 12).

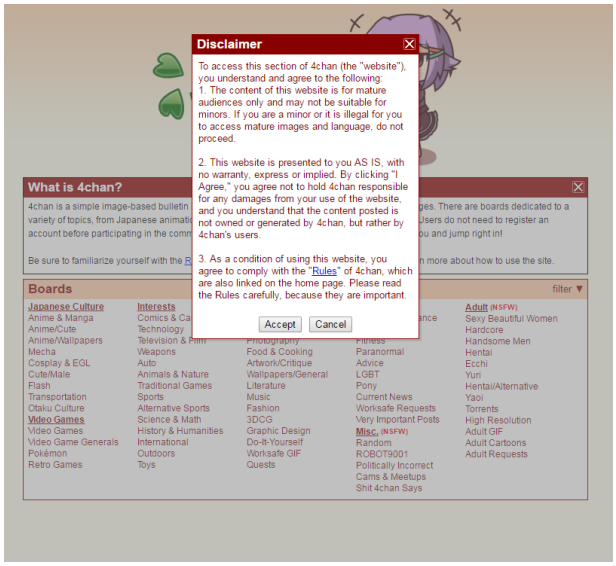


Fig. 12. The Disclaimer that visitors to *4chan* must accept before using the site. Source: "*4chan* -Disclaimer." *4chan*, www.4chan.org/. Accessed 13 Mar. 2017.

Furthermore, while signatures (images or text at the bottom of a post) and avatars are common on many other sites, in *4chan's* global rules states "Do not use avatars or attach signatures to your posts." ("FAQ"). This actively prevents users from employing uniquely identifying features. There are, however, several ways for users to identify themselves, but they are rarely used.

"Anonymity" on many other sites refers to not using your real name or identity. On *4chan*, however, it means being disconnected from any identity (Bernstein et al.). *4chan* has a board called /b/ which contains a large proportion of offensive and adult content, yet up to 90.07% of users on /b/ used the default anonymous setting (Bernstein et al. 55). While "*4chan* is primarily an anonymous website" ("FAQ"), there is an option for users to add a

name to their posts. The name, however, can be used by anyone, and is neither unique to that user, nor does it prevent the user from using other names. In Bernstein et al's study, 10% of users used a wide variety of names, many relating to an inside joke where many users all claimed the same name "David" (Bernstein et al 55). At other times, users claim to be OP (original poster; the person who initiated the thread) when they are not. This demonstrates how /b/ users fluidly claim identity when needed.

/b/ users have developed a ways of establishing their identity, despite the site's policy of anonymity. Some do this through "time stamping." This involves posting a picture of themselves holding a paper containing the current date and time (Bernstein et al, 56). Other users guarantee their identity by using a tripcode. This uses a password to generate a unique string (e.g. "User!ozOtJW9BFA") ("FAQ") after a username, giving the password holder a unique identifier. *4chan's* FAQ warns that tripcodes can be cracked "with relative ease" allowing access to the password, and suggests the use of a secure tripcode which is harder to crack. However, as Bernstein et al have shown in a study, *4chan* users usually eschew tripcodes and pseudonyms, with only 0.05% of /b/ posts using a tripcode (Bernstein et al, 52). Users may also include an email address, but 98.3% of posts in Bernstein et al's study did not provide this. With those that did, the email field was mistakenly filled with other *4chan* commands (e.g. sage) (55). Using an identifier is not only rare, but also typically met with hostility on *4chan* (Knuttila). Thus, most users remain completely anonymous and disconnected from any singular identity.

Posts on *4chan* tend to be ephemeral in nature due to their short longevity. Ephemerality is usually rare in large scale online communities (Bernstein et al 51). While it is not unusual to "bump" posts in a forum such as *4chan*, thus bringing that post back to the top of the queue, threads on *4chan* have a bump limit. When the limit is reached, the thread descends through the pages until it is bumped off the last page, ensuring that "content is kept fresh on the boards" (4chan). It also ensures that posts remain ephemeral, as they cannot be kept on a page for longer than a given time, no matter how much they may be bumped. Most threads on the /b/ board spend just five seconds on the front page and less than five minutes on the site before expiring (Bernstein et al). With the ten page limit for most boards (4chan), most content is removed in a few hours or days, depending on the level of activity. This contrasts with other sites, such as Facebook, where content is expected to be permanent. In a study by Bernstein et al on /b/, it was found that the median life of a thread is 3.9 minutes,

with the fastest thread to expire lasting a mere 28 seconds, and the longest lived thread lasting 6.2 hours (53). 6.2 hours is extremely short compared with other sites with 'forever-archives.' The rapid process of deletion creates a powerful selection mechanism, as content that the community wants to see must be repeatedly posted and potentially remixed, while other content is quickly lost (Bernstein et al 56). Even where users have created an identity, it is ephemeral on *4chan*.

At the most basic level, bumping a *4chan* thread puts it back onto the front page, delaying its demise for a short time. Conversely, *sage* allows users to comment on a thread without bumping it or extending its life. It provides an opportunity for users to chastise other users without keeping the post on the thread for a longer period of time. ("FAQ") (Bernstein et al. 54). According to Bernstein et al, only 0.77% of replies use the sage feature. This indicates that while /b/ users have the ability to manipulate the ephemera nature of threads, they usually use this to maintain threads rather than burying them (Bernstein et al 54). A thread that is ignored is likely to be pruned quickly. By influencing the longevity of threads, users are policing content, promoting user identity as a group, and creating a sense of solidarity between users (Trammell). This policing of*4chan* by its community is vital to the community's longevity, as well as their sense of identity (Trammell).

The ephemeral nature of *4chan* is part of its appeal, yet users have found ways to combat this. It is not uncommon for users to create a /b/ folder on their computers where they save images, or for users to request that other users share their personal /b/ folders (Bernstein et al, 54). Furthermore, sites such as *4chan*archive.org have been developed to save particularly "epic" threads (Bernstein et al 54). *4chan* itself has nothing to do with the creation of these archives; they are entirely user generated, run and maintained. This only happens to threads that have garnered hundreds of responses and are voted in, and occurs with less than a fraction of one percent of threads (Trammell).

Despite anonymity on *4chan*, communities of users develop a sense of belonging and have developed rituals around belonging and status on the site. Belonging to *4chan* is not signalled by the length of time a profile has existed, or number of comments made by or to the poster, as is the case with most other sites. Instead, belonging and status are demonstrated through the content of posts and the slang used. High status in the community is indicated by textual, linguistic, and visual cues, with slang playing a key role in delineating group membership. Using the correct dialect for the board on which one is posting signals entry-

level membership and status (Bernstein et al). The types of images posted are also important. However, these go in and out of fashion, as some classes of image have periods of limited experimentation, wider adoption, and abandonment (Bernstein et al). Due to *4chan's* ephemeral nature, there is a constant shift regarding what is in vogue. Users must constantly update themselves on the fashionable discourse, and a lack of fluency is often be dismissed with a "LURK MOAR," indicating that the poster must spend more time learning the culture and language of a board (Bernstein et al).

Due to the anonymous nature of *4chan*, what is posted and reposted determines what is in vogue. This is not influenced by who made the post. Content is of ultimate importance, because the identity behind the poster is unknown. Posts often have esoteric references that attempt to identify fellow posters as long-term users or new ones (Trammell). One example of status signal on /b/ is "triforcing," which consists of using a complicated series of Unicode character codes to create the three triangle icon of the video game, the Legend of Zelda. Newcomers are taunted "newfags can't triforce" and will often subsequently copy and paste the existing triforce into a reply. The reply text will look correct until it is posted, upon which the triangles will be misaligned (Bernstein et al.). Triforcing becomes indexical of an experienced user with skill and knowledge (Bernstein et al. 56). The ability to triforce and other status markers are links to the authenticity of the individual. Authenticity on other sites is linked to real names, personal information, the number of comments, date registered etc. However, *4chan* has none of those things, thus users rely on their knowledge of the subculture to prove their authenticity.

That authenticity needs to be proved at all on such an ephemeral and anonymous platform is an odd notion, as users gain no consistent reputation or advantage in their real lives (Trammell). However, maintaining a consistent core user base is imperative to a community's existence, and it is usually the more committed users who enforce behavioural norms (Trammell). Thus, while *4chan* may not have any of the traditional markers of identity (e.g., username, login) many of the behaviours expressed in persistent identity communities are evident on *4chan*. These include, for example, the policing of user behaviour, and attempts to expose new users or those who are uneducated about the site's culture. At the same time, *4chan's* communities demonstrate a clear understanding of the site's norms by using its currency through memes, references and in jokes. These are used to prove that the

user has indeed "lurked" for some time, and thus are more prestigious, despite the fact that most users have no identifying markers or persistence (Trammell).

The complete anonymity that is so common across *4chan* suggests that deindividuation would occur and cause people to behave anti-normatively due to reduced self-awareness and accountability. However, recent studies suggest that people, who are less focused on personal identity markers, are more likely to conform to group norms in anonymous contexts (Bodle 27). This means that while the content on /b/ is often reprehensible, posts stay within the established norms for /b/. Compared with other boards, /b/ is very much more offensive. Trammell found that *4chan's* users are highly invested in delimiting and policing what is regarded as "acceptable," and feel compelled to appear familiar with the norms of the community's subculture (Trammell). When personalisation and deindividuation occur in anonymous situations, individuals are more likely to adhere to group norms because individuals begin to define their behaviour at a group level (Huang and Li 402). This suggests that users are adhering to the norm of being offensive on /b/. Other *4chan* boards have different norms, and users tend to stay within their established rule sets. Norms are established through the pruning feature, moderation, and the short lifespan of unpopular threads. Dissenters usually disappear from the board or are deleted by moderators, facilitating conformity.

The dominant narrative regarding anonymity online suggests that communities benefit from revealing participants' names, or at least requiring persistent pseudonyms. This is seen as preventing disinhibition. *4chan's* /b/ board is crude place, often revelling in racism, sexism, homophobia and other antisocial behaviour suggesting disinhibition. It also styles the collective known as "Anonymous" (as in the FAQ), promotes deindividuation and mob behaviour (Bernstein et al 55). The anonymity and lack of accountability allow users to behave in ways that they would not behave offline or in contexts such as Facebook, where people who know them in real life would be able to see and judge their actions.

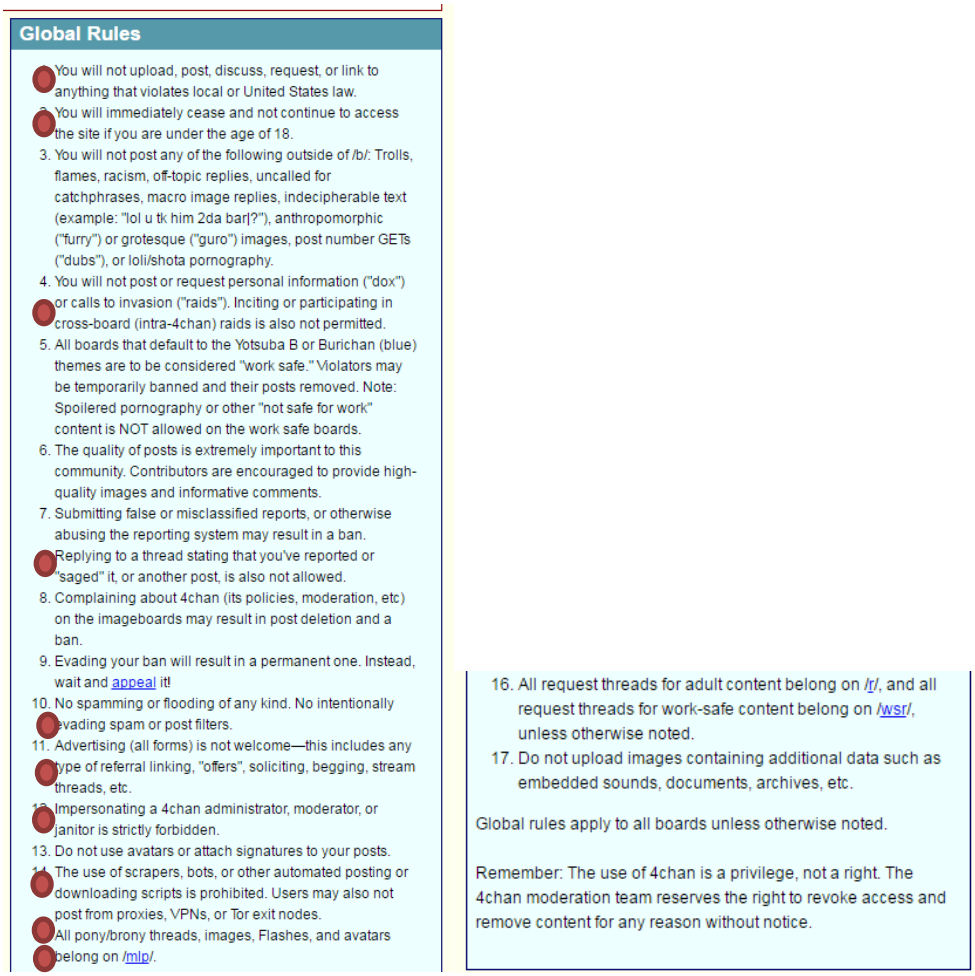
Disinhibition and the lack of accountability are not always negative. They can allow more intimate and open conversations in advice and discussion threads (Bernstein et al 55). Anonymity also facilitates experimentation with new ideas or memes. Many of the threads posted receive little or no attention (Bernstein et al 55) and anonymity masks the blow of being ignored, or explicitly told off. A history of poor posts is irrelevant, whereas on sites with persistent identities, these posts remain permanently (Bernstein et al 55). As Poole

himself stated, “The cost of failure is really high when you’re contributing as yourself” (Poole in O’ReillyMedia). *4chan’s* anonymity allows posters to speak their minds and “be judged for what we wrote rather than who we are” (Poole in O’ReillyMedia).

4chan also attempts to regulate behaviour through a set of global rules. These include: not posting or discussing anything that violates United States law; not accessing the site if under the age of 18; not posting anything related to trolling or flaming; not posting anything not safe for work (NSFW) on the safe for work (SFW) boards; not calling for doxxing or invasion (raids) of sites outside of *4chan* or across *4chan*’s boards; and not posting racist comments or off-topic replies amongst other things, outside of the /b/ (random) board. The /b/ board is the one that is most commonly focused on in research, and it is the one that is the exception to some rules. It is noted that there is a specific rule prohibiting trolling (with the exception of /b/), yet *4chan* is notorious for its trolls.

In addition to global rules, each board has specific rules and clarifications on how to behave, what is appropriate, what is not allowed, as well as clarification regarding where certain subjects should be posted in case of confusion. The rules for /b/ the exception, and are:

> *“ZOMG NONE!!!1**
>
> *Global rules 1, 2, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15 are enforced.*
>
> *Note: "ZOMG NONE!!!1" applies to moderators as well.” (*4chan).



Global Rules

1. You will not upload, post, discuss, request, or link to anything that violates local or United States law.
2. You will immediately cease and not continue to access the site if you are under the age of 18.
3. You will not post any of the following outside of /b/: Trolls, flames, racism, off-topic replies, uncalled for catchphrases, macro image replies, indecipherable text (example: "lol u tk him 2da bar|?"), anthropomorphic ("furry") or grotesque ("guro") images, post number GETs ("dubs"), or loli/shota pornography.
4. You will not post or request personal information ("dox") or calls to invasion ("raids"). Inciting or participating in cross-board (intra-4chan) raids is also not permitted.
5. All boards that default to the Yotsuba B or Burichan (blue) themes are to be considered "work safe." Violators may be temporarily banned and their posts removed. Note: Spoilered pornography or other "not safe for work" content is NOT allowed on the work safe boards.
6. The quality of posts is extremely important to this community. Contributors are encouraged to provide high-quality images and informative comments.
7. Submitting false or misclassified reports, or otherwise abusing the reporting system may result in a ban. Replying to a thread stating that you've reported or "saged" it, or another post, is also not allowed.
8. Complaining about 4chan (its policies, moderation, etc) on the imageboards may result in post deletion and a ban.
9. Evading your ban will result in a permanent one. Instead, wait and appeal it!
10. No spamming or flooding of any kind. No intentionally evading spam or post filters.
11. Advertising (all forms) is not welcome—this includes any type of referral linking, "offers", soliciting, begging, stream threads, etc.
12. Impersonating a 4chan administrator, moderator, or janitor is strictly forbidden.
13. Do not use avatars or attach signatures to your posts.
14. The use of scrapers, bots, or other automated posting or downloading scripts is prohibited. Users may also not post from proxies, VPNs, or Tor exit nodes.
15. All pony/brony threads, images, Flashes, and avatars belong on /mlp/.
16. All request threads for adult content belong on /r/, and all request threads for work-safe content belong on /wsr/, unless otherwise noted.
17. Do not upload images containing additional data such as embedded sounds, documents, archives, etc.

Global rules apply to all boards unless otherwise noted.

Remember: The use of 4chan is a privilege, not a right. The 4chan moderation team reserves the right to revoke access and remove content for any reason without notice.

Fig. 13. *4chan's* global rules that all boards (with the possible exceptions of /b/) must follow. Source: "Rules - 4chan." *4chan*, www.4chan.org/rules. Accessed 13 Mar. 2017.

Certain behaviours that are not allowed on other boards are permissible on /b/, including trolling, flaming, and racism. Rule number 6 regarding the quality of posts is also discarded. *4chan* users may be anonymous on the other boards, but they are expected to behave, and this is enforced through moderation. While /b/ is also moderated, it does not have to conform to the same rules as the rest of *4chan*, and in this sense, was created for certain types of behaviour that are not considered acceptable on other boards and sites.

4chan is moderated in several different ways. At the most basic level, users are "extremely encouraged" to report posts ("FAQ"). This is a simple process of clicking on menus and giving the reason for reporting the post. The second level of moderation is performed by janitors, who are a class between "end users" and "moderators." Janitors can delete posts on their assigned board(s) and submit ban requests. Janitors act as users and are

not allowed to reveal that they are janitors. They are selected via an application (application windows open from time to time), and testing process.

Finally, moderators perform the highest level of moderation, and perform general site maintenance. Moderators have the most power, as they are able to delete posts globally, ban users, sticky threads and close them. Like the users, moderators are anonymous, and there is little proof of their moderation when it occurs. This is because there is no public record of deletion. Although moderators may attach a message when deleting a post or banning a user (see image), this is optional. The moderation team is by invitation only, and people cannot apply for it ("FAQ").

As the FAQ on *4chan* says, it is difficult to see how much moderation is taking place due to *4chan*'s natural pruning system and the moderators not needing to make any kind of notification when they ban a user or remove a thread. Nevertheless, browsing through *4chan*, most posts do seem to comply with the board's rules, despite *4chan* often being depicted as chaotic and rule breaking. It is difficult to tell whether users abide by the rules or whether the moderators are very efficient. However, there are instances where moderator posts state that a user has been banned or a thread closed (fig. 14).

Regardless of how much moderation takes place, the site users take a surprising amount of care in policing their particular boards. Self-policing is usually hoped for with real name policies. In the case of *4chan*, members are able to actively chide other users for bad posts and, through the use of *sage*, to prevent their feedback from bumping the bad post up through using. This form of policing increases both individual user attachments to the virtual space. It creates solidarity amongst users by promoting user involvement in shaping the community culture (Trammell). This possibly explains how every board has its own subculture, and the extremely different subculture of /b/ which has different rules. The policing of online communities creates established norms which most users adhere to (Trammell).

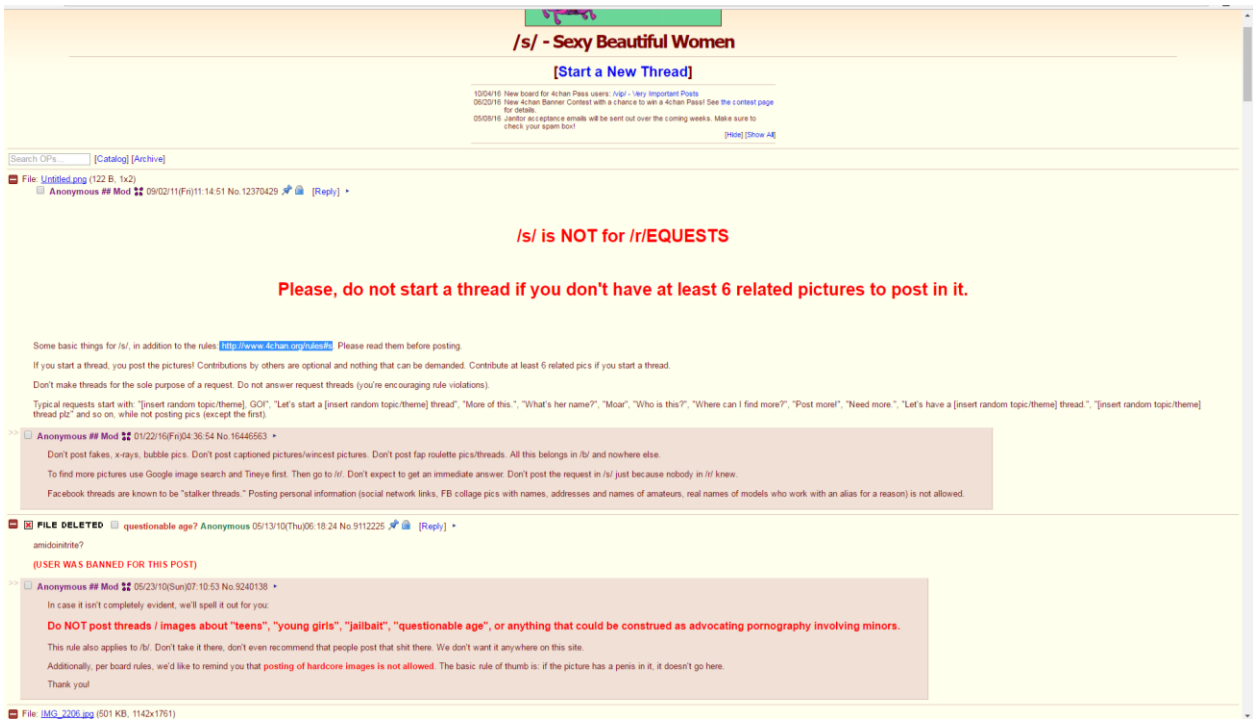


Fig. 14. The /s/ board has its rules clearly stated at the top. A moderator has banned a user for violating rules on it, and follows up with comments on what is not allowed. Source: "/s/ - Sexy Beautiful Women." *4chan*, boards.4chan.org/s/. Accessed 13 Mar. 2017.

Compared with /b/, an examination of the other *4chan* boards shows significantly less abusive posts. These boards stay on topic with only occasional visible moderation, and while

not all posts are serious, they are seldom abusive in the way that those on /b/ are known to be. Users have some honest and sincere conversations on them.



Fig. 15. A thread on the /an/ board of 4chan. "/an/ - Animals & Nature." 4chan, boards.4chan.org/s/. Accessed 13 Mar. 2017.

The above image (fig. 15) depicts a string of replies to a thread on the Animals and Nature board, /an/. In it, the OP outlines how their father is abusive to his dog and is threatening to beat it to death. Other posters offer advice on how to handle the situation, and what can be done to help the dog. Although profanities are used, they come with the force of emotion, rather than intending to be offensive. Below (fig. 16), someone receives advice on botany degrees, none of which seems to be malicious.



Fig. 16. Degree advice on botany being given on /an/ on 4chan. Source: "/an/ - Animals & Nature." 4chan, boards.4chan.org/s/. Accessed 13 Mar. 2017.



Fig.17. An argument about digital versus film cameras breaks out on the photography board. Source: "/p/ - Photography." 4chan, boards.4chan.org/s/. Accessed 13 Mar. 2017.

The extract in fig. 17 was taken from the photography board. The original questioned whether users prefer to shoot on film or digital. The conversation bounces between rational longer and shorter answers. There are also people who feel passionately about a particular option, and who get abusive, using the phrases "faggots," "piece of shit hippy" and swearing. This abuse is, however, not intended to be taken personally and is also drowned by other less abusive replies. At the point of examination, the thread had 156 replies. Despite it being a topic that people were clearly divided on, not all replies were abusive.

Unlike sites such as Facebook, *4chan* collects very little information on its users. When users make posts, their IP addresses are collected, but are viewable only to administrators. It is not certain what other information is collected, as the FAQ only states that "*4chan* collects and stores user information for postings" ("FAQ"). Personal information remains until a post is pruned or deleted, at which point it is also deleted ("FAQ"). Information such as IP address is declared not to be made public, with the exception of court orders or to cooperate with law enforcement agencies "when appropriate." The IP addresses of users are the one thing that is repeatedly emphasized in *4chan*'s rules, and constitute the single piece of information that they insist on collecting. TOR (a method of concealing identity) and proxy users, however, are blocked whenever possible, due to "repeated abuse" coming from these users ("FAQ"). This is a measure to help prevent, track down, and possibly punish users who post illegal content through the sharing of their IP address with relevant authorities ("FAQ").

Where it is in the financial interest of sites such as Facebook to store as much information on their users as is possible, *4chan* not only collects very little information, but also struggles to keep itself running. Users may, if they desire, purchase a *4chan* Pass for $20 USD. The pass is valid for 12 months, and is associated with an IP address, not a username or account ("4chan Pass."). Pass holders remain anonymous, and other users do not know if someone is a pass holder. Owning a pass allows the holder to bypass a CAPTCHA verification (a process used to prevent bots). There is also a board specifically for pass holders. The board is titled Very Important Posts (VIP), which highlights *4chan*'s emphasis on content rather than people. The title implies that being a pass holder makes the post very important, not the person. The board has no theme (global rules apply), except that it is for pass holders only. A non-pass holder is unable to post and will be greeted with an error page.

Unlike sites such as Facebook, *4chan* has very little commercial motive. In a TED talk, when asked what the commercial picture for *4chan* was, Poole responded: "The commercial picture? There really isn't much of one I guess" (Poole). Poole attributes this to the site's adult and obscene content, stating that "when you've got that, you've pretty much sacrificed any hope of making lots of money" (Poole). *4chan* offers free advertising to all bona fide Anime & Comic Book conventions ("Advertise"). However, the site's racy and often illegal content make it unpalatable to advertisers. In addition, its users are "hard to pinpoint," making it difficult to tell how many unique visitors they have as well as their demographic characteristics (Brophy-Warren). Unlike sites such as Facebook, *4chan* has sacrificed a lot financially through its anonymity. Its money comes from advertising, pass users, and occasional donation drives, and Poole states that the site breaks even (Brophy-Warren).

This section will look mainly at the *4chan* "random" board /b/, and *4chan*s first board (Sorgatz). The focus is on /b/ due to it being *4chan*'s most active board claiming 30% of all of *4chan* traffic (Bernstein et al 52). While other boards on *4chan* have sets of rules and reasonable moderation and it is also not included in many of the global rules and is frequently referred to negatively both outside of *4chan* and on *4chan*s other boards. Instead, /b/ is largely left to its own devices, (with the exception of the removal of personal information, child pornography, and 'raids' on other Web sites (Knuttila). In the words of Poole "It's my belief that the community should dictate its norms, standards, and rules," he says. "I've left /b/ to its own devices, with very little intervention." (Sorgatz). This is clearly evident in /b/'s "ZOMG NONE!!!1*" ("FAQ") rules. The exception to many of the global rules of /b/ ("You will not post any of the following outside of /b/: Trolls, flames, racism, off-topic replies, uncalled for catchphrases," ("FAQ") means that it frequently abounds with intentionally offensive language that is racist, sexist and homophobic.

The "fag" suffix is frequently used, new users are 'newfags' and in many other ways (Bernstein et al 53). Trammell suggests that "fag" is used so often that on the site it has become less of a homophobic slur and more of a generally offensive suffix to refer to a variety of individuals or groups (Trammell). Additionally it can work as a term of endearment or neutral form of self-expression (Trammell). Women posting images of themselves will commonly find themselves faced with the reply of "tits or GTFO" (post a shirtless image or get the f*** out) (Bernstein et al 53). This language is often offensive and

crude, much more so than on other boards, but is a part of the /b/ culture which pushes the boundary of propriety, and as boyd puts it is "hacking the attention economy" (boyd, "For the lolz"). Nothing is sacred as "attention hackers" (boyd, "For the lolz) highlight how information flows are manipulated, how lists can be gamed (such as the aforementioned *Time Magazine* poll), and that entertaining content can reach mass popularity without commercial intentions (boyd, "For the lolz"). The antics of *4chan*, in particular the /b/ board, and the users' irreverence force people to think about status and power, and laugh at anything that takes itself too seriously (boyd, "For the lolz"). While boyd acknowledges that much of *4chan*'s /b/ has offensive, and reprehensible content that should not be excused, it is the cultural ethos and anarchy that gives /b/ its appeal" (boyd, "for the lolz"). The lighter side of /b/ is funny, open and creative, as shown the numerous memes that emerge from there (Bernstein et al 53) and full of the occasional but of astute political discussion, heartfelt moments of virtual friendship and banter (Knuttila). Although /b/ gets a lot of media attention from the public stunts that it stages, it in actual fact consists of little call to action threads. The two most prevalent thread types are Themed (28%) and Sharing Content (19%) of (Bernstein et. al 53) while call to action threads made up a 7% of the sample (53). Furthermore, call to action threads commonly attempted to generate comments on Facebook or YouTube pages, or get people to call a phone number, and were met with disdain. These threads were seen as self-serving, and dismissed by replying that "/b/ is not your personal army" (Bernstein et al. 53). This is an indication that while /b/ may be notorious for their pranks and co-operated missions, they will not simply respond to any call to action by an individual.

4.2.1 *4chan* not as free as we think?

4chan employs subversive humour, lacks political correctness, and tolerates trolling as users see themselves going against the grain of accepted cultural behaviour. Despite this, *4chan* employs practices aimed at policing behaviour. Despite the desire to subvert ideologies of other sites through subversive behaviour, ironically many of *4chan*'s practices are held in common with the very sites they try to subvert (Trammell). The anonymity and ephemeral nature of *4chan* facilitate the expression of unpopular opinions within mainstream culture.

The offensive language used on the site acts as a policing mechanism in an unusual manner. Trammell argues that the novelty of the offensiveness wears off quickly, ceasing its function of subverting dominant or politically correct cultural expectation, and instead becomes simply an expected quality (Trammell). Moot may claim that ‘People deserve a place to be wrong” (Dibbell), but they need to be wrong in the correct way (Trammell). *4chan* may be notorious, but users have to be notorious the right way and conform to the norms of *4chan*.

Chapter 05: Conclusion

The internet has grown from a small entity used by a community of known researchers to something that is commonplace in households across the world. Username practices and views regarding anonymity have changed as the web and its uses have developed. Policies regarding real name usage versus pseudonyms and various degrees of anonymity need to consider the purpose of the site, as these options have implications for important concerns regarding privacy and the prevention of harm that could result from posts. While the dominant narrative has proposed that real name policies make a significant contribution in preventing harm, pseudonyms and other forms of anonymity provide the opportunity for users to perform acts that they might not perform if they were using their real names. Some of these acts may be harmful (e.g., flaming), but others are positive, such as experimenting with identity, discussing sensitive and controversial topics, and questioning dominant ideologies and beliefs.

Pseudonyms and their related anonymity play an important role in maintaining privacy. Using one's real name online is not directly equivalent to people knowing one's name in offline interactions, as these are vastly different contexts. Concerns regarding real name usage online include the digital footprint and collapsed context. Platforms need to be aware that real name usage may decrease participation in certain sites or topics for fear of speaking against dominant norms and beliefs. This could deflect the focus of the message away from its *content* to the *people* involved in the interaction (Ruesch and Märker, 112). This is relevant to online news sites, where Facebook logins that reveal the real name of users also provide cues regarding characteristics such as race and gender. This is likely to be highly problematic in the race sensitive culture of South Africa as people are likely to be influenced by users' race and gender rather than considering only the merit of the content that is posted.

A real name policy makes sense for sites whose purpose is to connect people who know each other in real life, such as Facebook. Here, the posts are people rather than content focused. However, even when real names are used in these contexts, they are imperfect, and often cater to a heteronormative Western understanding of a "real name." This is problematic for various cultural and minority groups (e.g., LGBTQ). The acceptance of Facebook in the West versus its lack of popularity in Japan due to its real name policy, suggests that privacy

norms have evolved differently in different places (Tabuchi). This evolution of privacy norms taking different paths is not only relevant geographically, but also across contexts. While Facebook was readily adopted by South Africans, news sites attempts to enforce real names through Facebook logins was met with a pushback (Anonymous and Anonymous), and as the data exhibits, many commenters did not use their real names.

The financial incentive of real name usage is not to be ignored, as it provides sites with a vested interest in implementing real name policies. Although Facebook has a sound reason for using real names (being person centric), the danger is that other sites use Facebook logins which results in individual identities being splayed across multiple sites. Boyd found that some users countered this by creating multiple Facebook profiles for themselves, each intended for a different imagined audience (boyd, "It's Complicated", 40-42). Within the boundaries of real name usage, some users fabricate content which undermines the intention of real name policies. For example, teens often fabricate identities and other information on Facebook because they do not believe that the site has the right to ask for personal data, they believe it is funny, or they do not want to be found by those who are not their target audience (boyd, It's Complicated, 46-47).

Despite the problems with real names, they are often promoted as a way of enforcing good behaviour, and because it is often customary to use them online. But the practice of name sharing, and the recoding of events is fundamentally different online from offline. However, simply enforcing real names does not guarantee good behaviour. This has been demonstrated by the case studies of *News24* and the *Daily Maverick* and is supported by other examples, such as South Korea's attempt to use real names to police behaviour and a number of South African Facebook members who have been taken to court for their remarks.

The closing of *News24* and the *Daily Maverick*'s comments sections occurred after real name policies had been implemented, demonstrating the failure of these policies. Their real name policies had achieved minimal and inadequate improvements in the nature of posts. Similarly, South Korea revoked its real name policy due to the extremely minimal effect it was having. Real names can also inhibit the ability to speak out and criticise those in power, dominant ideas, or people's willingness to expose their vulnerabilities. Trolling is often extremely damaging and has a bad reputation based partly on media's selective focus on trolling rather than other factors that contribute to negative events and outcomes. This was evident in the reporting of Rachel Bryk's suicide. However, it is difficult to distinguish

between trolling that is aimed at goading a reaction and content that signifies genuine hate speech.

As the case studies on *News24* and the *Daily Maverick* have demonstrated, the process of eliciting good online behaviour is far more complex than simply relying on real name usage. Despite real names having been seen as the way to create good behaviour, they were not enough, and comment sections had to be closed (Anonymous and Anonymous). The comparison of *4chan* with South African online news sites may seem like a strange leap. However, there are lessons that can be learnt from *4chan*'s system. While the notorious /b/ board is rampant with trolling and abuse, it is important to note that this is an area of *4chan* that is specifically designated for such behaviour. Bad behaviour is allowed, and indeed one could say even expected, on /b/. While other boards on *4chan* also have crude language, it is important to note that despite *4chan*'s ephemeral nature and anonymity, its users place a high value on their identity and status within the community. *4chan* users do not have profiles with badges or statistics, yet demonstrating that they are veterans and not "newfags" remains extremely important to them. Each board has its own set of rules and discourse, and users are highly invested in proving that they belong to a particular board, as well as in delimiting and policing the boundaries of "acceptable" posting behaviour (Trammell). This occurs despite the fact that users gain no consistent reputation, and have nothing to risk in terms of community prestige (Tremmell). Tremmel concludes that despite common beliefs, member and name registration are not required for inspiring users to invest energy in preserving and enforcing the boundaries and culture of their virtual community (Tremmel).

4chan shares some aspects with persistent identity communities, including the policing of posts, and the need to prove a legitimate (if anonymous and ephemeral) identity. More research needs to be carried out on the reasons why *4chan* users feel the need to police, maintain, and be recognised within their community. However, these needs suggest that something deeper than a username or account details is at play and this is probably related to a sense of belonging. It is recommended that news sites draw from this aspect. It is also important to note that in contrast to claims that increased anonymity leads to fewer social cues, people who experience deindividuation through anonymity tend to comply with group norms. Most of *4chan*'s notoriety comes from its /b/ board, which is the one with the fewest rules and the norm of being offensive. The rules on other boards on *4chan* are largely adhered to.

The architecture of *4chan* has also allowed for its creativity, meme generation, and the quick removal of inappropriate content. The natural pruning of threads after some time means that threads that are inappropriate or uninteresting are likely to be pruned off the site quickly. This may not always be practical for news sites that receive fewer continuous streams of comments than *4chan* does. For news sites, pruning could become more of an artificial process. However, *4chan*'s addition of *sage,* which allows users to police threads without extending the thread's lifespan, combined with the ability to report posts, means that users themselves can play a crucial role in policing threads. News sites may not have the same kind of pruning system, but it may be useful to consider systems that allow the most popular comments to reach the top of the page. In addition, the inclusion of a *sage* equivalent could prevent trolling comments from reaching the top. Comments that do not reach the top are less likely to attract people who inevitably take the bait and thus provide an extra incentive for trolls. Certain sites (e.g., YouTube) have a system in place where highly rated comments are bumped up to the top of the comment section's display. Further research into the effectiveness of this should be considered. Sites should also be aware that negative comments designed to spark outraged responses could bump a comment up to the top of the display, depending on the algorithms designed to show top comments. Therefore a function such as *sage* would allow users to respond and either take the bait or police their community without bumping a comment to the top of a page.

Moderation also plays a crucial role in ensuring acceptable posts. Despite its notoriety, *4chan* has moderators on all boards including /b/. News sites, however, seem reluctant to devote resources towards moderation on the scale that is needed. Instead they seem to attempt to use shortcuts by getting users to self-moderate through real name usage. This form of self-moderation in combination with real name usage tends to be ineffective as many people are reluctant to speak up against authorities or dominant discourses due to the potential personal endangerment that it may cause. This is particularly relevant in South Africa where the proposed Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill could place users who use their real names at risk. The bill has been criticised for being broad and vague and this increases the likelihood of internet users being prosecuted.

It has been shown that people tend to follow the norms of particular environments. Facebook had an easier time integrating a real name policy than Google+ because real name usage was already a norm. On *4chan*, bad behaviour is usually reserved for /b/ because users

usually conform to each board's norms. In addition, it is important to individual users to show that they understand the norms and can adhere to them. Moderation by users and actual moderators plays a crucial role in ensuring that the norms are adhered to, with offending content being removed by moderators and users being able either to report offending content or reprimand users who post outside of the norm without bumping the post. The combination of moderation and content's short lifespan allows for particular norms to be established for each board, and for them to remain consistent.

Based on the *Daily Maverick* and *News24* case studies, it seems that hate speech and trolling became the norm, rather than the carefully thought out and rational discourse that the site owners so craved (Anonymous and Anonymous). However, beyond reporting or disliking a post, there was little moderation that users could perform. Disliking posts made by trolls was likely to have the adverse effect of encouraging the troll. Moderators were used as sparingly as possible by the news sites, and these moderators often had many other comments to go through, as well as other duties not related to moderation (Anonymous and Anonymous). The result was that the norms for these sites became something that was undesired as they could not be shaped and controlled by the site or by a pre-established user base that behaved acceptably. Without proper moderation it becomes difficult to make people behave according to an acceptable norm.

The *4chan* case study indicates that norms need to be firmly established, and that users need to identify strongly with the site in order to follow those norms. It also demonstrates that identity is more than a profile with statistics or a username, whether real or otherwise. It is important to note that while deindividuation can lead to mob behaviour, it can also lead to people complying with group norms (Bernstein et al, 55). This is interesting as it suggests that to enforce a particular set of behaviours, deindividuation as opposed to explicit real name profiles, can have a strong effect.

The potential danger of real name usage was highlighted in South Africa by the case of singer Suenette Bridges. A court ruled that Bridges was responsible for content hosted on her page although she did not post it herself (Etheridge). Other examples, such as Penny Sparrow and Matthew Theunissen, demonstrate how people will continue to post racist content despite using their real names. However, it is possible that due to their imagined audience, they may not have realised how public their comments were. Nevertheless, they faced legal consequences for their actions. This makes sense as the Constitution promotes

free speech, but does not extend that right to racial, ethnic, gender, or religious hate. In addition, the new Hate Speech Bill also covers this behaviour (Thamm). Some activists hope that this bill will take care of racist, homophobic, and other prejudiced activities (Thamm). However, others note that the bill is vague regarding what constitutes hate crimes and that it puts free speech at risk. This creates fear among citizens regarding how hate speech is construed, how their comments may be taken out of context, or be interpreted as hate speech. There are apparently contradictions between the Constitution's provisions for freedom of speech, and the broadness of the Hate Speech Bill (Thamm).

PEN SA is quoted as saying that in South Africa we cannot rely on laws to address the "complex social problems and the hurt and outrage expressed by many South Africans" (qtd. in Thamm). Concern was expressed over the new laws censoring the freedom of speech by citizens and the media due to their broadness (Thamm). The resulting Bill extends "to virtually any characteristic and activity of a person and are far too wide" (Thamm), and creates the possibilities for almost any individual to lay charges against almost any human emotion as expressed by facial or bodily expression or innuendo as well as any form of text communication (in which tone is missing and can thus often be misunderstood)" (Thamm). Under the circumstances, while the Bill may aim at curbing offensive behaviour, the controversy around its broadness means that it could potentially put people at a heightened risk of accusation, especially in an environment of heightened emotions. From this standpoint, it makes sense for people to comment using pseudonyms as a safety precaution against an overly vague and broad bill that could possibly be abused. It is recommended that when pseudonyms are used, News sites log users' IP addresses so that they are able to provide these to law enforcement should the need arise. Real names have the potential to be abused by people wanting to incriminate their holders.

The Protection of Personal Information (PoPI) Act in South Africa has yet to be implemented. PoPI prohibits the collection of information for the purpose of resale or trade (Thamm). This has potential implications for sites that benefit financially from real name policies. Consequently, companies with real name policies should adopt these policies based on the perceived merits of using real names, rather than vested financial interest.

Based on this research, I would not recommend real name policies for content based sites as they do not necessarily ensure better behaviour online. Persistent pseudonyms or other accounts on which users can build reputations could prove effective in combination with the

other measures discussed. Using forms of Facebook verification (even if real names are not required) could assist in deterring trolls as creating trolling accounts could be inconvenient. This was supported by the *News24* interviewees. Heavy moderation may also be required, so that it is clear to users that posting abusive comments is not acceptable. The rules should be clearly outlined, and the desired norms strongly enforced as users will tend to follow pre-established norms. Increasing the difficulty of registering multiple accounts also makes it more difficult for multiple troll accounts to be created by a single user. This could be done through Facebook verification, email verification. Alternatively, sites could be opened for new registrations at particular periods so that trolls who are banned cannot open a new account immediately, but may have to wait for a period of time before creating another one. News and other content centred sites could consider encouraging acceptable behaviour and content in manner that is similar to *4chan*'s approach to bumping comments. They could also learn from Facebook's approach to using its architecture to develop a particular kind of user identity that influences how users present themselves and the way they post, rather than relying on moderators.

Due to the scope of this paper, not all areas of research could be covered. I recommend an in depth study of various kinds of websites and the corresponding kinds of trolling that they receive, so as to better understand the kinds of moderation and user behaviour in relation to the content of the site. Child friendly websites, such as Neopets, are also largely anonymous, and yet remain child friendly. These sites do not cater only to children, and often have users of varying ages. Certain sites are created for cultural taboos (e.g., educating youth on sex or menstruation) and research is needed on how they manage communities and comments. Taboo subjects vary across cultures and can be sensitive to deal with, but may be important for people to learn about. Research into privacy on sites that are created to support those with stigmatised illnesses such as HIV/AIDs is also needed. Here, users are a part of a vulnerable group and may not wish to be identified. Research into the role of incentives in accounts (e.g., earning badges, Reddit's karma systems, recorded numbers of posts, user "levels") and their effects on user behaviour would also be useful.

Further research could be conducted into the potential benefits of trolling. While this paper concludes that trolling is undesirable on many sites, it does have a place within society. Research which examines how trolling shapes culture, and offline forms of trolling would be beneficial. A better understanding of the relationship between anonymity and trolling would

be beneficial. Further research is required into the role of memes in society, such as understanding the production of memes, how they work as units of culture, how society interacts with and is affected by memes.

In summary, I have argued that there are places online where anonymity is appropriate and constructive, despite a trend towards real name usage. Where trolling is a problem, real name policies are not an adequate solution. There are disadvantages to attempting to homogenize and control content on the internet (were that even possible). Rather, website creators should be mindful of the kind of environment that they wish to create.

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