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Expanding The Understanding of Online Harassment and Online Harassers by Investigating Internal Narratives: An Exploratory Study

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EXPANDING THE UNDERSTANDING OF ONLINE HARASSMENT AND ONLINE  
HARASSERS BY INVESTIGATING INTERNAL NARRATIVES: AN EXPLORATORY  
STUDY.

JAY PALMER

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in fulfilment of  
the requirements for the Master of Research (Psychology)

The University of Huddersfield

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**Abstract.**

Due to the current indistinct and nebulous term of 'online harassment,' this research explored the subjective definitions of this offense and how it fits into an internet user's internal narrative. The resulting narrative profiles challenged the current depiction and perception of online harassment as behaviour typical of juvenile psychopaths who are somehow flawed mentally or emotionally. The research was accomplished via the analysis of semi-structured interviews with three men and three women who were recruited using social media. Due to the unique area of online social interactions the transcribed interviews were coded using adaptations of existing research methods; a qualitative approach that borrowed from grounded theory, discourse and narrative analysis, and the Narrative Action System in order to better explore and explain the social dynamics and internal narratives within a virtual environment in regards to online harassment. The study produced three distinct narrative profiles that provided an explanation for the magnitude of recorded harassment incidents that take place in the realms of social media and the internet in general. The profiles demonstrated relatable explanations as to how and why an otherwise blameless internet user may engage in harassment, or perceive themselves as a victim of it. The implications of this research provided further grounds for analysis of online harassment as behaviour that is representative of the human condition, rather than a maladaptive response of a flawed mind, as well as arguments for legal reform when defining the term as an offense and prosecuting or defending from an accusation of online harassment.

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Defining online harassment.

One of the core themes of this investigation was to clarify as to what the term 'online harassment' means. This was because the current understanding of the term has become so malleable both academically and legally that it may be suitably applied to describe any behaviour that an observer disapproves of, the specifics of which will be outlined in this review.

Legally, harassment is generally prosecuted under the Malicious Communications Act (1998) which covers electronic communication that can be considered grossly offensive, threatening, and/or known to be false by the sender. In contrast online harassment is covered by the Protection from Harassment Act (1999), described as: "[harassment] can include repeated attempts to impose unwanted communications and contact upon a victim in a manner that could be expected to cause distress or fear in any reasonable person", (The Protection from Harassment Act, 1999). As such it is easier to prove a violation of the former as it is more specific, compared to the latter which is much more subjective. The importance placed on the perceptions of those involved with this offense hold a similarity to the UK hate crime legislation, which refers to a hate crime as:

"any criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice towards someone based on a personal characteristic."

(O'Neil, 2017)

Therefore it is not unusual for subjective terminology to become legally enforceable outside of the sphere of online and offline harassment. Indeed, it is entirely possible to commit both a hate crime and harassment simultaneously if subjectively judged to be doing so.

The term 'Cyberbully' has also been included when investigating online harassment, the terms often being used interchangeably. Cyberbully/Cyberbullying also has no fixed definition, needing to be outlined in academic texts and examples given in media literature. The Merriam-Webster (2019) definition "the electronic posting of mean-spirited messages about a person (such as a student) often done anonymously," can be applied as both a malicious communication and online harassment as they are currently legally defined.

The terms 'Cyberstalking' and 'Online grooming' also have been featured in the context of online harassment. Cyberstalking is considered an extension of stalking behaviour using electronic mediums, such as monitoring of social media activities, or using social media to track the real-world location of the victim, this behaviour also includes using online communications to send unsolicited messages. The act of cyberstalking typically focuses on a specific individual as the target, therefore the offender's motivations are focused on their chosen victim, rather than simply embracing the act of harassment itself as the goal or some other more nebulous agenda. As such their motivations cannot be considered ambiguous, and

therefore are not the focus of this study. In contrast 'Online Grooming' or 'Grooming' is the act of an adult sexual predator targeting an underage individual and attempting to coerce, harass and/or intimidate them into performing sexual acts (Whittle, Hamilton-Giachritsis, Beech, & Collings 2012;2013;). While this too falls under the classification of online harassment in a very broad sense, the motivations of the offender are very clear, and therefore not subject to investigation by this study.

In this regard; Typically, offline bullying is associated with a lack of empathy in child bullies (Overgaauw, Rieffe, Broekhof, Crone, & Güroğlu. 2017), or representative of an imbalance of social power that adults seek to address with one another through maladaptive means (Salin, 2003). These explanations for the motivation behind bullying are by no means exclusive, as Evans & Smokowski (2016) point out the term of 'bullying' is often left open to the interpretation of the researchers. However, it is generally accepted that all forms of real-world bullying are manifestations of aggression (Cowie, Naylor, Rivers, Smith, & Pereira. 2002) and in that respect it is distinct from online harassment in that an individual who has been accused of online harassment may not have intended to aggress towards the self-identified victim, such as in the case of HM the Queen and Gregory Allen Elliot. In essence while all definitions of offline bullying will have a clear antagonist in order to be classified as bullying, all that is required for an incident of online harassment to occur is the statement of a victim. While targeted cyberbullying exists and it may indeed share motivations with offline bullying insofar as it is understood, this does not encompass the focus of this study which is regarding the much more prevalent form of online harassment that appears to have no clear motivation and the clarification and exploration of this indistinct and widespread phenomenon.

Motivations for stalking are described as "a delusional belief in romantic destiny, a desire to reclaim a prior relationship, a sadistic urge to torment the victim, or a psychotic overidentification with the victim and the desire to replace him or her." (Miller, 2009, p.495). These motivations will often manifest in harassing behaviour both online and offline (Cavezza, & McEwan, 2014) depending on the stalkers individual profile, to a stalker the internet remains another medium of pursuing their agenda, and they often make no real distinction between online and offline stalking. It should be noted however, that Cavezza, & McEwan (2014) observed cyberstalkers were more likely to be ex-intimate partners, and less likely to personally interact with their target, suggesting that the temperament and personal history of each individual reflects their methods of stalking. Regardless, this remains distinct from online harassment as described above, as a stalker's motivations are self-evident in their target fixation, thus embarking upon an investigative study to profile their internal narratives and motivations would be redundant. Cyberstalking and stalking clearly contrasts with an individual accused of online harassment as an online harasser may have had no agenda or hostility towards the victim and their motivations and internal narrative remains subject to speculation and investigation.

Harassment often takes place during the offline offenses of bullying or stalking, the same is true of the online equivalent. However, while an incident of offline harassment is often indicative of stalking/bullying or other targeted behaviour, online harassment remains entirely subjective upon the testimony and perceptions of the victim, in this respect it is distinct from its offline parallels. As stated prior a premeditated offense is not needed for an accusation online harassment, just the perspective of a victim. Therefore it justifies a more detailed study focussing on the inner narrative of individuals using social media in order to clarify what it means to harass online both as a victim and a perpetrator in order to provide a better insight into this poorly defined and often misapplied label without assuming motivations are related to its offline namesake simply due to a shared nomenclature.

One of the motivations of this study was to clarify the subjective and fluid definition of online harassment and what constitutes an 'online harasser.' However, it will not be definitively outlined here. The term will be contextually applied over the course of the investigation to each profile of 'online harasser' that is created. Essentially this study is not to create an all-encompassing definition of 'online harassment', but rather explore the term as it is understood by a victim/perpetrator within the context of their own attitudes and behaviours. A leading question such as 'have you experienced name-calling' may outline an expectation as to what online harassment is, whereas enabling each participant to define the term themselves, as well as how it applies to them in their online life, provides more contextually appropriate data. Within this context a qualitative approach was selected to provide a more diverse and detailed selection of data for investigation, rather than simply having the researchers own expectations refuted or confirmed using a yes/no questionnaire or Likert scale.

The notion of constructing an offender profile around such a subjective offence required a fresh look at how this crime is perceived and a methodology that reflects the mercurial nature of the offender and the offense and will be discussed later in this thesis.

Online harassment as it is outlined above remains a very subjective offense, and as such it may be committed unintentionally as it does not necessarily need a deliberate offender to create a victim. By its nature it is influenced by subjective shades of opinion and assumptions about the psychology and personalities of those who participate in it, leading to a lack of empirical evidence regarding internal narratives and motivations of both harassment itself and online harassers. The lack of any studies investigating this apparently common phenomenon served as the motivation to conduct this research. Although this lack of research provided a significant handicap when assembling data for a literature review leading to the review being less extensive due to lack of material available.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Online Harassment: 'Trolling' and 'Poe's Law'.**



The internet-based difficulty in interpreting the intent of a message/article/post using the medium of online communication is often referred to as "Poe's Law": "Without a winking smiley or other blatant display of humour, it is impossible to create a parody of fundamentalism that someone won't mistake for the real thing." (Poe, 2005)

This has come to represent the notion that it is not possible to truly know the intent of message posted to the internet without a clear and present indicator of tone, sarcasm or other humour. What may have been intended as harmless throwaway remark may be viewed as harassment. Thus, without *mens rea* lit: *The guilty mind*, i.e. an offender acting with malice and forethought (Martin, 2006) a victim of harassment has still been created. When confronted with inflammatory, hostile or seemingly over-the-top statements it is not uncommon for the question to be asked 'Is this a Poe?' by various internet communities to establish what reaction to the message posted would be appropriate.

Further issues arise when the identity of the sender can be confounded. As was the case with a university female rights activist Meg, Lanker-Simons who was found to have fabricated a rape threat against herself (Selheim, 2013). Her motivations for doing so are subject to speculation as Lanker-Simons did not comment on the affair directly after being cited by the police. However, this created a very complex 'Poe' in which the sender's intentions were presumed to be transparent, but were later revealed to be very different.

Another concern when evaluating online harassment is the trend of 'trolling' which is internet slang for the act of an individual voicing/typing deliberately inflammatory statements on internet communities. The intent is to provoke an extremely visceral emotional response in the targets (Urban Dictionary, 2017). An example would be a post stating support for the holocaust or Hitler on a holocaust remembrance forum, or posting anti-gay rhetoric on a homosexual internet community. These comments invariably fall under 'Poe's Law'; while some may do this for 'fun', others may genuinely hold these beliefs and seek to antagonise others with them. Thus, online harassment and hate crime become indistinguishable due to the lack of understanding of the original posters intentions.

The meaning of the internet slang 'troll' has become mercurial in the current age, as the term now has a variable definition depending on the context it is used. For example 'concern trolling' is regarded as an individual who professes sympathy with the targeted dynamic, but raises 'concerns' that actively present an opposed viewpoint (Urban Dictionary, 2018a). An example would be 'I consider myself an ardent communist, but have concerns over the regime in China.' 'Grammar Trolls' are individuals who ignore the content of a message in favour of correcting any spelling or grammatical errors and using this exercise to discredit the message. While individuals such as Milo Yiannopoulos, an openly homosexual conservative journalist has been described as a 'Professional Troll' (Lang, 2016) for his right wing views and his proud self-identification as a 'provocateur'. In this case Yiannopoulos did not fit the traditional definition of a troll, as his views represented his genuine political stance, rather than an attempt to provoke a reaction simply for its own sake. Thus it appears the word 'troll' itself had been overused to a point where its meaning is very

dubious, and could be argued in several instances to be used as a label against a speaker who has made a disagreeable comment. In a modern vernacular, labelling another internet user as a troll could also be argued to be a form of harassment; encouraging others to simply dismiss their contribution to a community as beneath contempt and worthy of being ignored.

The term 'troll' will undoubtedly arise when discussing online harassment, however like the term 'online harassment' itself, it is important to establish what an individual's personal narrative was, as one person's 'troll' may be another's 'prominent political activist'. This indistinct and subjective view of online harassment/trolling provided the incentive to conduct the detailed research into this topic.

## **2.2 Online Harassment: Prevalence and Public/Academic Perception.**

Social media is a medium with considerable social power (Kim, & Johnson, 2016; Sherman, Payton, Hernandez, Greenfield, and Dapretto, 2016). Statista (2018) indicated that in 2014 there were 1.91 billion social media accounts, while in 2017 social media had over 2.46 billion active accounts. Statista also indicated that by 2018 Facebook held the majority of active social media accounts with 2.27 billion monthly active users. With this new form of socialisation new forms of personal offense and *faux pas* are created. In the wake of this continued increase in online social connections new terms arose to describe this behaviour and the people involved in it; including 'troll', 'doxing' and importantly 'online harassment.' When investigating online harassment a commonly cited source was Maeve (2014) who surveyed 2,839 individuals from their random sample subject pool and discovered that 40% had personally experienced some form of online harassment. According to Facebook (2018), over 2.1 million pieces of content were removed in 2018 for bullying and harassment violations suggesting a number closer to 10% of users experiencing harassment. However, this assumed that for each piece of harassing content only one person felt harassed, which is unlikely in a social media format where one message can reach hundreds and potentially thousands of people. Despite the variation in statistical analysis the magnitude of these figures for a single social media site suggested that online harassment was extremely prevalent and would be difficult to be dismissed as simply the actions of a small negative element of society. Facebook (2018) also indicated that while 2.1 million pieces of content were removed there remains an unknown number of harassing/bullying posts that were not reported to the Facebook staff, or that were deleted before they could be removed. Despite the high numbers suggested by Maeve (2014) and the sites themselves (Facebook, 2018) the police statistics within the UK did not support such high figures. A freedom of information request revealed that the UK police reported that between 2013 and 2017 only 19 crime reports were received regarding social media, 17 of the crimes reported occurring on Facebook and the majority (8) being classified as "malicious communications" with only 2 being documented as "harassment" (MEP Sec Data Protection, 2018) although this may represent a lack of reporting, or lack of police capacity to respond to the offense.

When contrasted with the real-world reported incidents of stalking and harassment to the police in the UK which totals 87,853 reported cases from June 2017 to Jan 2018 (Office for National Statistics, 2018) the difference is significant. This may seem to indicate that while online harassment was considered a cause for concern, in most cases the typical social media user did not consider online harassment to be an offense worthy of police attention or not recognised as an offense at all, alternatively an internet user may be desensitised to harassing incidents online. A further implication being that real-world harassment was significantly more serious than online harassment, however, this inference was contested by Davidson, Gervais, and Sherd, (2013, 2015) who reported that most respondents in their study of real-world harassment (in a sample of 501 undergraduate women) consider it to be “no big deal,” and “unlikely to happen.” In contrast, Mishna, Saini and Solomon, (2009) reported that their respondents (38 pupils between the age of 9 and 12) considered online harassment to be more dangerous than its real-world counterpart because it occurred inside an individual's own home, or their ‘safe space’. Although a direct comparison between the two studies and the police data was not appropriate due to their distinctly different participants. The contrasting perspectives, as well as the apparently subjective nature of online harassment, provided motivation to undertake this study in order to produce narratives that may go some way to providing additional perspectives towards a seemingly ill-defined and ubiquitous offense.

In a more societal perspective the influence of social media was reflected by the expansion of the modern vernacular. The previously noted terms such as ‘troll,’ ‘doxing,’ ‘cyberbully’ and ‘online harassment’ appearing within the media when discussing the impact of social media on society and were accepted as common parlance. In academia the need to explore these new terms and their effects on individuals and society has been ubiquitous, with studies keen to identify key demographics of cyberbullies/online harassers, (Ybarra and Mitchell 2004. Williams and Guerra, 2007. Lindsay, et al. 2016) and explore the negative effects on its victims (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007. Cassidy, Jackson, & Brown, 2009. Ford, 2013). When encountering new concepts outlined by these terms people form prototypes; a cognitive representation of the typical/ideal defining features of a category (Dictionary of Psychology, 2015). In this case the terms ‘troll’ and/or ‘online harasser’ had been created in the minds of both popular culture and the academic world. In the aforementioned; the prevalent image seemed to be a kind of immature emotionally underdeveloped creature that delighted in the needless torment of others (Urban Dictionary, 2018), even the name ‘troll’ seemed to suggest that internet users wished to label such individuals as something less than human. In academia the descriptors became more cerebral, with quantitative analysis of target groups creating a dry kind of profile. This profile suggested that online harassers or trolls could be male or female, generally of a higher socioeconomic bracket, had a high level of computer literacy, shared many traits with traditional bullies, and can be victims as often as they are perpetrators (Ybarra & Mitchell 2004. Williams & Guerra, 2007. Lindsay, et al. 2016).

While the motivations and psychology of these demographics remained speculative, Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus (2014) suggested that online harassers score highly on the dark tetrad of personality traits (i.e. narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy) providing an explanation that online harassing/trolling/cyberbullying is the product of a collection of narcissistic, Machiavellian psychopaths (Abell, & Brewer, 2014). Fichman & Hara, (2010), suggested a similar proposal; indicating that 'trolls' are motivated by boredom, attention seeking, and revenge; and going on to state that they derive pleasure from causing damage to communities and people. While these studies were informative, they all seem to either promote or presume that the millions of individuals who harass online are somehow 'other,' in this case: criminal elements, juvenile psychopaths, or otherwise psychologically flawed. The sheer volume of online harassment alone makes this argument questionable. The explanation presented that the abundance of online harassment was the result of potentially millions of social media users being emotionally/psychologically underdeveloped psychopaths does not seem to reflect the reality of the prevalence of psychopathy, which was estimated to be 1% of the population (Hare, 2008).

The shared assumption that an emotionally damaged/underdeveloped, juvenile psychopath that represents a typical online harasser has led to an absence of any research into the psychology that motivated these acts. This inadvertently unspoken rule that 'everyone knows' online harassers are this odd collection of divergent misfits that use the internet's anonymity to lash out at society. This perception is being contested with more recent studies; Cheng, Bernstein, Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil, and Leskovec (2017) conducted a longitudinal study that suggested that "ordinary people under the right circumstances can behave like trolls" (Cheng et al., 2017, p. 1). It should be highlighted that Cheng et al. (2017) did make a clear distinction between 'ordinary people' and 'trolls' inadvertently supporting the prototype previously outlined, that a troll is somehow unable to be viewed as an ordinary person, despite the sentence implying otherwise. As such, the research in this thesis expanded on this more open-minded perspective in order to provide a more detailed qualitative investigation (Willig, 2013) into the psychology and motivations of both online harassment and those who may engage in it.

### **2.3 The Profile of an Online Harasser.**

The absence of any research detailing deeper or complex motives of online harassment presented a challenge when attempting to uncover previous work relating to the profile of online harassers. Indeed, Lwin, Li, & Ang (2011) admitted that "little is known regarding the motivations behind teenagers' intentions to adopt such [harassing] behaviour." (Lwin, Li, & Ang, 2011. p.32), therefore what little is available to explore is presented here.

In the previous section it has referred to how a rough prototype of online harassment/online harasser has emerged in the public consciousness. As a consequence the mind envisions what an individual may view as a 'typical online harasser.' In essence this was a rough criminal profile of an individual who would embody and personify the kind of

behaviour they associate with online harassment. The dearth of research investigating the motivations and individual psychology of online harassers (Cheng et al. 2017) seem to indicate that society and the majority of academia is comfortable with the image created. As discussed above, the current literature outlined, for the most part, seems to indicate that participants of online harassment are dismissed as some kind of childish, psychologically/socially underdeveloped 'troll,' and/or a shadowy collection of psychopaths. Thus when seeking literature regarding this phenomenon the most prominent research sought to identify the demographics of these individuals to ascribe blame or focussed on the worst of the offenders in an attempt to apply these results to the behaviour in general.

Regardless of the limited variations in these prototypes and the large numbers of reported incidents, the underlying theme in all descriptors is that it is presumed that online harassers or trolls represent the minority of social media users, i.e. the exception rather than the rule, and recent media has taken steps to change this view (Cheng, 2017). This reflects the unlikely probability that the figure of over 2.1 million pieces of harassing/bullying content reported by Facebook in a single year, from just one site, was the work of a small collection of individuals. Considering that repeated harassers/trolls have their accounts suspended and the figures only apply to active accounts, the prevalent profile that suggested these harassing/bullying messages were the work of some sort of dedicated minority of offenders seems specious. It would be considered much more probable that harassing behaviour was indulged in by the majority of the user base in general, albeit infrequently or accidentally.

The schema of an online harasser is by no means inflexible, in fact the malleability of the term was one of the primary motivations for this research. As a consequence of this flexible definition; recent events have indicated that individuals would promote their own perspectives in order to better cement their own schema within the public consciousness. For example; prominent feminist activist and CEO of Feminist Frequency, Anita Sarkeesian proposed to the UN that she considered the issue to have a strong gendered component, and that "online harasser" be considered a major problem that males inflict on females (Salvador Pardiñas, 2015), thus putting a male face on the profile of the typical online harasser. This schema is supported by Herring, Job-Sluder, Scheckler, and Barab, (2002) who consider trolls to be motivated by misogyny and despite 'troll' being a gender neutral term, referred to trolls using male pronouns throughout their work. An alternative aspect of an online harasser profile was presented by Stephanie Guthrie during the trial of Allen Elliot for alleged harassment over Twitter. When discussing a response Elliot had given regarding a slur on his reputation, now submitted as evidence of his harassing behaviour, Guthrie was asked by the court if Elliot should have the right to protect his reputation. Guthrie responded "He's entitled to defend himself to the world, but not to me." (HM the Queen and Gregory Allen Elliot, 2016. P. 3) suggesting that in this case contradicting or confronting allegations against your reputation to the wrong person may be viewed as symptomatic of an online harasser. In this case Elliot was clear that he considered himself the victim of harassment from Guthrie and her associates for contradicting them on Twitter, creating an interesting

dichotomy where either/both sides of the court case may be considered online harassers depending on the point of view of the observer.

This issue of the subjective description of online harasser was further confounded with attempts to prevent online harassment. In 2016 in an attempt to combat online abuse led to the creation of The Twitter Trust and Safety Council (TTSC), a group created with the power to censor and police communications on Twitter. The TTSC openly state in their introduction as a supervisory body; "... [the nature and volume of internet communication] makes it extraordinarily complex to strike the right balance between fighting abuse and speaking truth to power." (Twitter Trust & Safety Council, 2016). Emphasising the desire of people to "speak truth to power" and recognising that providing a platform for people to do so without fear of personal consequence provides its own set of challenges. In the months that followed prominent internet personalities began questioning the integrity of the Twitter Trust & Safety Council itself following accusations of censoring Twitter accounts that openly criticised its members (Maldonado, 2016). A situation is once again created where both sides of conflict accuse the other of harassment. This continued dichotomy reflects the need for this study, as an exploration of the internal narratives that indicate how some social media and internet users may view 'speaking the truth to power' as 'abuse' and vice-versa.

The malleable prototype/profile outlined above demonstrates the need for a more in-depth investigation and exploration of this phenomenon to provide more diverse and detailed schemas and a better understanding of an apparently prevalent behaviour on social media. It would seem that each individual has an idea of what they believe online harassment is, and an online harasser to be, but these prototypes seem to only coincide with one another in the most general of terms. Individuals create their own 'profile' based on the offense as they understand it, flavoured by personal opinions and prejudices. Furthermore the distaste for identifying with such a publicly vilified label means that these profiles almost always seem to reflect negative extremes of humanity, and as such any desire to empathise with such an individual is quashed.

#### **2.4 Creating a Criminal Profile.**

The previously outlined formation of a prototype of an offender/offence was a greatly simplified and rudimentary reflection of the original FBI profiling method, which relied on informed testimonies of colleague investigators as well as the investigators own personal insight and experience (Snook, Eastwood, Gendreau, Goggin, and Cullen, 2007). This approach relied heavily on common sense, intuition, and the ability to objectively isolate the observer's feelings regarding the crime, the criminal and the victim (Burgess and Hazelwood, 2008). This was considered more reliable than indulging a crude popular stereotype when depicting an offender. However, its lack of scientific rigor attracted criticism that it was no more effective than a profile generated by an average layman (Goggin, and Cullen, 2008). This criticism was reinforced when it was demonstrated that of the US criminal profiling investigated in Snook et al's (2007) meta-analysis the majority of which was either the FBI

method or a model closely related to it, 70% of observations made by experts and academics in their attempts to create a criminal profile were labelled as “common sense”. Snook et al, (2007) observed that anecdotal evidence; phrases like “telling it like it is” or “everybody knows”(Snook, 2007, p. 439) or derivatives of these sentiments were often used to justify statements made by the investigators/experts, making that method of criminal profiling very easy to criticise for its subjectivity and lack of reliable scientific method. Furthermore while Snook et al. (2007) observed that while predications made by self-styled profilers/experienced investigators were not significantly more accurate than comparison groups, they did out-perform the comparison group in overall offender outcome, suggesting that the method had elements of accuracy within it that had yet to be identified. The FBI method and its criticisms provided an apt reflection of the current understanding of online harassers outlined previously, i.e. collective notion that the profile of an ‘online harasser’ may be created through anecdotal evidence and/or common sense, based on what ‘everyone knows’ an online harasser to be. The lack of scientific rigor in this respect justified a more detailed study investigating online harassment, and the creation of more distinct and relatable profiles using methods that could be considered less dependent on ‘common sense’ and ‘what everyone knows’ thus leading the direction of the exploratory research of this study towards the investigative psychology field of forensic psychology.

Investigative psychology was founded with the focus on creating a more reliable and externally valid method of criminal profiling using more empirically measurable data (Canter and Young, 2009). Canter and Young (2009) constructed the core of this discipline around several key concepts, the most relevant of which will be briefly outlined. The first was that an offender themselves and actions they undertook contained an investigative element referred to as a facet. A facet represents a salient point, or prominent feature of a criminal act or the criminal’s attitudes and behaviours, something that could be observed and recorded that may reveal the psychological process or internal narrative inherent in any given crime. For example: Fritzon & Canter, (1998) identified 46 facets when building profiles on arsonists. These included: the presence of suicide notes, drinking alcohol, time of day, day of the week, locations, any threats issued, and if the actions were planned or impulsive etc. Once these facets have been identified and recorded the next key concept is employed.

In order to validate a link between criminal motivations and their actions/behaviours Canter (1993) proposed the  $A \rightarrow C$  equation. While it is not an equation in the literal sense,  $A \rightarrow C$  represents the understanding that actions have a linked relationship with characteristics, and if approached correctly this relationship may be observed and demonstrated empirically. It should not be assumed that the relationship between actions and characteristics were one to one, as this was rarely the case, but rather it represented the understanding that actions were indicative of underlying characteristics, and that these characteristics may be numerous and multifaceted. It further elaborated that if certain characteristics were commonly encountered alongside certain actions, then it is conceivable that certain actions may also be used to infer statistically probable characteristics of the

perpetrator. Thus, the facets outlined previously represent aspects of an offense and an offender that may correlate together to reveal a significantly probable working understanding of the psychological motivation and internal narrative of the offenders.

The third and last concept was the use of inference. Upon discovering a correlation between facets, an investigative psychologist would then apply the existing understanding of psychology or human behaviour to justify this correlation based on the relationship between A and C. As mentioned previously these relationships were rarely linear one to one correlations. A simple example of a practical rather than a psychological inference would be burglaries taking place exclusively during office hours suggesting the offender has an evening job, and a further inference may be applied that this allowed the offender to observe houses to determine which remained empty during this time. This inference may then have a working understanding of psychology applied to it to lend support for a profile that suggested that the offender had a cautious and professional attitude rather than seeking more risky crimes of opportunity for excitement. Of course, these inferences always remained speculative, but provide a foundation for which a profile may be constructed, tested and potentially refuted or reinforced in future. It was this part of investigative psychology that bears the most resemblance to the previously outlined FBI method; however the profiles were constructed from observable data, rather than lived experiences or common sense.

Investigative Psychology is not without its critics; Kocsis (2006) condemned the field of investigative psychology as a discipline that is only differentiated by its “stylized method for the idiographic interpretation of crime behaviour,” (Kocsis, 2006, p. 459) and considers its right to a distinct field as “highly debateable.” (Kocsis, 2006, p. 459). Kocsis then continued to insist that criticisms of ‘experienced profiles’ were unfounded.

“Over the years, and inclusive of my most recent study, a total of 16 individuals who provide profiles on a professional basis have been tested. The Findings of this research suggests that the sampled profilers can predict the characteristics of an unknown offender, to varying degrees, more proficiently than many of the compared participants.”

(Kocsis, 2006, p. 460)

It should be noted that despite the confrontational tone of this paragraph, Kocsis provides no citations for these statements, continuing on to claim he has “created a dilemma for the ideology of investigative psychology,” (Kocsis, 2006, p. 460). Kocsis’ (2006) casual disparagement of investigative psychologists by referring to the preferred research methods as an ‘ideology’ rather than a ‘scientific endeavour’ or ‘discipline,’ appearing to indicate his opinions on this matter. Kocsis (2006) goes on to point out that criticism levelled at criminal profiling often refers to lack of objectivity and failing to take into account the biases and prejudices of the respondents who are questioned in order to collect data or formulate an appropriate profile, stating:



“It is simply naïve to believe that in a social science experiment such as this, one could eliminate an individual’s biases and prejudices in answering questions posed to them, as individuals will invariably answer from the perspective of their own life experience and draw on their own understanding of prevailing community standards.”

(Kocsis, 2006, p. 463)

While this statement is accurate, it supports the adapted methodology of this research; with the focus of the study investigating participants’ own interpretations and perspectives of an offense rather than evaluating their reflections of an offense that a researcher has outlined to them. As the subjective nature of online harassment may be dependent on the variables Kocsis outlined.

### 3.0 Research Questions

The first research question was 'what is online harassment?' and therefore required a detailed understanding of what the participants considered 'online harassment' to be. This was instead of dictating what the researcher believed it to be and expecting the participants to verify or deny it. This includes establishing if a participant is an instigator or victim of any online harassment, as defined by them.

The second research question was, 'what is an online harasser?' which presented the opportunity to challenge the popularised image outlined of a shadowy, juvenile, psychopath and establish more towards a detailed, sympathetic, and multi-faceted psychological profile of an individual that engages in a seemingly ubiquitous behaviour on social media.

In order to address these questions, the study focussed on a need to view the phenomenon of online harassment as a behaviour that is immersed within a social dynamic rather than isolated from it. The high instances of online harassment suggest that criminal intent is unlikely to be the motivation of individuals accused of such behaviours. Therefore, it would not be appropriate to use unmodified criminal profiling techniques to investigate this behaviour, as the Narrative Action System (NAS) and FBI method both presume a criminal awareness and intent of offenders, or at the least self-justification for knowingly breaking the law.

Due to the investigation being centred on an ill-defined offense that has a subjective legal and academic definition, attempting to analyse the motivations and psychology of social media users and create profiles of those who would be involved with internet harassment required an investigation into what the individual consideration of internet harassment was. This establishes a personal concept of online harassment in which a participant's own behaviour may be reflected upon to extrapolate an internal narrative and motivations. In order to study the offence and the offender's internal narratives, a flexible perspective was needed, as an individual engaging in such behaviours inner motivations were dependant on their own perceptions of the offense of internet harassment itself.

Lastly, the methodology required that the importance of social media in an individual's life, and their place within it be investigated. This this was instrumental in determining how seriously they view their interactions and place within online communications and social media. Therefore it would have been remiss to ignore these factors when establishing a context of both the victim and perpetrator of internet harassment.

With these distinct challenges in mind, a qualitative approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1997; Simpson, & Hall, 2002; Willig, 2013; De Fina, Georgakopoulou, and Barkhuizen, 2015) that featured elements of previously outlined investigative profiling methods (Canter & Young, 2009) was created, which will be discussed in the methodology section.

## 4.0 Methodology.

### 4.1 Theoretical Rationale.

Due to the subjective nature of online harassment, combined with the possibility of a victim being created without the alleged perpetrator's intent to do so, determining the individual's internal narrative provided an essential perspective into the motivations of social media users who became embroiled in online harassment, either as a perpetrator, victim or both. Therefore, a system that is dedicated to constructing internal narratives seemed ideal for the creation of profiles of an online harasser, albeit with certain changes to reflect the malleable and subjective nature of the offense.

Evans & Smokowski (2016) make it clear in their work that they consider research into traditional bullying to be flawed due to a clear lack of a common definition of bullying, and therefore a lack of addressing all forms of bullying. Considering the aforementioned indistinct perception of online harassment, a qualitative approach that allows the terms to be investigated, evolve and be defined by each participant presents a solution to this observed weakness; addressing online harassment as a phenomenon as it applies to the participants, rather than how a researcher has decided to define it.

The identification of these facets would typically be regarded as 'salient points' and self-evident in traditional crimes. Facets such as the presence/absence of a weapon, or a specific victim demographic would be observable in police reports or offender testimonies following arrest (Canter and Young, 2009). However, for the subjective and nebulous offense of online harassment a different approach was needed to justify the facets identified, as these facets would be much less evident and much more changeable depending on the participants own perspectives and experiences.

Thus, in order to code these facets from the interview transcripts grounded theory would be used as its primary focus is collecting events, processes or occurrences under a descriptive label or concept (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1991) thus making it an almost ideal fit. However, in order to create a narrative using the NAS the  $A \rightarrow C$  equation would need to be employed, and as such the online harassment equivalent of 'actions' and 'characteristics' would need to be generated through this grounded theory analysis. Unfortunately a grounded theory analysis would provide facets without any focus, they would be salient points but they would not be comparable to an 'action' or a 'characteristic' thus making them ill-suited to an interpretation using NAS theory.

In order to compensate for this, two companion theories were applied to the grounded theory rationale. To create facets surrounding the perceptions/experiences of online harassment aspects of discourse analysis would be applied. Discourse analysis as a theory proposed by Foucault (1982) investigates the process by which human agents are turned into subjects, or alternatively how power is exercised through language in order to create an agent who acts, and the subject of their action who has been influenced and/or manipulated by the agent into following their agenda. This perspective was used by Davies (2011) when

researching offline bullying, and therefore presented itself as an appropriate and flexible enough research methodology to apply to cyberbullying and online harassment. Thus, the context of creating a facet that embodies the nature of online harassment a discourse analysis theoretical framework is well suited as a focus for the grounded theory analysis. Providing facets that are based on the use/abuse of power within an online environment, as even the broadest definition of online harassment can be said to be an exercise in social influence and therefore a use/abuse of power. In terms of the  $A \rightarrow C$  equation this would be the 'Actions' facets.

For the other half of the  $A \rightarrow C$  equation grounded theory would have aspects of narrative analysis applied, namely each individuals constructed identity within their social worlds (Riessman, 2008), or in this case, a virtual social world. As a tool for creating facets surrounding an individual's perceived identity within the environment of social media and online communication, this seemed to be the most logical choice, allowing for the creation of facets through the fundamentals of grounded theory, while restricting those facets to aspects of social presence and personal identity. These two collections of facets would be used to construct personal narratives using the fundamentals of the NAS.

When constructing an internal narrative for an offender using the investigative psychology approach; the NAS was the logical choice to begin constructing a suitable research method. The NAS was a framework that provided an internal narrative and motivations for different offenders committing the same offense. These were used to explain aspects of criminal activity, as well as each individual's self-perceived role in them. To explain criminal motivations Canter and Young (2009) proposed four key narratives; *victim* (irony narrative), *hero* (quest), *professional* (adventure) and taking *revenge* (tragedy). Each provides an insight into the motivations of an offender, for example burglary: a *victim* may view themselves as responding to poverty, a *hero* may view themselves as a modern day Robin Hood, a *professional* may consider burglary to be a vocation and pride themselves on their skills, while an individual taking *revenge* may consider their offense a way of striking back against their wealthy oppressors or somebody who has wronged them. Though the NAS narratives became more complex, the fundamentals of this approach reflected the core of the exploration of online harassment, with some subtle alterations.

Thus, in order to construct a more detailed profile elements of the NAS and investigative psychology were used. Firstly; the identification of facets, in this case: elements of defining online harassment/harassers as well as perspectives on individual involvement. Due to the aforementioned variance within the differing perspectives of online harassment; rather than presume to anticipate a participant's views or project established definitions onto each participant, each individual was given the opportunity to explore and define online harassment as they saw fit. As a result of this, more comprehensive and diverse facets regarding the perception of online harassment were revealed, as well as socially salient facets of the perceptions of an individual's own involvement and place within the realms of online harassment.

Following the identification and recording of facets; the  $A \rightarrow C$  equation was employed when comparing and correlating attitudes surrounding online harassment and social media use, providing appropriate reasoning for any emergent relationships between personal perspectives/attitudes and exhibited behaviours that occurred concurrently using the current understanding of psychological theory. This aspect of the NAS was applied with the use of inference to theorise why certain correlations occurred collectively within the participants social media use. This used the current understanding of psychological theory to rationalise the behaviours/attitudes and infer the internal narrative of the social media user towards harassment and their involvement in it.

This approach was used because it provided new prototypes/schemas for harassment and online harassers by making inferences based on the attitudes and behaviours of a selection of social media users, rather than self-identified trolls or harassers. In this vein, it provides a more sympathetic and nuanced understanding of how social media can affect people in ways traditional social interactions may not. Due to the subjective nature of perspectives and opinions, which are fundamental in the definition of online harassment, a qualitative approach was used in order to better reflect the beliefs and internal thought processes of each participant, and therefore provide a more accurate internal narrative. The qualitative approach also provided richer data and allowed for the participants to be more explicit in their thoughts and opinions rather than attempting some form of emotional operationalization and then categorising diverse and nuanced concepts into pre-defined and pre-established notions of what harassment/harasser is (Willig, 2013). In essence, this approach was created to assist in an exploratory study into the motivations of online behaviour long ignored or dismissed as self-evident. It was ideal for provoking new directions of thought and providing relatable and detailed internal narratives of social media users as to how and why they may be embroiled in online harassment.

#### **4.2 Research Design.**

In order to collect the necessary participants, a volunteer sample method was employed, with advertisements (see appendix: Fig 1.4) placed on social media asking if individuals would be willing to participate in interview that would ask about their attitudes towards social media, and their perspectives and possible experiences of internet harassment. Due to the time constraints and the multi-layered mythology requiring extensive, repeated, and time-consuming analysis of interview transcripts, the limit was set at six participants. The six participants selected were three females (aged, 24, 31, and 28) and three males (aged, 33, 35, and 55). This recruitment method was selected to ensure it would come to the attention of individuals who were already invested in social media enough to notice the advertisements, and therefore have a higher likelihood of being good candidates for interviews based around online use and social media. The interviews took place using online communication software and recorded using a Dictaphone placed next to a PC speaker. All participants communicated

from home during the evening (6pm to 9pm) barring one who communicated from a local pub using a laptop there as they did not have a stable internet connection at home. Interviews were then transcribed in full verbatim.

The interview was semi-structured (See appendix: Fig. 1.0), designed with open ended questions and the potential to expand on answers permitted at each of the three stages.

- 1) The first stage discussed the term 'Internet/online harassment' as the participant understood it, with the term being open to the participant to define it as a victim, perpetrator and/or observer as they see fit.
- 2) The second section discussed the use of social media, the volunteer's level of participation in social media, their place within it and value they placed upon it. Social media was also discussed in the context of how the participants expected it to be used by others.
- 3) The third and final section discussed the value of social media, the participants' investment in it, and how they responded to conflict and/or active contradictions to their own content when posted on social media.

A semi-structured interview was constructed which allowed facets to emerge that were directed towards the subjects being analysed without being so restrictive as to limit participants' responses. A more rigid interview may have produced uniform answers, which would have undermined the investigative nature of the study (Willig, 2013).

All aspects of the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics were followed including providing each participant a consent form and information sheet which informed them of their rights as participants before engaging in any interviews. Copies of the consent form may be viewed in the appendix (Fig 1.2). Copies of the information sheet may be viewed in the appendix (Fig 1.3). The interviews were transcribed in full verbatim and an example transcript may be viewed in the appendix (Fig. 1.5).

### **4.3 Coding Facets and Crafting a Narrative.**

Following the interview and transcriptions, the coding was conducted in three stages, with the third stage discussed in two sections for the sake of clarity.

Stage one identified salient points and created appropriate facets surrounding the perceptions and/or any experiences of online harassment and documented their frequency. In terms of the  $A \rightarrow C$  equation this would be the 'Actions' facets (See: 4.3.1.).

Stage two identified salient points and created facets surrounding the self-identity that each participant held within social media . This included attitude towards other users, values, characteristics, or other salient attributes that formed an identity online that was distinct or similar to the person they saw themselves as offline. In terms of the  $A \rightarrow C$  equation this would be the 'Characteristics' facets (See: 4.3.2.).

The number of instances of the facet occurring should be recorded, as well as which participant the facet applies to. The concept of online harassment remains indistinct and

subjective, the goal is not to provide a definitive definition, but rather investigate what online harassment means within the context of the perspectives outlined by the individual participants in order to better comprehend their involvement within it.

The third stage compared and correlated the facets revealed in the previous two stages using the premise of the  $A \rightarrow C$  equation. i.e. That actions and characteristics of individuals may be links and reveal an understanding of an internal narrative (See: 4.3.3.). Visual aids such as a graph may be used to assist in identifying trends (See appendix: Fig 1.6) such as large numbers of one type of facet being prevalent in a number of participants suggesting a shared narrative. Following this coding an appropriate narrative theory was constructed to explain internal motivations, perceptions and actions of the collected facets. (See. 4.3.4.).

#### **4.3.1 Stage 1: Perceptions of Online Harassment.**

This stage of the coding focussed on the nebulous perceptions of 'an online harasser' or 'harassment' as a concept. Focus was placed on the individual perceptions and personal narratives of the participants' understanding of online harassment as a behaviour and an offense, as well as any possible experiences of harassment.

In order to establish workable facets of online harassment each facet needed to be identified and justified as an abuse or exercise of power. In this instance 'power' is defined as the ability of an individual to influence/force others to conform or comply with the whims of the agent in question despite a desire to do otherwise. The decision to use this definition was an attempt to rationalise and operationalise social media interactions on a most basic level; social media as an exercise in power and influence (Kim, & Johnson, 2016; Sherman, Payton, Hernandez, Greenfield, and Dapretto, 2016). Therefore through this definition when that influence/power is misused, or is perceived as being misused, it risks becoming harassment.

Grounded theory analysis provided the analytical toolset while discourse analysis was used as a lens to focus the analysis towards facets of online harassment from the perspective of each participant. Typically grounded theory is used to construct a theory through thorough and methodical analysis of data, in this instance: the interview transcript (Strauss and Corbin, 1997). However, rather than creating a broad theory or collection of theories that detailed all aspects of the interview, as would be created by typical grounded theory, the perspectives of discourse analysis was employed when analysing transcripts in order to provide a focus and direction to the results. Discourse analysis typically focuses on perspective of power dynamics between individuals or groups (Simpson, & Hall, 2002), thus the employment and abuse of social power was the focus of this grounded theory analysis, creating facets that all share the theme of the use and/or abuse of an individual's power within online interactions. Unless the statement being analysed was transparently obvious with its power dynamics, it was not enough to assert an underlying meaning; each facet must be

justified with appropriate psychological theory. This enabled the construction and justification of smaller theories regarding the motivation and perceptions surrounding an interviewee's responses and the underlying or overt meaning behind them, thus creating a facet.

When reviewing statements or anecdotes that have been collected into the facets outlined by the stage one analysis, attention was paid to the participant's differences in communication when speaking as a victim, an observer, or when actively engaging in what they may or may not perceive as harassment. It was also noted that the participant's perspectives shifted to encompass observer, victim, and aggressor over the course of the interview, and as such the stage one analysis reflected this in the resulting facets when investigating the power dynamics of online harassment.

Once a facet had been established, each instance of it occurring in the interviews was recorded. Facets would be consistently applied to every interview and so once the interviews had been coded they were re-coded a second time to ensure the earlier transcriptions were checked for salient points that were applicable to facets that had arisen in the later interviews. Examples of the coded statements may be viewed in the appendix [Fig.1.7].

As this was an individual research project there was no second researcher for inter-rater reliability the stage one process was repeated after a month in order to determine if the facets collected were consistent. Any discrepancies were removed or re-assessed in order to meet a more reasonable standard of reliability.

It is also important to note that each participant had an alternative and unique perspective, with attitudes ranging from dismissiveness that attributed online harassment to corporations and/or political hotheads to outright hostility towards online harassment as a concept with no distinct target for that aggression. Therefore it was not the intention to create a definitive definition for online harassment as a concept, instead the goal was to create a personal narrative and reveal different personal perspectives of this offense.

In the context of the  $A \rightarrow C$  equation and a criminal profile, the 'actions' facets of a NAS profile were established by this section. While not 'actions' in the physical sense, these facets reflect an individual's use, abuse and employment of social power and so embody action in a social sense.

#### **4.3.2 Stage 2: Identity on Social Media.**

The majority of the interview required that the participant reflect on their experiences in the context of their personal narrative/perspective. This was because their place in this narrative was fundamental in establishing the importance of social media to each individual and the value of their identity within its spheres. For example, an individual who views social media as a platform to openly voice their ideologies may be considerably more invested in their online persona than an individual who views it as a platform to share their holiday



photos with family, or vice-versa. Alternatively, the two may express an equal level of investment or importance placed within their social media presence, but the emphasis is placed on different areas and therefore they perceive threats to their identity as different depending on the actions of others. To use the previous example: a family-centred social media profile may be nonplussed by constant political posting, but be very sensitive to implied ambivalence/criticism of their family. Alternatively the politically active social media profile may view family photos they post as incidental, but view any implied criticisms or contrary opinions of their beliefs as harassment and become defensive themselves.

With this perspective in mind, stage two constructed facets surrounding an individual's perceived self-identity on social media; and as a result investigated the investment, perspectives, and purpose an individual has when engaging with others on the internet. Like stage one; grounded theory was used in so much as it permits the construction of facets, unlike stage one; the focus of this grounded theory was through the lens of narrative analysis.

Typically, narrative analysis is used to depict constructs of an individual's social identity and social worlds (De Fina, Georgakopoulou, and Barkhuizen, 2015) therefore it was ideal for constructing facets that focus on the internal and external social narratives of an internet/social media user based on their professed involvement within their social media spheres. The narrative analysis focus meant that the participants' statements were analysed within their social contexts; care was taken when reviewing transcripts to identify facets that indicated social pressures, favoured groups, and peer pressures that arose through online interactions. Focus was also placed on an individual's professed response to a conflict or confrontation online, especially in the context of the level of personal investment in their online identity and the value of social media to each participant; this included the lengths an individual would go to in order to preserve their online persona. For example; an individual's comments could lead to a facet that indicates that the individual views themselves as the same person in real life as they are online. Statements that support this may be collected as an example of this facet, however statements that suggested that they alter their opinions/postings online to appease others would contradict this professed identity, and lead to the creation of a further facet of 'identity self-contradiction' or similar. If such statements occurred frequently along a similar theme a unique facet was created to demonstrate this common re-occurring aspect of social media use/user.

As outlined in stage one, unless the meaning of a statement being analysed was transparently obvious, it was not enough to speculate as to the underlying meanings; each facet must be justified with appropriate psychological theory, be it power dynamics in stage one or social dynamics in stage two.

As with the previous stage, as each transcript was coded more facets became apparent; therefore it was required that once the final transcript had been processed each transcripts was coded a second time to highlight any facets that had not been identified until the later interviews. As there was no second researcher for inter-rater reliability the stage two

process was repeated after a month in order to determine if the facets collected were consistent. Any discrepancies were removed or re-assessed in order to meet a more reasonable standard of reliability meaning each transcription required four coding sessions in total.

In this instance, approximate 'characteristics' of the  $A \rightarrow C$  equation were developed into facets of a criminal profile; with the investigation of how an abstract representation of an individual in a social media environment is influenced; and in turn seeks to influence others through it. Examples of the coded statements may be viewed in the appendix [Fig.1.7].

#### **4.3.3 Stage 3: $A \rightarrow C$ Inferences.**

The  $A \rightarrow C$  equation outlines how *actions* relate to *characteristics*, thus the need for stage one and two to generate these *facets* to employ in the final stage of the analysis. As stated above, despite this being called an equation Canter & Young (2009) make it clear that it is not considered an equation in a literal mathematical sense, rather it is a statement that clarifies the relationship and influence that the two groups have on one another. It is rare that the relationship between action and characteristic is a 1:1 phenomenon, as with all human behaviour actions and characteristics can be influenced by a number of variables. However, as discussed previously it is the goal of the profiler to establish what the most prominent actions/characteristics are, how they interact, why they correlate, and then to establish a working narrative profile based on these interactions. Thus stage three is ascertaining which of the facets correlate and then constructing a plausible explanation for these correlations using existing psychological theory in order to create an appropriate narrative profile.

In order to establish a visual indicator of facet correlation a graph was constructed as a visual aid (see Appendix: Fig. 1.6). Each facet was listed and each participant was given a unique colour to give a strong visual indicator of where their facets lay. The more frequently occurring responses were analysed and compared first, with the high frequency of the facets within the participant's responses indicating a greater presence in the internal narrative of the participant and/or their perceptions/experiences of online harassment. Each correlation of facets then had a tentative theory constructed explaining why the two or more facets occurred in such high frequency together using existing psychological theory and the current understanding of human behaviour and perceptions. In essence; the first two stages established the building blocks of the narrative while stage three established where those blocks belonged and how they related to one another in order to construct a plausible internal narrative. It should also be emphasised that these relationships are not limited to a 1:1 ratio and may be interpreted depending on any number of facets which occur concurrently.

#### **4.3.4 Stage 3: Narrative Profile.**

This stage examines the correlates and theories assembled in previous stage and applied them contextually to those that often occurred together. The correlates were analysed as a collective of behaviours and perspectives that frequently occurred together in order to provide a whole profile rather than an aspect of it. In essence; each correlate represented a part of an internal narrative, and the final stage was assembling these narratives to present a working profile that explained the internal narrative that governs perceptions of online harassment and an individual's participation within it. Each theory/investigation given to explain the correlates provided a part of a broader narrative theory that represented the final product of an in-depth and multi-layered narrative investigation method. As with all previous stages, explanations of the internal narratives are related to existing psychological theories such as Social Comparison Theory, Personal Fable, Symbolic Interactionism etc. in order to add legitimacy to analytical findings.

This final stage required several reviews of correlates and collective behavioural theories as some of the theories became mutually exclusive or contradictory despite occurring in high frequency together. Therefore stage three was not a linear process, it was one of continual review and refinement of developing narratives and ongoing research in order to explain the correlated facets using established psychological theory. As such, it has been divided into inferences and narrative profiles here to demonstrate the need to return to the prior section if it is needed to provide inferences to better support the latter stage.

Each profile contained references to number of incidents and number of individuals a facet applies to within that narrative i.e. (3 instances, 2 individuals). This is to demonstrate the presence the facet held within the narrative as an indicator of prominence. Higher numbers of incidents may indicate a greater presence of a facet within an internal narrative while lower numbers suggest it is not as prominent. A higher number of facets distributed across a large number of participants may indicate a very prevalent facet that applies to a greater or lesser extent to all profiles, while high number of facets distributed across a low number of participants may suggest it is a facet distinct to a profile.

#### **4.4 Limitations.**

The manipulation of existing research methods; such as grounded theory, the NAS, as well as Narrative and Discourse analysis, to better suit the sphere of online harassment may be argued to possibly undermine the integrity of these research tools. However, it may also be noted that often qualitative tools are heavily influenced by the interpretation of the researchers who use them. As such, this variance on understood methods may be considered a suitable focus of a subjective researcher, and therefore be within the sphere of traditionally understood qualitative research.

While the philosophical differences of grounded theory, narrative analysis and discourse analysis make them strange methodologies to draw aspects from in order to conduct research, the uniquely subjective and socially indistinct nature of online harassment as an offence demands an analysis that falls outside traditional applications of established methodologies. It is not an attempt to define online harassment through a singular analysis, be it grounded theory, narrative analysis or discourse analysis, rather it is an attempt to codify different elements of an online presence and then compare those facets to construct a reasoned argument as to why harassment may or may not occur in regards to the presence or absence of these elements. Insofar as it is understood this remains a unique and ambitious project and required the use of various elements of various methodologies, picked to suit the needs of this analysis, rather than interpreting the phenomenon through the eyes of a researcher in order to fit an established methodology.

Due to the extensive and time-consuming analysis of each transcript, the study itself was conducted using only six volunteers, therefore it cannot be said to be generalizable. However, as an exploratory study the emphasis is not placed on generalisability rather it is focussed on establishing results that may be investigated at greater length in the future.

Originally I had planned to interview and code 12 participants; however after transcribing an interview it became clear that the coding would take far long than anticipated. The method required each transcript be scrutinized line by line and each statement, anecdote or comment was subject to interpretation following the processes outlined in section 4.3. The first coding endeavouring to construct facets using grounded theory that represented a use/abuse of power, as such a discourse analysis lens was used when consulting existing psychological theory to construct such facets. Therefore each transcript needed to be painstakingly combed through and each line compared to the existing understanding of Foucauldian power dynamics in order to justify the creation of a facet. Furthermore after completing one coding it became clear that facets had emerged that may have been present but not detected in previous interviews, therefore following a complete coding of six interviews it was necessary to analyse each interview again for facets that had been discovered later in the coding phase that had not been applied to earlier interviews. In total one interview would take approximately one or two weeks to code depending on the length of the interview itself and the time constraints of the researcher. This process would then be repeated for the second facets analysis, with each line of transcript being analysed using a grounded theory using the lens of narrative analysis in order to construct facets that represented an individual's social perspectives and place within a virtual social environment. As previously this process would need to be repeated for each transcript upon completion in order to highlight any facets present in previous interviews that had not been discovered until the later interviews. As before this process would take between one and two weeks depending on the individual length of each interview and the time constraints of the researcher.

Due to the lack of a second researcher to create inter-rater reliability, the process would be repeated after a month by the single researcher in order to assess if the facets

discovered could be considered consistent, thankfully due to the extensive practice this process took slightly less time and usually was completed within ten days for each interview, and of course each interview needed to be coded twice for each stage to accommodate any faces that had emerged in later transcripts but gone unnoticed in the earlier coding sessions. While additional participants were discussed with supervisory bodies following the coding of the original six participants, following a consultation with supervisory personnel it was decided that the time investment in re-coding all interviews eight times due to the likely addition of new facets would not be an effective use of available time when compared to the expectedly limited benefits of adding additional participants to the study.

Additionally, due to the subjective nature of the interpretation as well as the reliance of an understanding of psychological theory, the coding required extensive background research within social psychology and online interactions which was very time consuming. In the case of this study the absence of a second researcher to ensure inter-rater reliability is also a notable limitation. However that may be offset in future by employing additional personnel. Furthermore, the lack research that focusses on the social and power dynamics, within a social media environment means that much of the assertions that form the facets remain speculative, or must be drawn from ill-fitting parallels from equivalent studies looking at real-world interactions.

## 5.0 Results.

The results are divided into three sections, Stage 1: The Crime: an exploration of the identified facets of online harassment. Stage 2: The Criminal/Victim: an exploration of the identified facets of an individual's identity and investment in an online environment. Lastly, Stage 3: The Emergent Narratives contains the narratives created using stage 1 and 2. The first two sections have been divided into sub-groups for ease of interpretation.

The facets and the number of recorded instances by each participant may be viewed in the appendix (Fig: 1.0).

### 5.1 Stage 1: The Crime.

This focussed on the perspectives of the participants when discussing online harassment, as well as lightly touching on the participants own engagement in cases that may be defined as online harassment and the opinions of others who do so.

#### 5.1.1 Definition and Frequency.

This section contains five facets that elaborated on or discussed online harassment as a phenomenon, with participants' disclosing their own perspectives and feelings regarding what they believe qualifies as 'online harassment'.

##### *Victim defined harassment.*

Five of the six participants (1, 3, 4, 5, and 6) considered that the creation of an incident of online harassment was dependant on the opinions/perspectives of the victim.

P3: "Yeah, it's a contextual crime. And the meaning behind it and, y'know I mean; I could say things to my friends that I don't mean and they know that I don't mean it. But it I typed it online, it can take on a completely different context"

Participants suggested that if the individual receiving the communication feels as if they are a victim then it is reasonable to assume that the person who has created this sense of victimhood is an online harasser. In total 14 instances were recorded; this perspective creates a parallel between online harassment and anti-social behaviour in the context that the victim may declare if an offense has been committed or not. Participants also commented that the temperament of the person claiming to be a victim would also be considered; describing acquaintances as "highly strung" and therefore more likely to take offense over an incident that a more level-headed person would be indifferent to.

P3: "if I know the one person, and I know them to be a bit highly strung then I'm more likely to take the victim with a pinch of salt then if I know they're level headed"

This facet marks online harassment as a 'social power-play' made distinctive as the power in this instance may be in the hands of both the offender and/or the victim. In this

facet the moment an individual declares they are a victim it condemns another person as an aggressor/harasser. In a sense, the victim is exercising their power to influence the opinion of others, which will go on to empower the audience through the use of social pressures to retaliate against the labelled harasser.

*Online harassment is commonplace.*

Participant 4 noted on two separate occasions that internet harassment can be considered commonplace. From the perspective of a power dynamic; the act of an act of internet harassment would be greatly reduced, if 'harassment' interactions are simply dismissed as 'part of being online.' As any effect a harasser may hope to have would simply be dismissed as so much background noise. This relates to the *victim defined harassment* facet; if behaviours have been dismissed as an everyday occurrence instead of online harassment, then no victim has been created and therefore no offense.

*Persistent unwanted communication.*

Five out of six participants (2, 3, 4, 5, and 6) considered repeated unwanted attempts to communicate with an individual through social media or personal emails as online harassment. In total an unsolicited communication was referenced 22 times over six interviews, though the context of this unwanted communication varied. Participant 2 focussed on the corporate nature of internet communications, singling out advertisements and unsolicited emails as indicative of online harassment. The remaining participants focussed on repeated unwanted communications from other social media users. The prevalence of this facet within these narratives suggests that there is a sense of victimisation when an individual feels other social media users or businesses may contact them at any time and continue a correspondence or instigate one without prior consent.

*A single instance.*

A participant (participant 4) explicitly stated that they consider harassment to be targeted, and that one communication could be enough to be classed as harassment. Generalised statements against a specific group, while viewed as distasteful, were not considered by the participants to be classified as online harassment. This category remains distinctive because five out of six participants, including participant within this category considered a defining characteristic of online harassment to be *persistent unwanted communications* i.e. repeated interactions as opposed to a singular personal attack. This suggests that a single online communication is enough to create a victim of online harassment, should the social media user who receives the communication wish to make it so.

*What online harassment is not.*

Three participants made stipulations as to what they considered to be exceptions to what online harassment may be. Participant 5 suggested that general statements aimed at a group rather than an individual were not considered harassment. Participants 3 and 6 also made it clear that a person inviting controversy or actively engaging in inflammatory dialogue could not be considered to be a victim of harassment. By these definitions an individual could employ a defence against harassment accusations when their victim was courting controversy or investing in a heated debate themselves. This perspective provides an interesting facet as it places the decision of whether something is an offence not in the eyes of the victim or the offender, but rather in the observers on social media who witness a controversial or heated discussion. This perspective links with the facet *presumed lack of ethics/presence of malice/ ignorance of "the other"* as it presumes the presence of an online collective. Though in this instance the collective is implied to be cohesive and coherent group that may be considered to be of one-mind when given the power to determine the guilt/innocence of actions of others. In essence this facet indicates that participants were able to dismiss an act as non-harassment provided enough support was forthcoming by an appropriate collective to justify this attitude. It is the social media equivalent of *argumentum ad populum*, lit.: Enough people agree with me, therefore I am in the right.

### **5.1.2 Types of Online Harassment.**

This section investigates the nine observed varieties of online harassment and specific acts or behaviours that may be perceived (or dismissed) as online harassment depending on each individual.

#### *Threats.*

Participant 4 discussed four distinct references to issuing threats online, with direct threats to an individual's personal safety or more general threats such as "I wish you got AIDS," or "I hope you get raped and die." They made it clear they consider such things harassment and also suggested that the threats may frighten somebody. In terms of effecting social power, a threat online may be used to silence or intimidate an individual by instilling fear. It may also be used as an attempt to enrage that person by using a targeted insult designed to outrage. In essence it is a rudimentary form of emotional abuse/control.

#### *Contrary Opinions as harassment.*

Over the course of the six interviews five participants (1, 2, 3, 4, and 6) referenced strong opinions, discomfort, and/or antagonisms towards opinions expressed that openly contradicted their own beliefs. In total 17 instances were recorded, suggesting that it is not an unusual perspective to hold. However this remains distinctive as it suggests that a person may voice an opinion on social media, and view any contradictions to that opinion as harassment due to the disempowerment and/or negative emotional response such contradictions cause (Which will be discussed later).



Two sub-categories were created within this facet.

*The censorship of others.*

During the discussion on contrary opinions, Participant 1 made three references to what people did and did not have a right to post online, and what opinions should be allowed to be held and voiced. This in itself suggests that the use of social media to restrict speech of others by using the argument of *contrary opinions as harassment* is not an abuse of power that would be viewed as unethical, but rather a virtuous act to protect others.

*Distinction between contrary opinions and harassment.*

Two participants (3 and 5) expressed frustration that other social media users did not know the difference between expressing an opinion and harassing someone. This demonstrates an awareness of a distinction, but the viewpoint remains subjective, although participant 5 remarked that too often in social media people resort to *ad hominem* attacks (attacking a person and not their argument) almost instinctively when a disagreement or conflict of ideals occurs, and such an act would cross the line from debate into harassment. This facet suggests that the line between a healthy debate and a disempowering attack that creates a victim of online harassment is not only subjective, but indistinctly defined.

*“Justified” attacks, revenge/retribution.*

Five participants (1, 3, 4, 5, and 6) discussed harassment online as something that people earn, deserve, or is somehow otherwise justified. Participant 6 discussed at length how in his experience people often relish the opportunity to attack somebody over a perceived slight to signal their ethical position to others in an open forum, going on to enjoy the sensation of self-righteousness that comes with such an act. Along this vein, Participant 3 admitted they'd “take glee” in confronting an individual online who had disagreed or had an argument with them in the past. This suggests that online harassment is viewed as a significant social power, and that when this power is employed it may be viewed as an empowering virtuous or righteous act.

*Do not feed the trolls.*

‘Do not feed the trolls’ is an online phrase that essentially means that ‘some people may post inflammatory statements; the best reaction is no reaction.’ Participant 5 echoed this sentiment and made it clear that even if an individual did engage in harassment; that there should not be “people with pitch-forks going after you”. This sentiment also makes it clear that despite the professed desire for *“Justified” attacks, revenge/retribution*, some individuals consider such behaviour unjustified. Although Participant 5 also commented previously that having people inject themselves into situations to prevent perceived suffering is important, they also professing a willingness to revenge

themselves on an individual who had wronged them in the past by kindling a new confrontation should they have had evidence to confront them with. As such, the 'justification' of harassment remains contentious, and the contradictions of participant 5, as well as the prevalence of opinion supporting such actions, suggests that the inhibitions against the desire to empower oneself through retaliation or contribute to self-righteous harassing behaviours are easily overlooked.

*Using the system to attack others.*

Participant 3 also detailed a specific instance of an individual who had their social media forcibly removed by the hosting site due to a report levelled against them. In this case the system itself was manipulated and/or employed in order to attack a victim through denying them their social media account. In the context of a power dynamic, this remains noteworthy as it is not simply employing a person's own voice, agency or even a collective voice or influence to attempt to control the victim, rather it is employing authority and power by proxy and enforcing an agenda through the use of institutional authority.

*Online harassment used to get attention.*

Participants 4 and 5 both referred (three instances) to online harassment as a tactic employed simply for attention, participant 4 even commented that an individual may bait harassment in order to generate publicity. From this perspective, the power would very much be in the hands of the 'victim' attempting to create or inflame a situation that draws in attention in order to garner publicity, support, or to simply receive the attention of an individual or collective.

*Social damage.*

Participant 6 remarked on three occasions that one of the *facets* of social media was the ability to inflict social damage upon an individual either through the destruction of a reputation, malicious gossip to mutual friends, or sabotaging their professional life. In terms of power in this instance, the harasser has the potential to not only harm the victim emotionally, but also sabotage their private and professional lives as well.

**5.1.3 Other factors/responses/justifications.**

This section contains six *facets* that were considered to be salient or frequently occurring to ignore, but did not explicitly define or outline the participants own definitions of online harassment.

*Importance of "the truth".*

Four of the six participants (1, 2, 3, and 6) expressed a frustration at individuals being untruthful, or voicing opinions as truth while on social media. The prominence of this

suggests that the desire to correct things viewed as untruths, or the frustrations that are felt when viewing such, may be a significant factor in the escalation of conflicts online, thereby increasing the probability that behaviour by either party may be viewed as harassment. This demonstrates an aspect of trolling in its most literal definition i.e. the act of posting something provocative in order to illicit an emotional response. In this instance the use of a more intimate social media like Facebook suggests that a person would not be posting content as some sort of childish bait for their peers, but rather a genuine belief in the content they are posting for their friends/family to whom they presumably hold in higher esteem than strangers. The information/opinion appearing upon a social media users newsfeed from friends/family rather than strangers may conceivably make the statements harder to ignore, and this not simply be dismissed as trolling. The recognition of this emotional response as being an aspect of online discourse suggests that either attempting to enflame emotions or provoke a conflict is a demonstration of subtle social power; in this case influencing the emotional states of others.

*Internet harassment and self-contradiction.*

All participants at some point self-contradicted regarding their views on social media etiquette, internet harassment, and/or behaviour online. The typical comments were statements that permitted a specific or general behaviour in others, but then went on to condemn the aforementioned behaviours within the same sentence or later in the interview. Other examples of self-contradiction were admission of participation in a behaviour that they themselves condemn, if not in the same sentence, then earlier/later in the interview. In total 14 instances of self-contradiction were recorded. While not a harassing behaviour as such, the flexibility of an individual's moral standpoint regarding acceptable internet behaviour is noteworthy. The implication that behaviour that is unjustified in others can be justified to the self, gives the agent in question liberty to exercise that social power while at the same time denying it to others.

*A person's perceived rights.*

Within the interviews five out of six participants (1, 3, 4, 5, and 6) referred to the rights of an individual 10 times collectively. Participants focussed on importance of recognising and/or preserving either their own right to say something/post content or recognising those rights in others. From the perspective of exercised power, the concept of an individual having a right to something suggests a willingness to engage in behaviour that an individual feels they have an entitlement to as well as an unwillingness to interfere with other individuals exercising that right. From the perspective of a real-world criminal act, an analogy would be an individual parking illegally because they feel they have a right to park their vehicle close to their house. In other words the citing of a right to a behaviour may be a justification for behaviour that an individual knows is morally questionable, however to avoid cognitive dissonance the explanation of an entitlement to this behaviour must be offered. From the

perspective of a power dynamic, this represents an individual empowering themselves to action through a sense of entitlement.

*Emotions recognised as harmful/counterproductive.*

Three participants (1, 3, and 4) commented over four instances that they recognised their own emotional responses (or emotional responses in general) as counterproductive or unwanted. Participant 1 went so far as to suggest public embarrassment as an appropriate punishment for an online harasser in order to illicit negative feelings as a form of punitive justice. From the perspective of power exercised, this represented an acknowledgement on the part of the participants that content on social media is an attempt to illicit an emotional response, this was defined by participant 2 disparagingly as “a knee-jerk response.” Therefore by denying that response to the poster they are effectively removing that power from them. In internet slang, this would be the common rule of *do not feed the trolls* or in layman's terms: If somebody is seeking to antagonise you, the only way to overcome this is to not be antagonised. Alternatively, it may simply be an effort to avoid negative emotional responses in order to maintain a more comfortable state of mind.

*Presumed lack of ethics/presence of malice/ ignorance of “the other”.*

All six participants (19 instances in total) commented on the nebulous ‘other’ i.e. those who would engage in online harassment and/or other social media users, as being flawed. Suggesting that this out group maintained an absence of ethics, the presence of malice, and/or an abundance of ignorance. This creates a dichotomy where the speaker automatically classifies themselves in the ‘in group’ i.e. those of moral virtue and ethically sound mentalities, and by extension they create the ‘out group’; in this instance the domain of the online harasser. From the perspectives of a power dynamic, once an individual has been classified as belonging to an ‘out group’ offensive actions taken against them may be justified (See: *“Justified” attacks, revenge/retribution*). This is another manifestation of a perspective that has emerged through a desire to avoid cognitive dissonance, as many individuals commit acts of online harassment (see: *Internet harassment and self-contradiction*) but cannot self-identify as the morally bankrupt ‘other’ and so the ‘us and them’ divide is created, permitting behaviour that would otherwise be taboo or restricted provided it is directed at the villainous ‘other’. By creating the ‘other’ the individual may have power over them from an ethical high ground and deflect any criticisms of their behaviour from this plateau.

*Presumed malleability of others.*

Three participants (1,3, and 5) presumed others using social media were more susceptible to its influence than themselves, with four instances of the participant discussing how others would be more emotionally or intellectually influenced by content on social media.

From the perspective of a power dynamic it places the participant in a position of an aloof observer, presuming that they remain uninfluenced by the same environment that they claim others will be effected by. This position grants the individual self-appointed credibility to act as a judge of what is not appropriate and enforce that code accordingly, thus granting them a position of authority (and therefore social obligation) to enforce their own code of ethics on others.

This could also be considered a variation on the third-person effect (Rosenthal, Detenber, and Rojas, 2018), which was originally attributed to advertisements. The crux of this effect is the notion that an observer believed others were more influenced by the advertisements than they themselves were, however evidence showed that they had been just as influenced by the advertisements as their peers. In the case of social media, the effect would be translated to messages received or posted on social media may be believed to affect others more than the viewer themselves.

The collected facets represent aspects of online harassment as viewed by the participants, however these facets themselves cannot be used to create a narrative without an individual to attribute these perspectives to. As such the next stage focusses on the social media users themselves rather than the abstract concept of online harassment.

## **5.2 Stage 2: The Criminal/Victim.**

Stage two focused on each individuals sense of 'self' within the sphere of social media as well as the social dynamics and/or collective behaviours they witnessed or participated in. The role of social media within each individuals' life was also investigated, indicating how strong or weak the impact of social media is on each participant's real life and personal identity.

### **5.2.1 Social media user's identity within in-groups.**

The 'social' in social media clearly indicates its use as a social tool, and where humans interact the previously discussed in-groups and out-groups may form. This section outlines the seven facets that explore the presence/absence of these groups within the virtual environment of social media and an individual's place within them.

#### *Platform to Influence others.*

Four participants (1, 2, 3, and 6) recognised social media as a platform that is used to influence others with seven comments in total supporting this facet of social media. From a social influence perspective this facet is self-explanatory; social media being recognised by the participants as an influential tool that may alter the perceptions or beliefs of others. This influence is not limited to perceptions others may have of the individual social media user; it also encapsulates ideological perspectives held by all social media users such as ethical,

political, or religious standpoints. The methods employed to exert this influence differ depending on the individual, some expressing broad lifestyle preferences they sought to promote while others explained that they would confront individuals who held opposing viewpoints. Ultimately the core of this sentiment remains the same; that social media is not simply an expression of the self, but also a tool of social influence that may be employed for an agenda, be it personal or ideological.

*Acceptance of social media as a platform for ideologies.*

Five participants (1, 2, 3, 4, and 5) expressed a total of seven comments regarding the use of social media as a platform to discuss or espouse an ideology. Although all later expressed a reluctance to share their own ideologies (see: *reluctance to share ideology*) or communicated to varying degrees a level of disparagement towards those who opted to post their beliefs or ideologies. In an offline social context attempting to signal one's ideologies or ensure that the identity of the individual is known to belong to an ideological 'in group' would be fundamental to establishing a shared social dynamic. However, it has not previously been possible to enact this behaviour regularly to all known friends, family and acquaintances simultaneously. Thus an internal conflict is created where the desire to proclaim an ideological stance to gain acceptance remains, but the fear of social condemnation and/or alienation also prevents this. I maybe speculated that in order to resolve this discomfort many social media outlets provide a 'soft acceptance' option; for example, Facebook allows users to 'like' posts and Reddit has a system of 'upvotes and downvotes,' thus a user may indicate approval for a message without needing to self-publish their beliefs overtly.

*Reluctance to share ideology.*

Five participants (1, 2, 3, 4, and 5) expressed a total of eight comments regarding their reluctance to share an ideological stance with the social media communities they were part of. From a social dynamic perspective this strongly indicates social desirability bias or conflict avoidance, with participants stating that ideological signalling was "not worth getting involved" or they interpreted ideological posting as "shoving my beliefs down other's throats". The overall concern of the participants appeared to be a combination between the concern of being perceived negatively by their social circles, and the fear of a confrontation regarding one's ideological stance.

*Conflict between in-groups.*

Two participants (3 and 6) referenced conflicts between ideologically opposed groups (seven instances in total). It is an inevitable consequence of group socialisation that individuals would eventually form a collective identity on social media within a group that best reflects their own perspectives and points of view. This suggested it is not enough to hold an opinion on social media, one must be *seen* to hold that opinion in order to preserve the identity that has been created online and display that identity to the social circles that may

witness it. Essentially a social media profile becomes an avatar that embodies Impression Management (an attempt to influence other's perception of the self) (Goffman, 1990) to not only the in-group, but the individual's social circles as a whole. When signalling ones beliefs it is highly likely that doing so will draw the attention of others whose group identity is formed around an opposing ideology and an inevitable conflict of ideas will arise.

*Conflicts between individuals*

Within this facet a sub-facet was noted of Participant 6 admitting that they observe individuals that hold contradictory ideologies more closely than others order for opportunities to contradict them. This suggests that while in-groups may come into conflict over differing perspectives, it is possible for *conflicts between in-groups* to take place on a personal level as the individuals in question take personal responsibility for an in-groups ideological stance.

*Control and reinforcement the in-group.*

Five participants (1, 2, 3, 4, and 5) expressed 18 comments regarding the control and reinforcement of their in-groups, including the control of the information within those groups. The methods of such remained diverse, but they all centred on the careful selection of who would be permitted to have access to their social media circles and the selective removal of those who they found to no longer be agreeable. From a social dynamic perspective, this will create and maintain what one participant called "an echo chamber," an online space where views that conform are encouraged and lauded, and those that do not are derided and criticised. The social pressures created by this group could be considered to be a significant contributor towards an individuals' social behaviour online (see: *self-alteration to appease others*). Thus the 'echo chamber' rewards behaviourally/ideologically approved group contributions that promote the dominant narrative through social re-enforcement, while refuting ideas or contributions (and those who voice them) that run contrary to the in-group through ostracism or condemnation.

A sub-category within this facet was the *control of information within the in-group* with five participants (1, 2, 3, 4, and 5) stating within 8 instances that they would restrict information and remove people from their in-group in order to avoid confrontations or contradictions to their statements, which again suggests a strong desire to maintain and enforce an online social in-group.

### **5.2.2 Self-perception within social media.**

This sub-section contains nine facets that focussed on the identity each participant held of themselves and their avatar on social media. Investigating social media as a manifestation of the self, as well as the perceptions of social media as a medium for self-promotion and/or personal change.

*Strongly identify with an online persona.*

Four participants (1, 3, 4, and 6) commented that they consider their identity in reality to be accurately reflected in their online persona created on the social media they used, however participants 1 and 6 expected a difference in others but they did not express an indication that this perspective could be applied to themselves. This double-standard could indicate a flaw in interpretation of online social interactions: If a social media user considers other users' actions to be performative, while their own are genuine; any observed criticisms of a personal social media avatar may become even more enraging. For in the eyes of this social media user; others who are engaging in potential harassment behaviour are doing so in order to garner attention or other social capital through their 'performance' rather than from a genuine expression of the self. In the terms of social dynamics, it stands to reason that a person who considers their online persona to be an accurate reflection of their true selves will be more sensitive to implied criticism or attacks against this persona as it would be viewed not as an attack on an abstract representation of themselves, but rather an attack directed at them personally. Thus any actions or expressions taken to preserve this identity become justified as self-defence.

Participant 1 also commented (2 instances) that they *expect others to know them based on their online identity*. This suggests that Participant 1, despite observing differences in other's real-world and online personas, considers his online persona an accurate reflection of his real world identity. The participant did not make it clear if his actions and attitudes shaped his online identity or if he allowed his online identity to dictate his real-world self, if he considered such a distinction at all. While the interview did not focus on this, and therefore there is little else to explore this reasoning, it does suggest a paradigm shift caused by social media on its users: That the act of creating an identity exposes the social media user to the potential social pressure to conform to the aspects of the self that have been advertised on social media.

*Personal Investment*

Five participants (1, 2, 4, 5, and 6) expressed on nine occasions a strong personal investment with their social media accounts. The investments centred around the desire to communicate with their social groups *én masse*, and the amount of personal memorabilia, such as images of family and friends, that they had stored on their social media accounts. From a social dynamic perspective the level of investment in a social media account imbues them with considerable emotional and psychological value. As such any perceived threat or disruption to this would have its severity heightened and the likelihood of a harassment accusation or hostile retaliation to any alleged threat or criticism would be increased.

*Real-Life/Online identity discrepancies in others observed.*



Participants 1, 2 and 6 all remarked that the identity they perceive online in others may not accurately reflect a person's real-life identity, although Participant 6 re-evaluated their statement and then re-phrased it as if to presume others may view an online/offline identity as different, but they personally did not. In a social context this reflects an expectancy of other social media users to be showing, as participant 2 described it; "a rose tinted" identity. A prevalent attitude professed by these participants was that social media users maintain a healthy scepticism about content posted by others. However, the failure to apply this observation to their own social media avatars implies that they take their investment within their own identity online much more seriously.

In a related sub-facet, participant 5 expressed an expectance that a person's online persona would crumble into a more civil demeanour when interactions were transferred to a real-life scenario. While this assumption remains speculative, it does recognise that participant 5 presumes, at least in others, that the *person viewed online is not an accurate reflection* of a person in reality, despite their later admission that they consider their own online persona to be an accurate reflection of themselves.

From a social perspective this places an individual in the position where they would consider their own identity a true reflection, while showing scepticism and a critical eye of others whom they consider to have a biased portrayal. It is not unreasonable to assume that any criticisms or doubts levelled upon an individual's own identity would provoke a negative response, even if an observer was expressing the same sceptical attitude towards online profiles that the participant themselves maintained. Indeed, the sceptical perspective of other users' profiles may result in an increased likelihood of private or public criticism or doubts from social media users regarding the content of others, and thus lead to confrontations online.

#### *Biased self-portrayal.*

Five participants (1, 2, 3, 5, and 6) made seven total comments indicating a biased self-portrayal by the participants when engaging in social media. All bias was positive suggesting a social desirability bias that is prevalent within individuals who engage in social media and thus colouring their self-persona they create online (Akbulut, Dönmez, & Dursun, 2017).

#### *Recognising the differences between real life and online identity.*

Two participants (3 and 5) mentioned on two occasions that they recognise a difference between their own online persona and a real-life identity. With Participant 3 recognising a difference within themselves in terms of being less "outgoing" on Facebook, and Participant 5 stating that they consider their online personality to be "more well formatted." Although the latter could simply mean they consider their online presence to have better grammar and presentation thanks to the text-based communication of the internet and

social media. In terms of a social dynamic, the distinction between the online and offline identity may indicate an altered level of personal investment, and therefore a significant factor in their behaviour online.

*Self-alteration to appease others.*

Four participants (1, 2, 5, and 6) expressed seven comments that related to self-alteration in order to appease others on social media. Accounts ranged from simply editing content posted so as to not trigger an argument or confrontation, or carefully editing life events in order to better present oneself to groups within social media. This was also attributed to social desirability bias (Akbulut, Dönmez, & Dursun, 2017).

*Access to social media viewed as a right/necessity.*

Participant 6 remarked that to ban somebody from social media would be comparable to imprisonment and an appropriate punishment for online harassment. This suggests a significant personal investment in social media, the absence of which 6 comparable claimed would cause significant distress comparable to a prison sentence or other punitive sentence in which an individual would be separated from society. While this may have been unique to this participant, it voices a clear indicator that online social connections can be just as vital to an individual's mental and social wellbeing as a real world social circles and social interactions.

### **5.2.3 Social/emotional responses to interactions within social media.**

A sub-section focussed on the two facets that outlined the emotionally provocative nature of social interactions online and the participants' views and responses to situations that encourage such.

*Social vulnerability of an online identity.*

Participant 5 remarked that "in real life it's a lot harder for people to spread their opinions about you to everyone you know". The awareness of a social vulnerability recognises the value placed in an online reputation/identity, as well as the investment an individual must have in both maintaining and protecting this identity. In essence, it encourages vigilance in not only catering to an individual's own created identity, but also in maintaining a continued awareness of what others are contributing to this identity.

*Emotional response to conflict.*

Two participants (5 and 6) expressed five sentiments regarding their emotional reaction to a conflict online. Their sentiments were mixed, with descriptions of contradictions of stimulating/liked, and depressing/worrying. The combination however, suggests a very volatile emotional reaction to a conflict on social media, and one that could be considered both alluring, when stimulation and enjoyment is the reward, and to be avoided when

depression/worry is threatened. From a social standpoint this suggests that a conflict could be sought out but only on the terms that the instigator would prefer, to minimise the negative outcome and maximise the possibility of a positive outcome.

Having established personal reflections, investments, and values that individuals place on social media and online interactions, these results are compared to the facets established in the first section and the correlations made from this process that occur concurrently are assembled allowing narratives to be inferred.

### **5.3 Stage 3: Emergent Narratives.**

Using the facets outlined in the first section and comparing them to those developed in the second, this section details the relationships between them to infer three working narratives that explain the significance of facets that can be linked.

#### **5.3.1 The Core of Online Harassment.**

When using the facet approach to the NAS, the most frequently occurring responses/behaviours are said to reflect the typical criminal act. In this instance the most prevalent responses would define online harassment as "*persistent unwanted communication*," (22 instances) "*Presumed malice/ignorance/lack of ethics*," (19 instances) and "*contrary opinions*," (14 instances), with "*victim defines harassment*," (14 instances) being referenced most prevalently by all participants.

#### **5.3.2 The Narrative Profiles.**

Narrative 1: *Judge and Judged.*

This profile is typified by less frequent instances of professed investment in a social media identity when compared to other narratives but yet still indicating that the individuals *strongly identifying with their online persona* (4 Instances, 1 Individual) and *personal Investment*, (2 instances, 2 individuals). Participants who professed this attachment less frequently also trended towards a *biased self-portrayal online* (2 instances, 2 individuals), and would alter their content posted online or *engage in self-alteration to appease others* (3 instances, 2 individuals). Despite this careful editing of their online persona, individuals within this narrative would claim that they *expect others to know them based on their online identity* (2 Instances, 1 individual). This narrative showed an awareness that social media may be used as a tool of social engineering (*control and reinforcement of the in-groups*: 1 instances, 1 individual), further emphasised by the discussion of the *control of the information within the in-group* (4, instances, 2 individuals). This narrative recognises *real-life/online discrepancies*

observed in others (2 instances, 2 individuals) despite their own blind-spot in this area when reflecting on their own social media avatar's resemblance to their real-life identity.

When defining harassment; this narrative often discusses *contrary opinions as harassment*, (9 instances, 2 individuals) placing an importance on broadcasting their views of what they consider to be 'the truth' (*importance of "the truth"* 5 instances, 2 individuals), as well as *a person's perceived rights* when operating on social media (5 instances, 2 individuals). There were also instances of a *presumed lack of ethics/presence of malice/ignorance of "the other,"* (6 instances, 2 individuals). With this attitude towards others established, it should also be noted that this narrative exhibited a willingness to engage in behaviours they themselves condemn, with a participant discussing "*Justified*" attacks, *revenge/retribution* (2 instances, 1 individual).

To this profile; online harassment would be defined as actions or statements of others that they believe to be untrue, or a violation of their personal self-depiction, i.e. their online persona, through perceived misinformation. They also considered information or indications that their social groups do not think highly of them as catalysts for harassment, if not harassment itself.

Due to their strong connection and lack of distinction between their online avatar and their real-world self, this profile becomes motivated to harass others when confronting perceived slights against their social media avatar, ensuring that it, and therefore they, were perceived positively. Their perceived harassment generally would be open contradiction of others and a willingness to censor and restrict the content others may post by any means in order to 'stand up for what's right' or 'set the record straight'.

A social media profile to *the judge and the judged* represents an inner reflection of their ideal; a personification created to manage the opinions of others. While they do not identify as strongly as other profiles might, the emphasis this narrative profile places on a social media avatar is its ability to influence the perceptions other social media users have of the owner of the account.

Therefore they do not spend time self-promoting for its own sake; rather they focus on the attitudes and behaviours of other users that may reflect on them.

The participants who contributed the most to this profile were participants 1 and 2.

Psychological theory and appropriate references will be provided in the discussion.

#### Narrative 2: *Vox Populi*

Much like the above narrative, individuals in this category share an investment in their online identity; with a similar number of instances of identifying with an online persona (*Personal Investment* 3 instances, 1 individual. *Strongly identify with online persona* 2 instances, 2 individuals). However, this narrative is made distinct by a strong collectivist stance; a greater emphasis is placed on *control and reinforcement of the in-groups* within social media (9 instances, 2 individuals). Also, individuals within this category show higher instance of *acceptance of social media as a platform for ideologies* (4 instances, 3

individuals). Despite this, individuals within this narrative also expressed a *reluctance to share ideology* (4 instances, 3 individuals) indicating an awareness of the consequences that may arise from public professions of an ideological stance.

When compared to other narratives of online harassment this narrative once again shared similarities with the former narrative, but with lesser instances of emphasis placed on the *importance of "the truth,"* (1 individual, 1 instance) *a person's perceived rights* (4 instances, 2 individuals), and an increased emphasis on the *presumed lack of ethics/presence of malice/ ignorance of "the other,"* i.e. the other users of social media (12 instances, 3 individuals). This narrative also contained higher instances of referencing *contrary opinions as harassment* (5 instances, 2 individuals). The instances of the individual discussing or inadvertently indulging in *Internet harassment and self-contradiction* (7 instances, 2 individuals), while also demonstrating a willingness to engage in *"Justified" attacks and revenge/retribution* (4 instances, 2 individuals) indicates that this narrative would likely justify their own perceived acts of harassment against others as a virtuous act in the face of malice/incompetence/unethical behaviour, assuming they considered their actions as harassment at all. The different stance on harassment in this instance is the notion that a *single instance* (3 instances, 1 individual) may be viewed as harassment, as well as sharing the unsolicited messages with an emphasis on *persistent unwanted communication* (7 instances, 2 individuals). The other narrative divergence is use of *threats* in online harassment (4 instances, 1 individual) as well as the view that *online harassment is commonplace* (2 instances, 1 individual). Thus, individuals in this narrative may presume that online harassment, and therefore threats, are commonplace and as such are more open to the perspective that *online harassment may be used as a tool to get attention* (2 instances 1 individuals) by *emotion seekers* (see below).

This narrative appears to observe contrary ideological standpoints as well as criticism towards the self-identified in-groups as 'online harassment'. The apparently prevalent collective mentality and strong social ties suggest that this narrative will perceive harassment when generalized statements or ideological/political/religious policies are voiced that may be considered to negatively impact an in-group they identify with.

When engaging in perceived online harassment this profile is likely to seek opportunities to contradict those who are viewed as opponents of their in-group and engage in or support veiled attacks/threats and/or open criticisms of an out-group. They are also the most likely to make the political, personal, and may be more likely to view an inter-group conflict as a personal attack and respond in kind to others.

*Vox populi* invests their social media account within a collective, drawing affirmation, social belonging and self-esteem from the associations they hold. It would seem their avatar is a manifestation of their self-esteem, unlike the *judge and the judged* its primary purpose is not to influence others, but rather indicate an alliance and shared beliefs towards an in-group that the *vox populi* wished to internalize and adopt as their own. The difference is essentially: the *judge and judged* would adjust their avatar in order to better influence others,

however the *vox populi* would adjust their avatar to better fit in as a result of the perceived pressure to conform impressed upon them by their in-groups

The participants who primarily contributed to this profile were participants 3 and 4.

Psychological theory and appropriate references will be provided in the discussion.

### Narrative 3: *Emotion Seeker*.

This narrative indicated slightly increased instances of *personal investment* in their social media identity compared to the previous two narratives (4 instances, 2 individuals) but with less indications that they *strongly identify with online persona* (2 instances, 1 individual). The *emotion seeker* responded with more instances of *biased self-portrayal* (5 instances, 2 individuals), recognising that social media encourages *biased self-portrayal* and also indicating that they do not represent themselves accurately online. This was accompanied by a comparatively high instance of *self-alteration to appease others* over social media (4 instances, 2 individuals). This narrative remains distinct due to the emotional investment an individual has placed within their online interactions with others through social media (*emotional response to a conflict*, 5 instances, 2 individuals). While other narratives all maintained a strong identification with their social media accounts, an individual within this narrative was the only participant to view social media as a necessity (*access to social media viewed as a right/necessity* 1 instance, 1 individual).

Furthermore this narrative placed a strong emphasis on an individual being involved personally with inter-group conflicts when describing their experiences (*conflict between individuals*, 3 instances, 1 individual).

Much like the other narratives, individuals within this profile view *persistent unwanted communications* as harassment (9 instances, 2 individuals), with a strong emphasis placed on the victim being the one to determine if an interaction is defined as harassment (*victim defined harassment*, 5 instances, 2 individuals). This narrative received a high instance of “*Justified*” *attacks and revenge/retribution* suggesting an acceptance of actions they would traditionally condemn in the name of justice or revenge (6 instances, 2 individuals). The *emotion seeker* showed the highest frequency of a *distinction between contrary opinion and harassment* (5 instances, 1 individual) and the lowest instances of *Internet harassment and self-contradiction* when discussing what online harassment is and their willingness to engage in it (2 instances, 2 individuals). Most distinctly, this narrative recognises the *social damage* that can be done to an individual through the misuse of social media and online harassment (3 instances, 1 individual), and to a lesser degree recognises that online harassment may be used to get attention from others that would otherwise ignore the harasser (*online harassment used to get attention*, 1 instance, 1 individual). While other participants commented that emotional responses are often harmful or counterproductive the participants in this category made no such references. The *emotion seeker* also showed the lowest frequency for the

assumption that other social media users were ignorant, malicious or lacked ethics (3 instances, 2 individuals, *presumed lack of ethics/presence of malice/ ignorance of "the other"*).

This narrative is the most likely to define online harassment as content that provokes an unwanted emotional response to a degree that exceeds their normal tolerance for emotional stimuli, for example a debate that gets out of hand, or an ideological post that they deem radical or extreme. The *emotion seeker* is drawn to emotional highs, this does not necessarily mean positive emotions such as joy or mirth, they may also be repulsed or offended by messages on social media if they seek to feel a sense of outrage, anger, or revulsion.

When engaging in perceived online harassment this profile is likely to attempt to provoke a reaction in others, or drive them towards behaviour that would stimulate their own emotional response. This profile is the closest to what typically would be a traditional troll, seeking to enhance their own emotional enjoyment of social media at the expense of others. This may not be intentionally malicious, it could simply be a side effect of the strength of the user's own emotions masking any sense of empathy for what is at the time viewed as text on a screen.

The *emotion seeker* views social media as a 'means to an end,' the end in this instance being a source of entertainment. The investment they have in terms of self-esteem is weakest of the three profiles, and while it may be used socially this casual attitude indicates it is unlikely to be considered a cornerstone of the *emotion seeker's* personal identity. However, this does not mean that social media is not important to the *attention seeker*, rather its importance is placed on its social/entertainment value rather than as a vehicle of their self-esteem or self-worth.

The participants who contributed primarily to this profile are 5 and 6.

Psychological theory and appropriate references will be provided in the discussion.

## 6.0 Discussion

The three narratives revealed an interesting contrast; the first two narratives the *judge and the judged* and the *vox populi* both draw heavily from established theory from the spheres of social psychology (Hogg & Vaughan, 2011). Conversely the third profile, the *emotion seeker*, focusses more on a working understanding of human nature, much of which is considered common sense and therefore rarely considered worthy of a specific explanatory theory.

While the behaviour/attitudes of participants demonstrated trends outlined in the results, the prominently observed facets were by no means exclusive to their assigned narratives. Thus, while attitudes and behaviours were more prominent in the profiles outlined, they were also often present within other profiles, albeit to a lesser degree. This is to be expected, as people are not simply one-dimensional beings that slot easily into pre-determined categories and will often alter their attitudes and behaviours in relation to external stimuli. However flexibility should not be taken as an implication that an individual's core identity, perspectives, beliefs and habits may be fickle.

It is also of note; that all profiles exhibited an investment in their social media presence to varying degrees; the normalisation participants felt towards online harassment behaviour under various guises suggests that a personal investment in social media and a significant online presence makes being both a victim of and/or a perpetrator of harassing behaviour inevitable to some degree. It is also noteworthy that a commonly held belief among participants was that a victim would indicate if the online behaviour of others is classed as harassment, which supports the notion that online harassment may be committed unintentionally or in ignorance and therefore may be more prevalent as the result of miscommunication and/or poorly chosen words.

The first two profiles strongly link with Self-Presentation and Impression Management theories (Schlenker, Bonoma, & Tedeschi 1973), which typically focused on more traditional forms of social interaction, but in this case have been applied to the virtual environment of social media. A social media account serves as an ambassador for the individual within the realms of social media, attempting to generate positive self-esteem for the user by acting as their representative. Thus, the stronger the individuals identify with this avatar, the stronger their self-esteem is invested in this avatar, and the more influence social media may have on their behaviour online and potentially offline. The connection between self-esteem and social media usage has been recorded in other research; Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe (2008) observed that individuals experiencing low self-esteem would gain more in terms of increased social capital i.e. the strength of their social networks, through the use of social media than those with high self-esteem. This suggested that a person experiencing a level of vulnerability due to low self-esteem would be more inclined to heavily invest their time and social interactions within the domains of social media and this investment would increase the value and importance of their online avatar to their self-esteem. Unfortunately, an individual with low



self-esteem who is invested so heavily in their social media account may also be more sensitive to perceived slights against their social media avatar. As a result of this increased investment of vigilance and attention directed towards this end, the user may over time grow even more defensive of their perceived virtual-self to reflect the value of their investment, creating a vicious circle of investment, defence, and impression management.

Profiles 1 and 2 also contrast with profile 3 in regard to the Selective Exposure Hypothesis (SEH) (Fischer, P., Jonas, Frey, & Schulz-Hardt, 2005). With the increased instances of *control and reinforcement of the in group* and *control of information within the in group* suggesting that narratives 1 & 2 both adhere to the SEH, i.e. restricting their social circles and the information that is displayed within them in order to avoid a sense of emotional/cognitive discomfort that would occur from information or posts that conflict with their self-created identity. However, the individuals within narrative 3 display very few instances of this, seeming to prefer to be exposed to contrary arguments and conflict, the emotional reward from which will be explored within their narrative discussion. Where the narratives differ in this context is that the emotional turbulence generated by a conflict within the realms of online interactions serves as a source of distress and dissonance for profiles 1 and 2, and therefore may be more likely to be defined as online harassment, while profile 3 may view such conflicts as exciting and stimulating. However, this does not mean that these perspectives are exclusive, but rather the response to the content can be shaped by the viewers own temperament and mood at the time.

It would seem from the profiles generated that the prominent personal definition of online harassment, as previously alluded to, seems to equate to 'online harassment is whatever I need it to be in order to have my opinions validated.' Though the specifics of this sweeping statement vary and the nuance of what this means to each profile will be discussed in more detail.

Due to the fluid and ever-changing definitions of online harassment evident in the interviews, each participant's motivations engaging in harassment and presumed motivations of others to harass online varied. Though each narrative stipulates the possible reasoning and rationale for these perceptions, it seems by the participant's own admission that most will engage in behaviour they would deem as harassing under the right circumstances. With the offense being so subjective, a social media user would be unlikely to view their own actions as harassment, if reflected on at all. It would seem that an individual's own harassment behaviour is viewed as harmless, or perhaps righteous and/or speaking the truth. Unfortunately, the messages they post may be perceived by others with a more negative view, presuming malice/ignorance or the lack of an ethical core. The reasons for which will be outlined in each narrative.

While each participant reflected on their use and possible dependency on social media, each seemed to have different motivations for engaging within their virtual social domains. Each investment reflected where vulnerability may lie to a perception of harassment, and also what may trigger the individual to themselves harass others. A simple example is a

participant who used social media to focus on pictures of family and the public posting of life events. In this case the perceived criticism of family life may be high, and the inclination to respond to this harassment with behaviour that may be interpreted as harassment in turn, is also likely. Thus, the differences in social media use reflected on the unique investment in social media each participant had, providing evidence that was able to contribute to inferences as to what each individual may need in order to perceive harassment, or be prompted to engage in behaviour that may be viewed as such.

Therefore each narrative that has been outlined required a detailed discussion in order to explain why each remains distinct from the others and how each narrative is supported by psychological theory to explain these differing narratives.

### **6.1 Narrative 1: *Judge and Judged***

This narrative hinges on the need for self-esteem; in essence a social media profile in this narrative is the manifestation of an individual's own social identity in a virtual space. The profile represents a cornerstone of an individual's self-worth; a virtual embodiment of a personal fable (Cingel, Krmar, & Olsen, 2015) and thus the user's self-esteem becomes vulnerable to the perception others have of this profile. For the *judge and judged* social media becomes fundamental to coping with low self-esteem in order to assuage the fear of being excluded or socially rejected (Leary & Kowalski, 1995). As discussed prior, social media users with low self-esteem report higher social capital generated, and therefore greater emotional/cognitive rewards from social media use than those with high self-esteem (Steinfeld, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008). As a result of this, a cycle may be created where the vulnerability felt to an individual's self-esteem online is assuaged by a greater investment in social media, creating a self-feeding cycle. Narrative 1: *judge and judged* reflects the results of hinging an individual's self-esteem upon a social media avatar to a degree that causes the user to develop destructive or maladjusted behaviours in order to sustain and protect the avatar of themselves and therefore their own self-esteem.

Social Comparison Theory (SCT) proposed by Festinger (1954) would indicate that social media is rife with behaviours and opinions of others that provide a rich source of presumably socially approved behaviours to serve as examples of how to socialise and behave to the individual viewing it. In essence social media serves as a working example of safe opinions and beliefs that may be publicly proclaimed in order to strengthen self-esteem and secure social unity through shared ideologies. When considered alongside Mead's (1934) Symbolic Interactionism perspective, social media avatars provide an almost textbook example of what Mead would describe as the looking-glass self. The looking-glass self is not created as a true reflection, but rather a 'self' that is performative; the individual is not preoccupied with how people view them, but rather how they *think* people view them. Thus, the *judge and judged* is an individual who has become preoccupied with their social media avatar's influence on other users of social media, i.e. how they believe others view them as a result

of their virtual avatar. The comparative lack of emphasis on the *control and reinforcement of the in-group* could also suggest that an individual who subscribes to this narrative created an avatar that is an independent self (Markus & Kitayama, 2003) i.e. a 'self' which is grounded in ones' relationships and connections to other people. However, this independent self is distinct as it is not an internal perception; rather a digital re-creation of what the social media user wishes others to perceive. While the *judge and judged* crave the social approval of others they do not allow the profile itself to be shaped by it. Therefore, the avatar presented by the social media user attempts to shape others, subtly adjusting the content of their social media presence in order to promote the best response, and therefore positive perceptions from individuals they interact with on social media rather than exhibiting example of genuine personal change within their real-world self.

This narrative's online harassment behaviours or interpretation of online harassment from others may arise from the perceptions and reactions individuals have to not only their online avatar, but also the information that may contradict what their avatar represents. If the *judge and judged* believed others were viewing their avatar, and therefore the person themselves incorrectly, this sense of internal dissonance and infringement upon their self-esteem may cause enough distress to lead them to seek out and correct these perceptions. This is demonstrated by the high frequency of *control of information within the in-group*, *Importance of "the truth"*, and *person's perceived rights within this narrative*. Due to strongly identifying with their online persona this narrative represents an ongoing battle not only to influence the opinion of others regarding the identity the individual wishes others to view as their true self, but also to maintain their virtual identity's standards and persona to facilitate this. Cracks may appear in this virtual persona due to the common tendency of individuals to overestimate their good points as well as their control over events (Taylor & Brown, 1988), leading to further frustrations and damage to the self-esteem of the individual when any flaws or discrepancies are observed or commented on in regards to their online presence. This narrative is not an individual attempting to control others to only bolster self-worth; rather it is an attempt to influence and/or control the *perceptions* of others in order to preserve their external independent-self through the careful maintenance and grooming of a virtual identity. Any potentially harassing actions taken by the user to enable and/or enforce the perceptions of their social media avatar are easily viewed by the *Judge and Judged* as simply 'speaking the truth,' 'standing up for oneself,' or "setting the record straight". This attitude was demonstrated by participant 1 when discussing slander online;

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, names will never hurt me. But. Erm, if it— if somebody says something about somebody else and it incurs shame or hurt to that person then I think they have a right to do something about it, especially if it's only hearsay and not true."

In this case, the participants contradicting statements neatly demonstrate the need to "do something about it" despite their previous statement that "names will never hurt me". The

high instances of responses to *presumed malleability of others* also suggests a rather dim view of other users within social media. The *judge and judged* may feel that if they are not present to correct, challenge or otherwise attempt to control the opinions and information present in social media, then other users will be more susceptible to its influence and therefore form the 'wrong' thoughts, opinions and perceptions of the user themselves.

Participants were not incorrect in their social media perspectives; any perceived attacks on such a cornerstone of an individual's self-esteem would be received negatively by anyone. Unfortunately, any reactions or retaliation taken by the *judge and judged* could easily be interpreted as online harassment under the individuals own definitions as a result a narrative is needed to avoid negative self-perception. To complicate this cognitive process it was revealed by all the participants that their personal opinion of their actions does not dictate if it is harassment or not, such judgments fall to their peers, as the potential victims of any harassment. The awareness of this would likely intensify the need to control others' perceptions, when combined with the hyper-awareness of their self-esteem a cycle of paranoia (Fenigstein, 1984) that manifests in a fear of negative judgment is kindled. In turn, this stimulates a desire to engage in a virtual impression management, and/or condemning the 'other' in order to secure the ethical/moral/intellectual high ground to counteract the climbing insecurity and lack of self-esteem. This was demonstrated by the frequency of responses in the facets; *platform to influence others, control of information within the in-group, and acceptance of social media as a platform for ideology*, while at the same time expressing a *reluctance to share ideology* due to the awareness of the consequences if their social media identity does not 'match up' with what they desire others to think of them. This was compounded if they *expect others to know them based on their online identity*. Any attempts through their social media avatar to demonstrate their own righteous virtue through the condemnation of out-groups are then themselves subject to the scrutiny of others, increasing the vulnerability of the individual's self-esteem. In summation, harassment from this narrative occurs when the user wishes to alleviate or mitigate the damage to self-esteem that results from the fear of being judged negatively, and the individual in question begins to act as a self-appointed judge of others. Participants 1 and 6 both outlined this desire to control the opinions of others when discussing what content should and should not be posted on social media.

P1: "By all means have an opinion but I just think; you can't have a negative opinion."

P6: "I do want to have that opportunity to steer them into what I think is the right way of thinking"

The notion that a person who is over-critical of others tends to be very self-critical of themselves has been outlined by Stosny (2008), while Caplan (2003) indicated that individuals with low self-esteem and depression tend to be drawn to social media interaction. With this in mind, social media has enabled individuals with low self-esteem to adapt the maladaptive response of maintaining hyper-vigilance for perceived criticism from others to a level that

previously would have been restricted to feedback limited to an inter-personal exchange. Prior to the rise of social media, even delivering a speech to several hundred people would not leave that individual open to negative or critical feedback to each person listening in the same way that a post on a social media site such as Facebook or Twitter now enables. A social media user may have access to hundreds, or even thousands of people through social media; this narrative proposes that the combined weight of their supposed judgment would undoubtedly stoke the insecurities of the *judge and judged* and enhance the desire to combat this insecurity with further investment in their social media avatar (Steinfeld, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008). In this narrative, that reaction manifests through the elevation of the self through the public judgment and correction of the opinions of others, especially if the opinions pertain to their social media avatar. This is combined with the need to protect their own virtual identity through the *control of information within the in-group*. In the context of online harassment, this individual is both more likely to presume that *harassment is contrary opinions* thanks to their increased sensitivity to criticism, and therefore engage in actions that may be viewed as harassment by others in response, indicated by the high frequency of *internet harassment and self-contradiction*.

What makes this narrative distinct from the others is the focus on the self, contrasting to *vox populi* and *emotion seeker* which are focussed on a collective mentality and an emotional thrill seeker respectively. However, a social media user who engages in behaviour which is typical of this narrative may engage in behaviour that is indicative of other profiles. This suggests a pattern that may represent a more dominant narrative that forms a baseline of behaviour and perspectives to a specific social media user. Ultimately human behaviour is an expression of an underlying motivation, and in this instance the motivation is the promotion and protection of a self-image; an image that has been created in itself in order to project strength and perfection and mask insecurity by the shaping of the opinions of others (Tice, 1992). Or as Participant 2 phrased it; "I think [pause] it [Social media profiles] comes across more [pause] life is; all roses and— The kids are perfect... [laughs]." This leads to the social media account becomes an embodiment of the individual's impression management and self-presentation (Schlenker, Bonoma, & Tedeschi 1973), attempting to mitigate any negative impressions while promoting positive impressions of themselves through their media avatar, with whom they feel strongly connected due to this emotionally symbiotic relationship.

According to Howard's (2011) quadripartite violence typology, the online harassment engaged in by this narrative may be classified as controlled-reactive aggression, i.e. aggression undertaken to redress a perceived injustice or a slight to the self. However this does not quite encompass the narrative as a whole; the 'injustice' in this case is the *judge and judged* believing they are being perceived negatively and/or the belief that the validity, credibility or nobility of their social media avatar is being brought into repute whether

intentionally or not. So while not the 'self' in the very real sense, the value placed on this identity and dependency on a social media account for the *judge and judged* is to secure their self-esteem; this blurs the line between 'self' and 'virtual self'. Typically, this is not addressed through aggression, though it can be, but rather through less overt methods such as social shaming, veiled criticism, or implications that other users are misguided/foolish. In both instances either party may claim to be harassed by the other as a result of these interactions due to the victim-centric nature of online harassment. However, these acts of aggression may not be intended in this instance to drag the other down, rather they are intended to act as a screen to mask the insecurities felt by the *judge and judged* by depicting them as an individual worthy to dispense criticisms and condemnation.

The *judge and judged* as an online harassment narrative would be comparable (though not identical) to the Revenger's Expressive Tragedy within Canter's NAS model (Canter & Youngs. 2009). In this case the offender views their online profile as a mirror of themselves, therefore any perceived attacks upon their social media avatar would leave them no choice but to retaliate and force them into acts of revenge/retaliation in order to preserve their sense of control of how others perceive them. Thus their harassment actions become tragic within their own eyes as they have no choice but to come into conflict with others in order to stand up for themselves and their rights. This is not an ideal fit to the NAS as the *judge and judged* could also be said to reflect a victim rather than a revenger due to their perceived need to constantly be vigilant to perceived attacks. It is likely that most individuals do not view their retaliation as online harassment at all and thus need not feel the need to justify it. This improper comparison reflects the need to adjust the NAS methodology in order to reflect the unusual nature of online harassment as an offense when compared to real-world crimes/offenses.

## **6.2 Narrative 2: *Vox Populi*.**

As stated above, SCT (Festinger, 1954) would indicate that social media provides examples of socially approved behaviours providing working example of safe opinions and beliefs that may be publicly proclaimed in order to strengthen self-esteem and secure social unity through shared experiences and ideologies. *Vox populi* shares a common ground with the previous narrative by focussing on the preservation of self-esteem through impression management and self-presentation. However the approach taken by the social media user is different, relying more on the theories outlined in SCT, i.e. the immersion and participation within the environment of social media and reforming their behaviours as they are influenced by their social environment. The *vox populi* narrative focusses on creating and reinforcing self-esteem and self-image through the immersion of the user within a virtual social arena which allows the social media user to behave in a way that further promotes their self-concept (Gangestad, & Snyder. 2000). The self-concept is traditionally an abstract creation sustained by an individual within their own psyche; it is the person that an individual perceives themselves to be, and thus the social media avatar is a manifestation of this self-

concept in virtual form. While the social media avatar of the *judge and judged* could be said to be a manifestation of an independent self, used to influence the opinions of others, the individuals within this category's online avatars are shaped by the collectives they attach themselves to. Like the *judge and judged*, the self-identity of the *vox populi* will adjust in response to the views of others, but unlike the *judge and Judged*, individuals within this narrative are more likely to exhibit a genuine change in order to experience the security of further establishing themselves as part of an in-group (Markus & Kitayama, 2003). Therefore the *judge and judged* will change their avatar in order to control the opinions of others, while the *vox populi* will enact genuine change within themselves in order to better maintain the security and self-efficacy of belonging to an in-group.

When discussing the topic of avoiding expressing contrary opinions, participant 3 made the case for why people would remain silent, despite holding contrary views to an opinions/ideology that had been expressed on social media.

“there are a lot of— a lot of people who don't understand the difference between someone expressing an opinion and attacking someone.”

Based on this facet correlation, it may be inferred the *vox populi* will avoid this hostility or accusations of harassment by becoming a social media chameleon; adjusting themselves subtly to better secure their sense of belonging within their chosen in-group. The limited discussion of *biased self-portrayal* within this narrative (1 instance) further suggests that the individual within the *vox populi* narrative does not elicit change to influence others, but rather the changes they make to a social media avatar is then reflected within their real lives.

The narrative of the *vox populi* reflects a stronger collectivist mentality within the individual, with the increased negative assumptions about other social media users indicating a tendency towards the *relative homogeneity effect*, i.e. viewing all members of the out-group as the same, in this case incompetent/morally corrupt/malicious etc. and assuming that the in-group is more diverse (Lee & Ottati, 1993). In this instance; the in-group would be those permitted into the individuals virtual social circles, while the out-group would be those excluded or potentially other users in general. Considering that in social media the in-group is very effectively controlled by maintaining exclusivity and/or the use of blocking tools, it is hardly surprising that social in-groups will be formed and reinforced, with their membership being pruned as needed to maintain the collective identity/beliefs of the group members. In this instance the in-group may not be refined along racial, cultural, or ideological lines, though these may be important factors, but it is rather the collective that is viewed to be the most similar to the individual who is in control of their social media account. A side effect of such a carefully selected social group is the increased likelihood of falling victim to the conversion effect (Moscovici & Personnaz. 1991). Conversion theory states that when a person is surrounded by a persistent and consistent stream of information they eventually will

internalise this information and it will become part of their core beliefs. For instance within social media, if a person is presented with the same ideological posts daily supporting a particular stance, they may find themselves sympathising with this stance more, despite originally being ambivalent. Therefore by passively participating within their own self-made in-group the *vox populi* risks the manipulation and/or creation of social values simply through the shared information that they are routinely viewing.

While the narrative once again hinges on self-esteem and the investment of an individual's sense of self-worth into a social media avatar of themselves, the difference is apparent in how the individual in question accomplishes this, as well as the perceptions held regarding online harassment. *Vox Populi* exhibited a greater sensitivity to perceived attacks to the self or the group, and a more collectivist view when describing events and responses. From the perspective of self categorisation theory this would seem to indicate that an individual within this narrative engages with social media in order to identify, or reinforce their connection to an in-group, according to SCoT the social media user will go on to ascribe positive attributes to this group and thus these attributes go on to reflect positively on the self (Turner et al. 1987). In essence the creation of an online identity as a manifestation of the users' self-esteem is created through the association with groups that the user has chosen to identify with, thus the user is establishing self-worth through association. To expand on this using intergroup emotion theory (IET) (Mackie, Devos, and Smith, 2000; Smith & Mackie, 2015) the *vox populi* narrative identified so strongly with their in-groups that criticism or attacks, real or perceived, against the in-group were interpreted as harm against the self and generated negative emotions regarding perceived harasser(s). Thus, harassment from the perspective of the *vox populi* narrative is perceived as an affront to any members of the in-group or those that share the same social networks, beliefs, or ideologies of the user. Online behaviour that promotes the in-group, be it their own behaviour or participation/observations of fellow in-group members' online activities, generates positive emotions. In contrast, anything that damages the in-group may feel like a personal attack to the *vox populi* and therefore harassment, even if that was not the intention of the original poster. As a result of this affront, retaliation becomes easily justified and even virtuous within the narrative of the *vox populi*, especially when reinforced by a collective in-group; hence the marked increase in "*justified*" attacks, *revenge/retribution* when compared to other narratives.

The high level of instances within the facet *presumed lack of ethics/presence of malice/ ignorance of "the other"* as well as the presence of instances within *presumed malleability of others* suggests a strong presence of disconfirmation bias within this group (Edwards & Smith, 1996). In this case the disconfirmation bias being a readiness to dismiss any information they disagree with, and the people who post this information as malicious, foolish, or specious. When combined with a strong prevalence of instances within "*justified*" attacks and *revenge/retribution* it is possible to infer that an individual within this narrative would be inclined to both perceive harassment from the out-group and to respond in a manner which also could be perceived as harassing. The result is a social media user who



feels both empowered by, and responsible for, the promotion and defence of their collective. In the context of online harassment the *vox populi* is motivated to indulge in behaviour that they would otherwise condemn in others in order to act in the defence of an in-group, or in order to retaliate or condemn an out-group to further establish membership of an in-group.

Howard's (2011) quadripartite violence typology, would classify the *vox populi*'s harassment as controlled-adaptive aggression i.e. to achieve a desired outcome and its reward; in this instance social recognition and the ability to wield the perceived power of an in-group. While this classification may be deemed appropriate in some instances, it could also be argued to be controlled-reactive aggression i.e. vengeful, by seeking vengeance for a perceived slight against the self. However, it should be noted that the victim status and sense of injustices the *vox populi* often employs as justification for their retaliation doesn't fit this descriptor due to the 'self' aspect of the controlled-reactive response, as they often aggress on the behalf of others. The profile suggests *vox populi* narrative rarely acts out of outrage or perceived slight against the self, but rather acts in the name of the group they have chosen to champion in order to wield the voices of many which is considerably more powerful than a voice that is just their own. The partial exception to this would be if the *vox populi* internalised a statement against a group to reflect on them personally, however their response to this would be the same.

The most appropriate NAS model for this narrative would be the Hero's Expressive Quest. In essence the offender believes they are standing up for others; their harassment is an expression of their rejection and/or hatred for the out-group while at the same time indicating that they are firmly allied with their in-group. This mentality becomes a quest when the focus of the offender becomes aligned with a cause, be it political, social or ideological. This offender is the overbearing ideological activist that regularly posts media that supports their views and aggressively criticises or attacks any contrary points of view. Unfortunately, like the previous narrative, this NAS model is not a perfect fit. The social media user in question would likely view their harassment as self-defence against a slight they have taken personally or in defence of their in-group. For example, a person may post their hatred for prominent left/right-wing politicians, and when challenged they will state that they need to 'fight back' against policies they view as dangerously socialist/fascist. Despite making the initial attack in the form of their post declaring their hatred, their internal narrative remains that of a victim. This attitude is outlined by participant 3 when discussing members of social media in-groups.

"They want to play the victim so that if they say something inflammatory and people say 'no' then they can go 'Oh this person said "No" and then said this about me, aren't they terrible people, aren't I a victim.'"

This mentality shifts their actions towards a different profile, in this case the 'righteous avenger' rather than the 'hero'. When 'revenge' is not an appropriate narrative, while the

individual may view their actions as vengeful, it is far more likely to come from a place of perceived nobility and/or altruism. Ultimately, they are rarely pursuing their actions for restitution against a personal slight, rather they believe they are acting on the behalf of others, thus the 'hero' label becomes more appropriate.

### 6.3 Narrative 3: *Emotion Seeker*.

This narrative focusses on the heightened emotional response expressed by the individuals when encountering an online conflict. It is demonstrated when a negative emotion is expressed by a social media user, yet the individual continues to engage or spectate with an ongoing conflict regardless of any negative emotional outcome as they view the conflict as 'exciting'. This narrative would suggest that the social media user may spectate or engage in conflicts for the emotional high of the experience, be it the self-righteous fury, exasperated frustration at the perceived stupidity of another, or the excitement that comes with a confrontation that triggers an emotional rush with the user. Or as participant 5 put it "[being contradicted online] irritates me, but I like it because it's stimulating".

Humans by our nature seek emotions, individuals will often seek themed media such as action/horror/romance in order to experience excitement/fear/love vicariously through this medium. Despite knowing a scene of a car crash is likely to be morbid, an individual may slow down to inspect a traffic accident to sate their curiosity and perhaps glimpse something that will spark a thrill of horror within themselves. An extreme of this behaviour offline and online can be seen within individuals suffering from Borderline Personality Disorder, the desire to seek emotional highs can be so intense as to cause the individual in question to sabotage relationships with others (Friedel, 2004; Stockdale, Coyne, Nelson, & Erickson, 2015). On the surface it would be easy to equate an *emotions seeker* to a troll, alluded to previously; an individual who gains vicarious enjoyment from provoking extreme, usually negative, emotions in others. However, Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus (2014) found high correlation between individuals who self-identify as trolls and the dark tetrad of personality, i.e. narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy which leads to the fact that most internet users would not identify as trolls, and are highly unlikely to be psychopaths, narcissists or Machiavellian schemers. The key difference is that an *emotion seeker* may not actively provoke others for the emotional enjoyment, but that does not mean they will not actively seek out conflict, so in this respect the *emotion seeker* could be defined as a pale reflection of the popular preconception of a troll. The fundamental difference between the *emotion seeker* and the troll is that the *emotion seeker* represents behaviour that embodies normal human emotional enjoyments, while the troll represents the presence of the dark tetrad of personality that indulges this enjoyment with no regard for the feelings or harm it may cause to others.

This narrative acknowledges that a part of everybody draws emotional stimulation from conflict, provocation, or the suffering of others that in some way 'deserve it'. This is the type of narrative that corporations that manufacture or produce 'viral news' rely on, seeking to

empower a message emotionally in order to ensure the message is passed on. In social media this phenomenon is called 'clickbait' and is designed to inflame outrage, curiosity, or morbid fascination in order to draw attention and the inevitable 'click' from the viewer.

Participants within this narrative delivered a comparatively high number of responses to recognising social media as *a platform to influence others, biased self-portrayal, self-alteration to appease others*, while also vocalising a higher number of instances of an *emotional response to a conflict*. They also were unique in observing that an individual has *social vulnerability online* and that a conflict of ideals may become a *conflict between individuals*. These factors suggest that an *emotion seeker* shares the same understanding and appreciation of inter-group conflict as the *vox populi*, however the *emotion seeker* views the conflict as a source of emotional stimuli while at the same time appreciating the social dangers that such conflicts may generate. The stakes of involvement in such conflict are a social reputation, and one of the rewards generated from this risk are the emotional highs encountered through a personal involvement in a conflict. This emotional investment/return relationship is a virtuous cycle; the greater value placed on an emotional response, the more likely it is an individual may experience it, and the higher value is placed on the validity and usefulness of that emotion (Lee et al. 2012). Therefore, the emotion seeker may be more likely to be susceptible to social media addiction, though this remains pure speculation as relationships between social media and any kind of addictive behaviour was not part of this investigation.

The *emotion seeker* is typified by the ability to find the emotion they expect in order to self-stimulate, if the *emotion seeker* expects amusement, outrage, or fear, they will undoubtedly experience it from content which in any other context would be benign. Thus, they can become a victim of online harassment simply through the expectation of encountering that experience upon entering the spheres of social media (Tamir, Bigman, Rhodes, Salerno, & Schreier, 2015) in effect becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. That is not to say that harassment is never genuine, there are certainly individuals who will attack others online for their own reasons, but this explanation does provide reasoning as to how and why it is perceived that *online harassment is commonplace*.

The emotion-centric focus of social media is not a new concept; Sriwilai & Charoensukmongkol (2016) discovered that individuals with a high level of social media usage were much more likely to rely on emotion-focussed methods to deal with stress, suggesting that an individual heavily invested within social media is one who places a high value on the emotions they encounter when doing so. Thus, the *emotion seeker* represents the individual who values the feelings generated rather than the accuracy of the content of the social media they consume. The point at which this narrative becomes unhealthy is if/when a social media user begins to manufacture situations, consciously or unconsciously, that lead to the emotional stimulation they desire. For example, a person feeling a need to be outraged may seek media/comments that indulge their established beliefs regarding a sense of victimhood. If

none are obviously forthcoming they may begin to interpret otherwise harmless comments as calculated insults or slights. Alternatively their response to the lack of stimuli could lead to them baiting the desired emotion by making comments designed to inflame others into a conflict. Participant 6 discussed the enjoyment of a conflict and the tendency of a social circle within his social media to engage in disagreements for entertainment and emotional stimulation.

“I don't agree with them and I will put that, and we sometimes get into heated discussions which, y'know what I mean, some people could look at and say 'that's harassment' but we all just kind of like arguing with each other”

According to Howard's (2011) quadripartite violence typology this would be classified as 'Impulsive-adaptive' aggression, i.e. aggression designed for immediate reward, or 'thrill-seeking'. The emotion sought depends entirely on the individual's temperament, and may indeed be passive, simply seeking content that will spark outrage/affection/amusement in order to experience it vicariously. This desire may become harmful or abusive when the individual feels they must become personally involved in the content i.e. they need to create the emotions they seek through the antagonising of others, or they begin to interpret otherwise benign messages as hostile or as harassment to fulfil their desire to experience the emotions associated with victimhood. When their emotions are stoked rather than allowed to die down the viewer may engage recklessly with the collective of social media, thus the probability of a conflict increases and the probability of a party feeling harassed is also increased. Runions (2013) suggested that the 'sensation seeking' need not be impulsive, but rather reflects poor inhibition and self-control; in the context of online communication and social media an individual may allow themselves to be drawn into conflicts with other social media users because they lack the self-control to withdraw from the situation. Bushman (2002) indicated that when an angry person is given catharsis, i.e. an opportunity to lash out at the source of their anger, their anger increases rather than decreases. Thus the *emotion seeker's* own lack of self-control is exacerbated by their ability to express their emotions towards the sources of their outrage, anger, or frustrations via social media. This combination of factors creates a perfect virtual environment for inflamed emotions and perceived aggression, and therefore online harassment.

The *emotion seeker* is distinct from the previous narratives as rather than justifying actions taken online in the name of preserving a self-image or righteous indignation on another's behalf, the *emotion seeker* falls victim to an over-indulgence of the emotionally provocative nature of modern social media. Just as Layton, & Muraven, (2014) proposed individuals with high self-control have restricted emotional extremes, the *emotion seeker* embodies the opposite of this; their heightened emotional extremes reflecting poor self-control and a higher tendency to engage in behaviour that would otherwise be out of character

when over-stimulated. Participants 4 and 5 remarked on the rapid escalation of conflict when discussing online debates or differences of opinion.

P4: “Argue your corner if someone’s being ridiculous and nobody else has stuck up for what you think is the right thing, but if it’s just gonna’ go back-and-forth, back-and-forth, you’re just screaming at each other, you’re not going to get anywhere”

P5: “people really quickly escalate to just throwing out abuse rather than having a proper discussion.”

The *emotion seeker* falls outside of the traditional NAS psychological consistencies, as the individual in question would likely not consider their actions outside the norm, as engaging with social media in order to illicit an emotional response is the purpose of social interactions (Krach, Paulus, Bodden and Kircher, 2010) and social media as a whole. As such, no rationale or internal narrative would be needed by the offender to justify their actions as it is unlikely to be viewed as online harassment by the perpetrator. If the *emotion seeker* recognises that their actions were outside of their normal character, the rationale after-the-fact could easily be something equivalent to ‘I say things I don’t mean when I get emotional,’ or mitigating personal responsibility through blaming the source of what caused them to lash out e.g. ‘They shouldn’t have posted that if they didn’t want to make people mad.’ If a NAS profile was ascribed to the *emotion seeker* rather than a profile in which the offender self-identified, it would likely be the victim’s expressive irony; the individual becomes the ironic victim of their own impulses and desires, but as alluded to previously if accountability is self-attributed at all it would have to be done after any such events when the individual in question has had an opportunity to calm down and reflect on their actions.

## 7.0 Conclusions.

The narratives established by this study suggest a fresh perspective on the label of 'online harasser'. Indeed, it even goes to some lengths to explain why the perspective of online harassment is so vilified yet prevalent throughout the spheres of online communication, with individuals quick to condemn behaviour they understand as harassment, but then engaging in this same behaviour when motivated sufficiently. Contrasting to the current trend of studies and media (Abell, & Brewer, 2014; Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014; Fichman & Hara, 2010; Herring, Job-Sluder, Scheckler, and Barab, 2002; Salvador Pardiñas, 2015.) seeking to ascribe sinister personality traits or label demographics as 'problem people.' This study instead provided a relatable and sympathetic narrative that can arguably explain the millions of cases of online harassment with a more believable reasoning. Essentially, this study was needed to draw the focus away from a punitive 'us and them' mentality that is revealed in the *presumed lack of ethics/presence of malice/ ignorance of "the other"* facet and more towards a perspective that seeks to comprehend and explain online harassment as symptomatic of social media use, rather than simply identify those responsible. After all, it is not possible to solve a problem without understanding it, and the current academic zeitgeist seems to follow, or perhaps encourage, the perspective that online harassment is the work of the sinister 'other' rather than a flaw within the human condition that may affect anyone.

When considering the study aims; the focus on the internal narrative revealed that online harassment, as a concept that is so poorly defined, essentially can become whatever the observer wishes it to be. While a definitive explanation was not forthcoming the study revealed that an individual's perspectives of online harassment appears to be strongly influenced by their own internal narratives, which also encompass their perspectives of their identity on social media and of others who use it. It was also revealed to be flexible even within an individual's own description; with all participants' contributing to the *internet harassment and self-contradiction* facet, suggesting that even once defined, online harassment remains contextual to the perspective of the individual in question. The harassment narratives reflect the perspectives of the individuals, the perception of the self/online-self, and the perception of others when engaging in social media and online communications. Each facet of these perspectives and perceptions demonstrated an effect on the phenomenon of online harassment and how it is engaged with. While these narratives cannot be justifiably applied to all internet users, the fresh perspective, as well as the narratives constructed may provide a valuable insight that may be argued to represent the majority of the minor cases of online harassment, rather than the minority of offenses that embody its worst offenders.

The limitations of using only six participants have been discussed previously; however the qualitative nature of this study meant that higher numbers would have not been feasible due to time constraints. The qualitative nature of the study itself reflects the need to explore online harassment on a much more nuanced level than prior studies, and therefore the process was considerably more time-consuming. The offense being identified as one that was

in the eye of the beholder presented a challenge to understand what the beholder is seeing when they claim to experience or witness online harassment. Because of this a quantitative approach would have presented limitations by describing the offense and asking for an opinion, whereas a qualitative approach allowed each participant to elaborate on their own experience, rather than selecting from experiences or facets presented by a researcher.

The prevalent theme throughout the study in regards to online harassment is that it may be defined as the user needs it to be in order to better support the favoured narrative that the social media user subscribes to. The licence to engage in online harassment seems to be perceived as defensive or justified when used to avoid the discomfort of identifying with an online harasser; therefore the motivation to engage in this behaviour must always come from an ethical high ground, at least in the user's own eyes. This contrasts with some of the current understanding of 'trolls' as shadowy psychopathic Machiavellian narcissists, and instead re-paints the online harasser as the everyman who has simply over-indulged, misinterpreted, or developed an unhealthy fascination with social media. Just as alcohol is a beverage that may be socially enjoyed that people often make mistakes when they indulge to excess, this research presented social media as another kind of social lubricant, which when used irresponsibly may lead to instances of perceived harassment.

Ultimately, the participants viewed figures that engaged in online harassment as the 'other,' often attributing malice, incompetence or lack of maturity to this group. But almost all participants admitted to overtly, or incidentally, that they had engaged in behaviour that they themselves may view as online harassment. This represents a microcosm of the current attitude towards this social media blight; the need to draw the line between oneself as a good person and the activities of people whom have been deemed by society at large to be 'bad'. However, the narratives have not unmasked a monster or labelled individuals as 'bad,' rather they have revealed that each user has the capacity to make mistakes when engaging with individuals within social media, and that the eyes of the beholder that perceives harassment online is rarely turned inward.

### **7.1 Recommendations for Policy and Practice.**

The narratives generated reflect the individuals interviewed rather than individuals who have been prosecuted or self-identify as internet harassers, therefore they remain as profiles for the 'everyman harasser,' - a person who may lead an otherwise blameless virtual life, but may at some point engage in behaviour that may be interpreted by another individual as harassment. As such it does not represent the internal narratives of a self-confessed criminal/offender, but rather a behavioural guide that may explain, to some degree, the reasoning behind why individuals on the internet behave in ways which they themselves condemn in others. Traditional criminal offenders often act with malice and forethought, hence the need to demonstrate *mens rea* in court. However, in the narratives discussed prior, each person could be described as acting, broadly speaking, within acceptable behavioural limits of

an ordinary person. With self-defence in the case of the *judge and the judged* in order to preserve a sense of self-worth, and in the defence of others in the case of *vox populi* who often act in the interests of their in-group. While not acting out of any sense of self-preservation, the *emotion seeker* could be argued to be simply over-indulging in the very emotions that social media is designed to illicit and acting irresponsibly as a side effect. Indeed, if an *emotion seeker* is provoked into behaviour that is otherwise out of character due to content posted by another, they could themselves claim to have felt harassed. Thus legally it presents the scenario where to mitigate an accusation of harassment, the defence only needs to demonstrate that an alleged harasser may simply be a 'typical internet user' who has fallen afoul of the influence social media has on human behaviour. Currently, in order to validate the current laws regarding an internet troll/harasser the prosecution must demonstrate that the alleged offender was acting out of malice and therefore represented a danger/threat to the accuser. Courts may be confronted with a situation where the offender may be blameless, and the victim's perceptions of another's behaviour has the power to condemn them as an online harasser, reflected in the high number of instances within the *victim defines harassment* facet. With this in mind, the burden of *mens rea* could arguably be shouldered by both the defendant and the accuser, as it has been demonstrated, in the case of Her Majesty the Queen and Gregory Allen Elliot, that the accused harasser can be brought to trial in an attempt to control, intimidate, or persecute them and give them no rights to defend themselves from the accusers wrath. However, such cross-examination would also risk victimising an individual who is already in court as a victim of harassment, thus the situation remains challenging, both ethically and legally.

As with the example of hate crime, it is not unknown for a legal precedent to be set with a subjective view on if a crime/offense has occurred or not. As such, the concept of a crime being within the eye of the beholder is not a new phenomenon under the UK law, however in this case an online 'paper trail' means that cases should theoretically be much simpler to evaluate, as a jury would be presented with the evidence as it was presented online to all viewers. The determination of guilt then becomes dependant on the interpretation of members of the public who are outside of any social circles than those involved in the case, placing the decision of whether or not online harassment has occurred in the eyes of twelve other beholders.

Thus, if this research proves to be consistent when repeated over extended groups it may set a strong argument for legal reform regarding online harassment laws towards the recognition of the indistinct, subjective, and often unintentional nature of this offense.

From a mental health perspective; in the context of individuals who are *emotion seekers* the number of popular political figures and celebrities who have 'twitter meltdowns' (Grabham, 2009. Rahinnon, 2014, Boulton, 2016) seem to embody this lack of emotional control/emotional overstimulation in a very public way. It could be easily argued that individuals like prominent politicians and celebrities are hardly representative of the general population, however an ordinary member of the public is unlikely to gather the same level of



attention for a 'twitter meltdown,' outside of their own social circles. If an individual with thousands of followers in the public eye can lash out due to emotional over-stimulation despite the social pressure to not lose face in front of an audience, it is not unreasonable to suggest that a member of the public with a few hundred contacts/followers would act irresponsibly and/or uncharacteristically given the appropriate over-stimulus. However the lack of societal awareness of the emotional impact of general social media on mental health remains somewhat limited due to the attention of the public eye being fixed on the worst elements of social media, rather than its everyday effects (Cheng, 2017). Just as in generations prior; a cultural understanding of the importance of regular breaks, sunlight, and interpersonal relationships needed to be highlighted within the public domain in order to encourage the responsible use of an individual's time in order to maintain robust mental health; this research provided an argument that the current generation needs educating on the potential dangers of the everyday use and over-indulgence of social media and its effect on mental health and human behaviour (Huang, 2014; Lin, Sidani, Shensa, Radovic, Miller, Colditz &, Primack, 2016; Hawk, van den Eijnden, Regina, van Lissa, & ter Bogt, 2019).

## **7.2 Recommendations for future research**

The core of this research was that harassment was not caused by a significant psychological flaw such as the dark tetrad of personality, instead it is simply the side-effect of the impact of social media on an otherwise healthy psyche brings into question the current understanding of what it means to be an online harasser. The current focus of investigating the worst elements of internet users and then using that to extrapolate down as to the motivations of a vast number of social media users is disingenuous. The equivalent non-psychological parallel is attempting to discover what makes a television work by examining a broken one, and then presuming this to be the case for all televisions regardless of make, model and manufacturer. The narratives outlined here may serve as a fresh starting point to investigate the arena of social harassment as an extensive global phenomenon caused by the nature of the online environment itself rather than as a social media blight that has arisen due to a shadowy collection of psychopaths or a flaw in the human condition.

The alternative to looking at the worst elements of harassment behaviour and generalising it to all online users; is to look at specific victims and then speculate as to all offenders. Reports such as the Cyber Violence Against Women and Girls (UN Women, 2015) focus on a victim demographic, and make a presumption based on this that the motivation of the offender is based on a conscious/unconscious shared hatred of women that has now manifested online. This makes the assumption of harassers based on the perspectives of a single person speaking on the behalf of a demographic, not unlike the *vox populi*, that online harassment is conducted by those who are somehow sinister or broken in some way, rather than allowing for a more nuanced understanding of human behaviour. Solutions that stem from this standpoint invariably lead to the solutions becoming ones of mass-censorship, or

criminalisation of certain aspects of online behaviour without a genuine understanding of what motivations may spark this in the first place. The researched outlined here seems to indicate that when an 'everyday harasser,' as profiled within this study, is confronted with a comment they have made that a person has found offensive and harmful; a typical response would be one of confusion or defensive indignation rather than a genuine expression of malice or hatred. Regardless of their own perspectives an instance of online harassment has still been created, independently of their intentions. The solution from the current understanding would be to block/ban and possibly even prosecute the accused, but with the ease that social media accounts are created it is unlikely that banning or blocking would be anything more than a stop-gap measure at best. Furthermore, by publicly silencing criticism or controversial statements within the public domain it is possible that the opposite effect is achieved, and even more negative attention is drawn to the victim and their circumstance (Cacciottolo, 2012).

Thus this research promotes a recommendation towards a shift of focus away from victims and extreme perpetrators and towards the realms of social media itself as a unique social tapestry that may yet demonstrate new effects on typical human behaviour. By shifting the research from a victim/punitive standpoint onto a more rehabilitative and investigative standpoint the solutions to the problem of internet harassment may be adapted to better reflect the root causes of the issue and provide insight into its solutions, rather than simply establishing ways to better identify and demonise those in need of some form of punishment.

Ultimately, psychology is no different to other disciplines when faced with the decisions on where to focus research. Serial killers, career criminals, and self-identified serial online 'trolls' make for much more interesting subjects of study because they are so divergent from what a typical person identifies with as the self. However, this study suggests that in the case of online harassment, the key to understanding it is not to unravel the Pandora's Box of a disturbed mind that is alien to our own and equating that to humanity at large. The focus instead may be directed towards individuals like ourselves to answer why in the new frontier of social media so many millions of people with whom we share so much in common will harass and seem to feel harassed by their fellow internet users.

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## Appendix:

### Fig 1.0: Semi-Structured Interview.

#### Semi-Structured Interview

You're reminded at this time that you can decline to answer any question if you see fit.

#### Stage 1 of 3

- If you were told somebody was a victim of "Online Harassment" what would you expect that to mean?
- At what point does person deserves prosecution for online harassment?
  - o What sort of behaviours should be criminalised?
  - o What sort of punishments do you think are appropriate?
- Can you think of a time you felt harassed in online interactions?
- Under what circumstances do you it is possible that an individual may invite harassment?
  - o Should a person being offended by content/messages posted online have a right to retaliate?
    - To what extent?
- At what point does an online confrontation become harassment?

#### Stage 2 of 3

- Obviously you don't have the time or perhaps the inclination to post everything you do on social media, what would you say you prioritise in posting?
  - o What about on personal media, such as your Facebook page or twitter feed?
- Do you feel the identity you have online is different from your real world self?
  - o Do you enjoy self-promoting online?
  - o Would you consider your online persona as an accurate representation of yourself?
- Do you feel that social media is a good place to openly voice your own beliefs and ideologies?
  - o How would you describe your emotional reaction to people who use it this way?
- Would you expect somebody to be sensitive of your views when posting something that may be contradictory to your beliefs or views?
  - o Can you think of a time this has happened?
- Can you think of a time you have altered what you have posted in order to avoid antagonising another person?
  - o Alternatively would you post content in order to provoke a reaction from them and engage in an attempt to push your agenda and defeat them/win them over?
- How would it make you feel if your Facebook account, Twitter and other social media accounts were all deleted?
  - o Why would you feel this way?

#### Stage 3 of 3

- How often do you edit, censor or otherwise block friends and family from your newsfeeds?
  - o Do you feel that you have a right to control what information or content you are exposed to?
  - o Does it make you angry when people contradict information or messages you post on your newsfeed?
- Can you tell me about the last time this happened?
  - o Do you pay closer attention to others who do not share your views as an opportunity to contradict them?
  - o Would you consider revenging yourself upon somebody who had caused you distress unknowingly by contradicting them in the future?

**Fig 1.1: Coded Results.**

Perceptions of harassment

A single instance.

Participant 1	0
Participant 2	0
Participant 3	0
Participant 4	3
Participant 5	0
Participant 6	0

Threats.

Participant 1	0
Participant 2	0
Participant 3	0
Participant 4	4
Participant 5	0
Participant 6	0

Persistent Unwanted communication.

Participant 1	0
Participant 2	6
Participant 3	4
Participant 4	3
Participant 5	5
Participant 6	4

Harassment is contrary opinions.

Participant 1	8
Participant 2	1
Participant 3	4
Participant 4	1
Participant 5	0
Participant 6	3

Distinction between harassment and opinions made.

Participant 1	0
Participant 2	0
Participant 3	1
Participant 4	0
Participant 5	5
Participant 6	0

"Justified" attacks, revenge/retribution.

Participant 1	2
Participant 2	0
Participant 3	3
Participant 4	1
Participant 5	2
Participant 6	4

Do not feed the trolls.

Participant 1	0
Participant 2	0
Participant 3	0
Participant 4	0
Participant 5	1
Participant 6	0

Importance of "the truth".

Participant 1	4
Participant 2	1
Participant 3	1
Participant 4	0
Participant 5	0
Participant 6	1

Internet harassment and self-contradiction.

Participant 1	4
Participant 2	2
Participant 3	3
Participant 4	4
Participant 5	1
Participant 6	1

Victim define harassment

Participant 1	4
Participant 2	0
Participant 3	4
Participant 4	1
Participant 5	2
Participant 6	3

Person's perceived rights

Participant 1	3
Participant 2	2
Participant 3	2
Participant 4	2
Participant 5	0
Participant 6	2

Emotions recognised as harmful/counterproductive

Participant 1	2
Participant 2	0
Participant 3	1
Participant 4	1
Participant 5	0
Participant 6	0

Presumed lack of ethics/ presence of malice/ ignorance of "other."

Participant 1	5
Participant 2	1
Participant 3	8

	Participant 4	2
	Participant 5	2
	Participant 6	1
Presumed malleability of others		
	Participant 1	2
	Participant 2	0
	Participant 3	1
	Participant 4	0
	Participant 5	1
	Participant 6	0
What online harassment is not		
	Participant 1	1
	Participant 2	2
	Participant 3	0
	Participant 4	0
	Participant 5	0
	Participant 6	2
Using the system to attack others.		
	Participant 1	0
	Participant 2	0
	Participant 3	1
	Participant 4	0
	Participant 5	0
	Participant 6	0
Online harassment is commonplace		
	Participant 1	0
	Participant 2	0
	Participant 3	0
	Participant 4	2
	Participant 5	0
	Participant 6	0
Online harassment is used to get attention.		
	Participant 1	0
	Participant 2	0
	Participant 3	0
	Participant 4	2
	Participant 5	1
	Participant 6	0
Social damage		
	Participant 1	0
	Participant 2	0
	Participant 3	0
	Participant 4	0
	Participant 5	0
	Participant 6	3

Fig 1.2: Consent Form.



### CONSENT FORM

#### Analysis of the Motivations and Psychology of Internet Harassment:

It is important that you read, understand and sign the consent form. Your contribution to this research is entirely voluntary and you are not obliged in any way to participate, if you require any further details please contact your researcher.

I am above the age of 18

I have been fully informed of the nature and aims of this research as outlined in the information sheet.

I consent to taking part in it.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time during the Interview and up to 4 weeks following the interview without giving any reason.

I give permission for my words to be quoted (by use of pseudonym where appropriate)

I understand that the information collected will be kept in secure conditions for a period of 10 years at the University of Huddersfield .

I understand that no person other than the researcher/s and facilitator/s will have access to the information provided.

I understand and desire that that my identity will be protected by the use of pseudonym in the report and that no written information that could lead to my being identified will be included in any report.

If you are satisfied that you understand the information and are happy to take part in this project please put a tick

Signature of Participant:  _____	Signature of Researcher:  _____
Print:  _____	Print:  _____
Date:  _____	Date:  _____

in the box aligned to each sentence and print and sign below.

(one copy to be retained by Participant / one copy to be retained by Researcher)



## An Analysis of the Motivations and Psychology of Internet Harassment

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### INFORMATION SHEET

You are being invited to take part in a study about the motivations and psychology of internet harassment. Before you decide to take part it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with me if you wish. Please do not hesitate to ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

#### What is the study about?

The purpose of this study is to attempt to better understand the public perceptions of online harassment and the motivations behind such acts.

#### Why I have been approached?

You have been asked to participate because you are a regular user of social media.

#### Do I have to take part?

It is your decision whether or not you take part. If you decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form, and you will be free to withdraw any time during and up to four weeks following the interview and without giving a reason. Simply contact the email below citing your participant number and desire to withdraw.

#### What will I need to do?

If you agree to take part in the research you will be asked to participate in a short (approximately 10minute) interview which will be recorded.

#### Will my identity be disclosed?

Unless permission is given that indicates otherwise, all information disclosed within the interview will be kept confidential, unless you indicate that you or anyone else is at risk of serious harm, in which case I would need to pass this information to the relevant authorities, including but not limited to the police and social services.

#### What will happen to the information?

All information collected from you during this research will be kept secure and any identifying material, such as names will be removed in order to ensure anonymity unless otherwise stated. It is anticipated that the research may, at some point, be published in a journal or report. However, should this happen, your anonymity will be ensured, although it may be necessary to use your words in the presentation of the findings and your permission for this is included in the consent form.

#### Who can I contact for further information?

If you require any further information about the research, please contact me on:

Researcher: Jay Palmer  
E-mail: Jay.Palmer@hud.ac.uk



Supervisor: Dr Andrew Newton  
E-mail: a.d.newton@hud.ac.uk

**What should I do if I feel psychologically unsettled by the interview, or I feel I am being harrassed online?**

Should you feel you require mental health support, please do not hesitate to contact your local GP/doctor or one of the following agencies:

**Mind Infoline**

A helpline that provides information about mental health problems and where to access appropriate help, treatment, and advocacy. Run by the charity, Mind, who provide support for individuals who encounter mental health problems.

Tel: 0300 123 3393

E-mail: info@mind.org.uk

Text: 86463

Website: www.mind.org.uk

**Samaritans.**

A helpline to support individuals experiencing any kinds of crisis, run by trained volunteers. Samaritans will offer advice and support, but not a mental health diagnosis.

Tel: 116 123

E-mail: jo@samaritans.org

Website: www.samaritans.org

**The Police (UK)**

Internet harassment is a crime, and should you feel that your life or personal safety is endangered the police should be contacted as soon as possible, if you do not feel the danger is immediate but you have cause for concern the police may be contacted on a non-emergency line and informed of your concerns.

Emergency Tel: 999



Non-emergency Tel: 101

**Fig 1.4: Reddit and Facebook advertisements.**


⋮

Good day,  
 I am looking for individuals who would be willing to participate in interview that will ask about your attitudes towards social media, and your perspectives and possible experiences of internet harassment.  
 The interview will be conducted online and should take about 20mins.  
 Please contact me in PM if you are interested and able.  
 Jay Palmer.





---


 Like
 Comment


---




Write a comment...
















 Post

 Image & Video


 Link

[Academic] Attitudes towards social media, your perspectives and possible experiences of internet harassment (All 18+)

**B**
*i*



**A**








Switch to markdown

Good day,  
 I am looking for individuals who would be willing to participate in interview that will ask about your attitudes towards social media, and your perspectives and possible experiences of internet harassment.  
 The interview will be conducted online and should take about 20mins.  
 Please contact me in PM if you are interested and able.  
 Jay Palmer.

+ OC
+ SPOILER
+ NSFW
 FLAIR ▼

SAVE DRAFT

POST

Send me post reply notifications

**Fig 1.5: Transcription of an interview.**

Perceptions of Internet Harassment: Participant 4

1 I: Would you please confirm your age for me?  
2  
3 P: I am 31.  
4  
5 I: and would you please state your preferred gender.  
6  
7 P: I am female.  
8  
9 I: If you were told that somebody was a victim of online harassment, what would you expect  
10 that to mean?  
11  
12 P: Cyberbullying. Being continually threatened or provoked.  
13  
14 I: So you'd see it as something that happens constantly?  
15  
16 P: Usually, although I know it can mean a singular instance.  
17  
18 I: So you consider that harassment could be a singular instance?  
19  
20 P: Yeah but, the first thing that springs to mind is like, continual.  
21  
22 I: Okay, that's fine. At what point do you someone deserves prosecution for harassment, so  
23 when do they cross that line? And it stops becoming just; stuff on the internet, and starts  
24 becoming a crime.  
25  
26 P: Making any threat to the person's safety is not acceptable, anything that frightens  
27 somebody or threatens their wellbeing should be taken seriously.  
28  
29 I: Okay, so I mean— you mentioned frighten there, if someone posts something that frightens  
30 somebody but isn't necessarily directed at them, would that still be harassment?  
31  
32 P: No.  
33  
34 I: So it has to be targeted?  
35  
36 P: Yes.  
37  
38 I: Right.  
39  
40 P: To me, yeah.  
41  
42 I: Okay so, you've mentioned a few things, you generally believe that threats should be  
43 criminalized if they are not already. What sort of punishment do you think is appropriate?  
44

45 P: [Sighs] It depends on the nature of the threat and the person that's being threatened, how  
46 long it's been going on for. A fine's appropriate for most things I reckon 'cuz taking up jail  
47 time for threatening someone online is ridiculous. [laughs] the prisons would be full.

48

49 I: That's fair enough, that's fine. Can you think of a time you've felt harassed in online  
50 interactions, you don't have to give the details if you don't want to, but could you say you've  
51 felt it ever?

52

53 P: Once or twice, like a few years ago when I was part of an online community, yeah.

54

55 I: So was it, about that community? Or was it just— it happened?

56

57 P: It was another member of that community.

58

59 I: I see. Do you think it's possible for an individual to invite harassment?

60

61 P: Absolutely! [laughs]

62

63 I: [laughs] Okay? Can you think of something that might be an example of that?

64

65 P: People bait each other all the time on the internet, I mean YouTube for instance you go to  
66 like; a celebrities video and all of their fans will be there and someone will just come on and  
67 basically just shit-post them. [laughs]

68

69 I: Okay, so do you think it's possible for an individual themselves to invite harassment onto  
70 themselves, so like; you mentioned the celebrity on YouTube would they post that to get that  
71 attention? That negative attention?

72

73 P: Yeah, usually. They usually just want people to take notice of them and so forth.

74

75 I: So you think it's like; almost publicity?

76

77 P: Yeah.

78

79 I: Should a person that's been offended by something that's posted online have a right to  
80 retaliate against that offense?

81

82 P: Everyone's got a right to retaliate but whether they should or not is another matter, it's like  
83 beating a dead horse.

84

85 I: Alright, so to what extent would you say is an appropriate retaliation? Feel free to use  
86 examples if you need to.

87

88 P: Argue your corner if someone's being ridiculous and nobody else has stuck up for what  
89 you think is the right thing, but if it's just gonna' go back-and-forth, back-and-forth, you're  
90 just screaming at each other, you're not going to get anywhere. You're lucky if anyone even  
91 read's your comments [laughs].

92

93 I: Okay, obviously so you've talked about "back-and-forth" at what point would that  
94 confrontation become— stop being back-and-forth and become harassment? If it does at all?

95

96 P: Anything that, as I said before, continually targets somebody can, but just getting way too  
97 personal like ' saying; "I wish you got AIDS" or, y'know, I've seen it happen! [laughs]

98

99 I: [laughs] Yes, that's a very internet comment, that's why I laughed.

100

101 P: Yeah, it's like; "I don't like this thing, I hope you get raped and die!" alright. [laughs]

102

103 I: So it's when it starts being personal?

104

105 P: Yeah, yeah when it's extreme or really nasty.

106

107 I: Obviously you don't have the time or inclination to post everything you do on social  
108 media, what would you say you prioritise in posting?

109

110 P: Just extreme emotions more than anything, or like events I consider to be prevalent.

111

112 I: Person event? Public events?

113

114 P: Personal, it's almost always personal. It could be "I have a chocolate bar," or "life has  
115 been spectacularly shit today."

116

117 I: So, would you say you primarily post on Facebook then, or would you use Twitter or  
118 Reddit or any other online community?

119

120 P: I'm not part of a community any more, I do have a blog but I don't use it any more, I do  
121 occasionally post to twitter but mostly on Facebook, or SnapChat.

122

123 I: Do you feel that the identity you present as online is different from the real world, y'self?

124

125 P: No I don't think so.

126

127 I: Okay, so do you enjoy when you get to self-promote online? So talking about  
128 accomplishment, or—

129

130 P: it makes me uncomfortable actually.

131

132 I: Okay, no worries. Do you feel that social media is a good place to openly voice your  
133 beliefs and ideologies?

134

135 P: [sighs] To a degree, a small degree.

136

137 I: [laughs] Okay, well in that case how would you describe your reaction to people who use it  
138 that way?

139

140 P: Facepalm, just it makes me want to beat my face against the table, bloodily, to a pulp. It  
141 just—

142

143 I: So you'd describe it as frustration?

144

145 P: Hmm, that would be putting it mildly, I tend to block anyone that just harps on about  
146 something like; oo! Political things.

147

148 I: Would you expect somebody to be sensitive of your views when posting something that  
149 may be contradictory to what you believe? When they're posting and they know you're  
150 gonna' see it.

151

152 P: No, as long as they're not deliberately disrespectful, everybody's got a right to say what  
153 they think.

154

155 I: kay, well alternatively would you post content in order to provoke a reaction from them,  
156 erm, to engage them and push your agenda to try and win them over?

157

158 P: No, I don't believe in trying to change people's minds, you've got your own minds. Leave  
159 people alone.

160

161 I: How would you feel if your Facebook account was— or your other social media accounts  
162 were deleted— you woke up tomorrow and they were all deleted.

163

164 P: I would be really devastated if Facebook was deleted because there is a lot of stuff  
165 chronicled on their which I don't have anywhere else.

166

167 I: Right, sorry, not Facebook as a whole, just your account.

168

169 P: Yeah, there is stuff I'd lose that I wouldn't be able to get back.

170

171 I: So it's just the memories on there—

172

173 P: Yeah.

174

175 I: not the social interaction side.

176

177 P: [laughs] no.

178

179 I: How often do you edit, censor, or otherwise block friends and family from your newsfeed?

180

181 P: Not very often, only when I get really annoyed, I don't have many family and friends on  
182 my newsfeed for that reason.

183

184 I: So would you say it's happened maybe ten times, or does it happen maybe once, or is there  
185 a number on it?

186

187 P: About three people. Yeah, it's not a lot. I'm very selective in the first place [laughs].

188

189 I: Right so it's kind of; you don't have to 'cuz you're—

190

191 P: Yeah, I have less than 50 Friends on Facebook.

192

193 I: Do you feel you have a right to control what information and content you're exposed to  
194 when you look at your news feed?

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P: Of course.

I: Okay, does it make you angry when people contradict information or messages you post?

P: Only, again, if they're purposefully argumentative or disrespectful, everyone's got a right to voice their own opinions.

I: So if you feel that their contradicting you just for contradiction's sake then you—

P: Oh that'll piss me off, no.

I: So if you feel like it's personal then?

P: Yeah.

I: and it's not about whatever message you post.

P: Yeah.

I: Well from what you've told me in the previous interview, most of the stuff you post is personal anyway so obviously any contradiction would be against yourself rather than anything else, erm. Okay, without going into too much specifics, unless you want to, can you tell me about the last time you felt this may have happened to you?

P: What, someone's commented on something of mine?

I: Yes, when someone's basically— seems like they've made you angry because they've contradicted you. If you can't think of one, that's fine.

P: No, I'm trying to think of one [laughs]. On my own stuff, no, I can't think of an incident recently.

I: That's fine. You obviously— you're gonna share a newsfeed with family and friends who don't all share your views. Do you pay closer attention those who don't share your views.

P: No I pay less attention, 'cuz I know it riles me up.

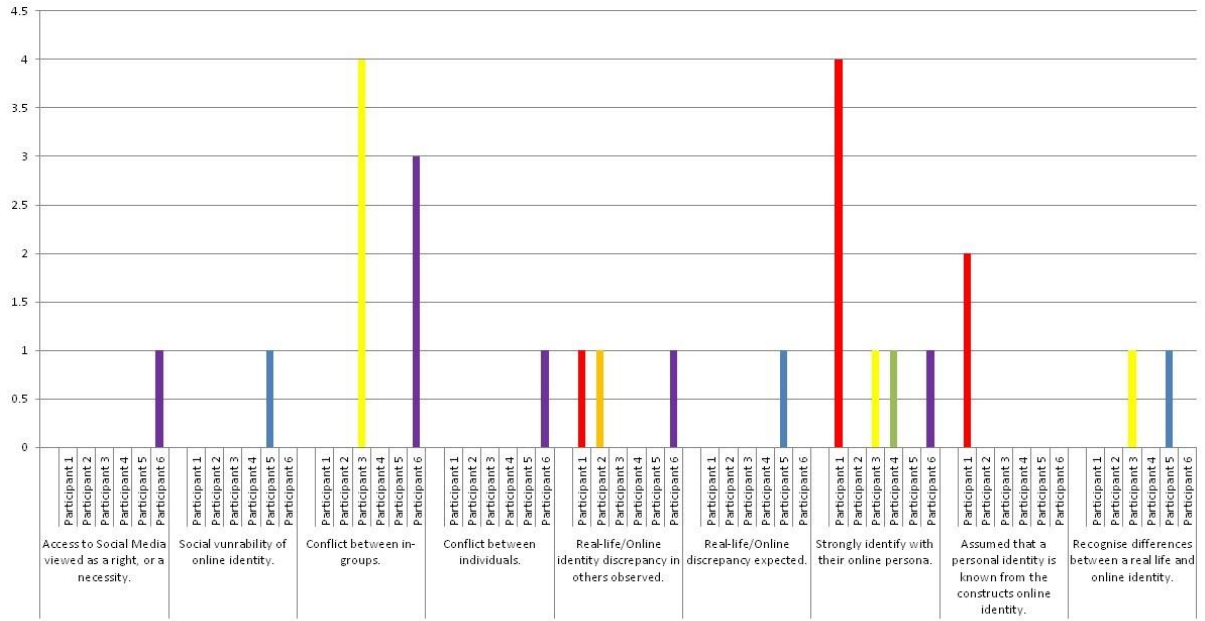
I: Okay, I was going to finish with "Do you take that as an opportunity to contradict them."

P: Sorry. [laughs]

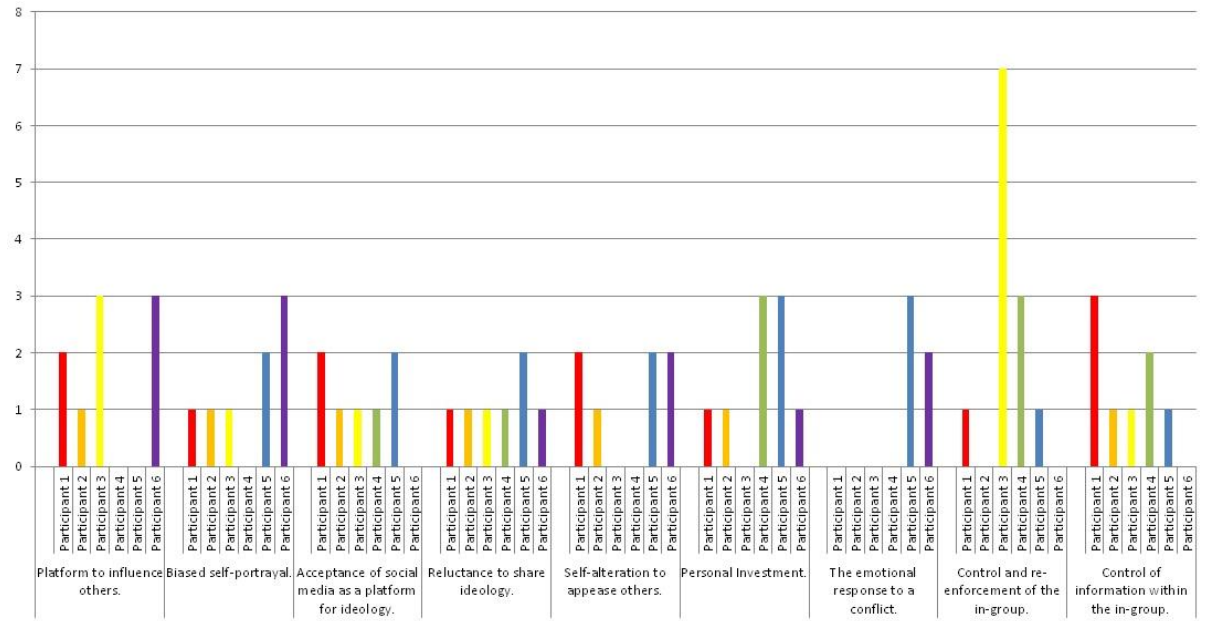
I: [laughs] No, that's fine, that's also a valid answer. Okay, if somebody caused you distress unknowingly, I don't know, posted something that erm, frustrated or upset you, or went against your beliefs or whatever, would you would you pay closer attention to them and consider contradicting them in future to sort of revenge yourself, or sort of right that wrong?

P: No. I am very anti-conflict, I'd rather just sit quiet [laughs].

**Fig 1.6: Graphs used as a visual aid: representing frequency and locations of facet occurrences.**

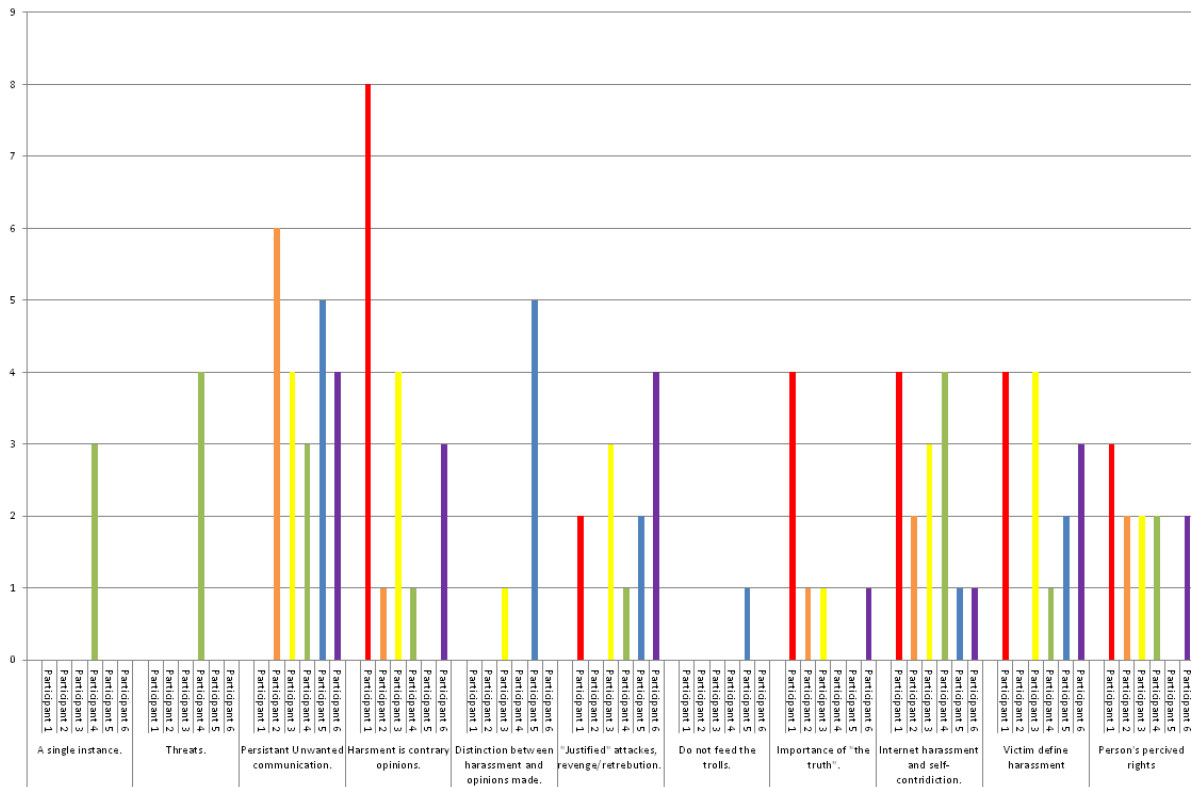


Graph 1.0: Graphs to provide a visual representation of facets of social media engagement and perspectives.

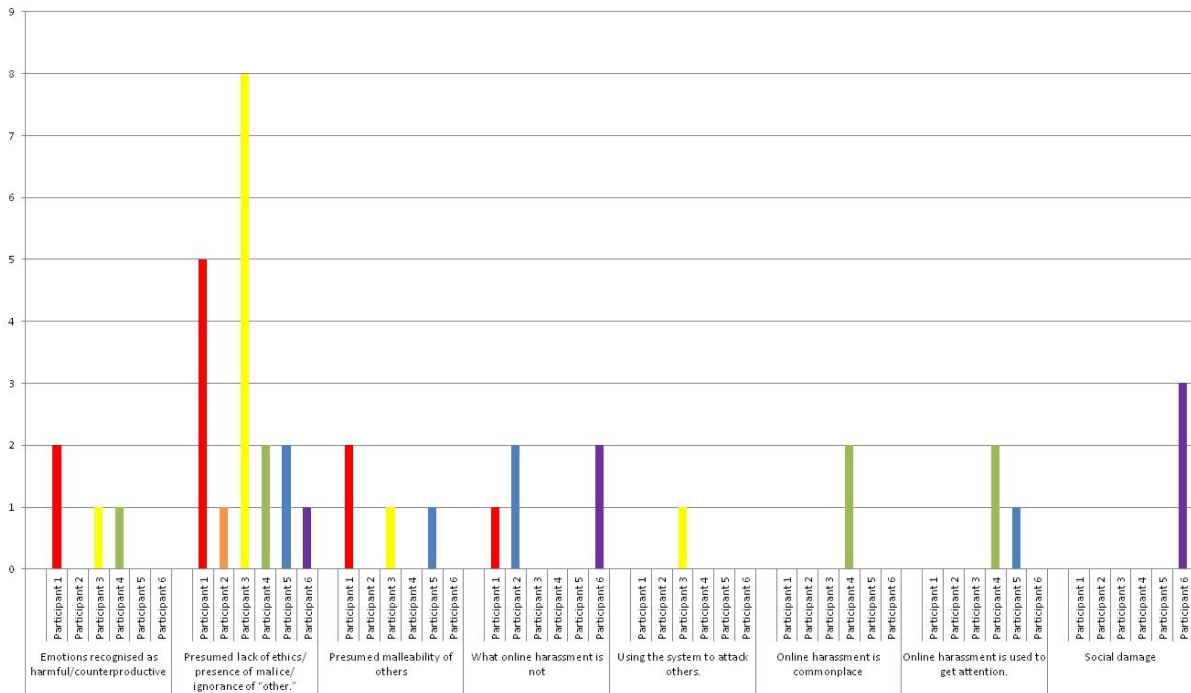


Graph 1.1. Graphs to provide a visual representation of facets of social media engagement and perspectives.





Graph 2.0: A graph to show the facet distribution of online harassment



Graph 2.1: Graph to show the facet distribution of online harassment.

## Fig 1.7. Facet Creation. Perception of Harassment.

### A single instance.

[when asked if it must be persistent] “Usually, although I know it can mean a singular instance” Int 4 : 16

[Continued explanation when asked if harassment could be a singular instance] “Usually, although I know it can mean a singular instance” Int 4 : 20

[When asked if harassment has to be targeted] “Yes” Int 4 : 34 -36

### Threats.

“Making any threat to the person’s safety is not acceptable, anything that frightens somebody or threatens their wellbeing should be taken seriously.” Int 4 : 26-27

“but just getting way too personal like saying; “I wish you got AIDS”” Int 4 : 96 - 97

“Yeah, it’s like; “I don’t like this thing, I hope you get raped and die!” alright” Int 4 : 101

[When asked if it has to be personal] “Yeah, yeah when it’s extreme or really nasty.” Int 4 : 105

### Persistent unwanted communication.

“Lots of emails, online bullying” Int 2 : 18

“unwanted emails.” Int 2 : 22

“[unwanted emails] from companies you’re not wanting emails from.” Int 2 : 30

“I think after a few times of [unwanted emails/communication], of being asked not to have contact.” Int 2 : 49

[Public or private] Int 2 : 137 – 141

“I mean like; She carried on and carried on for a while and that was when I thought “It’s not worth it.” Int 2 : 340 – 341.

“When it [Internet harassment] becomes systematic” Int 3 : 50

“[punishments] depend on the systematic level of [Online Harassment].” Int 3 : 72

“it turns into a broken record where you’re trying to move the discussion along and they’re just sticking to the original argument and yeah where they just keep going back and going back ‘cuz they don’t actually want the conversation, want the discussion, they just want to make a point and they want to keep making that point until you go away.” Int 3 : 164 - 168

“[Online Harassment is] the persistent same statement that originally offended you” Int 3 : 172

“Cyberbullying. Being continually threatened or provoked” Int 4 : 12

“It depends on the nature of the threat and the person that’s being threatened, how long it’s been going on for” Int 4 : 45 – 46

“continually targets somebody” Int 4 : 96

[When asked what it means to be a victim of online harassment] “I’d expect that somebody had given them unwanted attention,” Int 5 : 12

“that when they said they didn’t want to interact with the person, they kept bothering them.” Int 5 : 12-13

“And when they stated they didn’t want it [unwanted comments/images], it kept coming.” Int 5 : 15

“the person is persisting once they know that the other person is suffering negatively, then I’d say that other people need to intervene” Int 5 31 – 33.

“I think if the person ducks out of the argument and just says “I’m done” or stops replying, if they then followed somehow then that’s harassment.” Int 5 : 104-105

“several private messages sent to them or several posts open up to everyone else to read where it’s basically being negative towards them and attacking them over something they’ve done” Int 6 : 12 - 14

“if they constantly bombard you with negative, basically, comments about you privately or on Facebook,” Int 6 : 19 20

"If it's [A personal attack over social media] sustained, definitely, yeah. I mean if it's just one comment and then they don't leave it alone but never say anything again, I wouldn't really call that harassment" Int 6 : 29 - 31

[A confrontation becomes harassment when...] "I'd say if you ask them to stop and they didn't" Int 6 : 141

### **Harassment is Contrary Opinions.**

"Rebuke" Int 1:16-17

"No, that's not right." Int 1 :120

shouldn't try to make others agree with your facts . Int 1 : 174 – 176.

"It's ["Negative" online behaviour] against my way of thinking." Int 1 :415

"I'd never do tit-for-tat. I'd probably make a comment and tell them erm, "that's not my way of thinking." And erm, er, if it continues I'll um, remove them." Int 1 : 464 - 466

#### **Censorship of others.**

"The fact should have never even been portrayed." Int. 1 : 175 – 176

"By all means have an opinion but I just think; you can't have a negative opinion." Int 1 :279 -280

"You can still have an opinion, and it still be positive even though it's saying something against what somebody else is saying. It's just how you say it." Int 1 :281 - 283

[After stating that it's okay to have an opinion] "there is voicing your opinion and then there's voicing your opinion and wanting to argue." Int 2 : 96

"they want that. They want that to— again it's the victim thing. They want to play the victim so that if they say something inflammatory and people say "no" then they can go "Oh this person said "No" and then said this about me, aren't they terrible people aren't I a victim." Int 3 : 137 - 140

"If they knew that is offending you and they continue with that original statement, at that point it is— there is no point in continuing that discussion. Because they're not discussing they're just attacking basically. " Int 3 : 172 – 175

"this guy who had voted leave attacked me instantly; started calling me a "remoaner," "oh you're one of these remainder idiots," calling me a "moron" called me all sorts of— and basically attacked me for a single tongue in cheek sentence in the middle of an entire paragraph, and that was just like; well, he obviously had an agenda and was putting that agenda on me." Int 3 : 315 – 319

"I can't let this person get away with saying this, and I know that I'm gonna get attacked back, d'ya get what I mean? Just-Just by saying "y'know I think you're wrong." They will take that as an attack." Int 3 : 417 - 419

[When asked if they pay attention to those who have opposing views] " No I pay less attention, 'cuz I know it riles me up." Int 4 : 231

"It might be something you've put on Facebook yourself and now they are attacking that" Int 6 : 22-23

"not harassment in the sense of actually physically attacking me, more harassment as in; he was just trolling the conversation, detracting from it constantly, and every time I tried to shut him down to carry it on he wouldn't let it go, he kept posting and posting, and that was kind of harassment in the sense of; you're not involved in this in any way shape or form in a— in a way that is er, y'know what I mean, any way of getting involved in this discussion you're just here to derail it and try and make me look like an idiot, or something like that." Int 6 : 74 – 80

"trying to inform people of things they don't know, whereas they see it as me saying to them, y'know what I mean, "You're wrong, and I'm right." And it's like; I'm not trying to say that, I do believe that, but [laughs] it's just that's as our opinions are. [laughs] and if you don't agree with me; that's fine! But you don't have to come on and start attacking me" Int 6 : 133 - 136

#### **Distinction between harassment and opinions made.**

[When asked if social media is a good place to share ideologies] “Yes and no. I mean, there are a lot of— a lot of people who don’t understand the difference between someone expressing an opinion and attacking someone.” Int 3 244 - 245

“you express opinions, people really quickly escalate to just throwing out abuse rather than having a proper discussion” Int 5 : 62 - 64

### **“Justified” attacks, Revenge/Retribution.**

“Retribution for physical confrontation” Int 1: 17-18

Retaliation/Getting your own back makes the situation worse. Int 1 : 155 - 156

“I’ve got female friends who people have never met before and people have written to them now threatening to rape them because of an opinion they’ve had.” Int 3 : 64 - 65

“I would expect them to be respectful, but anyone is allowed to disagree with me, so long as they’re not calling me a bigot or something or throwing labels at me” Int 3 : 290 - 291

[When asked if they would contradict somebody to revenge themselves upon them for a past argument/disagreement] “Sometimes I do take glee in that, yes, I’ll admit” Int 3 : 425

“if someone’s being ridiculous and nobody else has stuck up for what you think is the right thing” Int 4 : 88 - 89

“the person is persisting once they know that the other person is suffering negatively, then I’d say that other people need to intervene” Int 5 31 – 33.

[When asked if they would revenge themselves upon an individual on social media who had contradicted them in the past.] “Yes, if I had er, an opposing opinion that had proof I would definitely erm, bring it along with me.” Int 5 : 270- 271

“being negative towards them and attacking them over something they’ve done” Int 6 : 14

“someone putting up a negative comment about somebody saying they had a problem with what they did at a show or something like that, and then lots of people will attack them, because they’re attacking someone else” Int 6 : 98 – 101

“Now the first initial attack might not have been for what they were thinking as an attack, more of a kind of like; trying to point out a problem they had, then other people saw that as attacking someone else so their reaction is to attack them” Int 6: 101 – 103

“they’re doing something horrible and they should have it back,” Int 6 : 105

#### **Do not feed the trolls.**

“I don’t think you deserve harassment, you’d probably get ridiculed but I don’t think that if you’re a troll you should have people with pitchforks going after you” Int 5 : 97- 98

### **Importance of “the truth.”**

Truth mentioned 3 times. Int 1 :44 -45

Opinions used as facts. Int 1 :63-64

“Harassment is when people use opinions as facts.” Int 1 :67 – 69

“Why is there so much negativity and untruth? Why ? Why do people feel they have to tell a lie?” Int 1 :357 - 358

“competitions [in Facebook] are sometimes the worst ones ‘cuz they— a lot of them can be fake and misleading.” Int 2 : 41-42

“I find it [Statements made on social media] frustrating, especially if they haven’t done their research” Int 3 : 388 - 389

“if they’re saying things that there’s no er, evidence of, or anything like that. If it’s just y’know what I mean, accusations with no basis” Int 6 : 48 - 49

### **Internet Harassment Self Contradictions**

Cyberbullying is and is not harassment, but part of it. Int1 :27,24-25

“Sticks and stones” analogy used, followed by immediate contradiction. Int 1 :34 – 36

Support truth and later condemn telling the truth, dependant on circumstance. Int 1 :51

"I generally will not respond hugely, I'll probably put a one-liner in there." Int 1294 - 295

"I would consider it [repeated unwanted communications] a part of being on social media." [After condemning it] Int 2 : 71

"I think everyone has the right to voice their beliefs and their opinions ... to a degree." Int 2 : 189 193

"In the end I called the admin and the admin banned me and banned everyone so I think they overreacted." Int 3 116 - 117

"if someone regurgitates [copies and pastes information about an argument] at me then sometimes I do provoke them back, just to show that just regurgitating— I will challenge them to try and back up what they're saying." Int 3 : 344 - 345

"I don't care what the outcome is I just ask them to do the research first or be informed, y'know? I hate people who demand research straight-up" Int 3 : 392 - 393

"Everyone's got a right to retaliate but whether they should or not is another matter" Int 4 : 82

"Argue your corner if someone's being ridiculous and nobody else has stuck up for what you think is the right thing, but if it's just gonna' go back-and-forth, back-and-forth, you're just screaming at each other, you're not going to get anywhere. You're lucky if anyone even read's your comments [laughs]." Int 4 : 88 - 91

[When asked if Social Media is a good place to voice ideologies] "To a degree, a small degree." (Int 4 : 135) [When asked to describe their reaction to people sharing their ideology on social media]

"Facepalm, just it makes me want to beat my face against the table, bloodily, to a pulp. It just—" Int 4 : 140 - 141

"you express opinions, people really quickly escalate to just throwing out abuse rather than having a proper discussion. But it's never been like; actual harassment, where it's mean specifically to me." Int 5 : 62 - 64

Int 5 : 62 - 64

[When asked if people have a right to retaliate to offense] "Yeah, I would say so, I would say a lot of the times the retaliation is er, not helping the situation;" Int 6 : 121 - 122

### **Victim Defined Harassment. [xx review hate crimes]**

Emotional Pain Int 1 :35

Physical effects on victim dictate severity. Int : 167 -69.

Outcome more important than the act. Int 1: 72, 74.

Effect on victim determines severity of crime/punishment. Int 1: 92-93

[When asked to describe what Online Harassment inflicted on an individual would entail] "I hate to say it, but it would depend on the individual." Int 3 : 21

"it's very easy to cry victim but— I mean online I've come across people who cry victim all the time when actually their not being victimised but they think that their— in their world they are being victimised" Int 3 : 25-27

"if I know the one person, and I know them to be a bit highly strung then I'm more likely to take the victim with a pinch of salt then if I know they're level headed." Int 3 : 32 - 34

"Yeah, it's a contextual crime. And the meaning behind it and, y'know I mean; I could say things to my friends that I don't mean and they know that I don't mean it. But if I typed it online, it can take on a completely different context." Int 3 : 90 - 92

"depends on the nature of the threat and the person that's being threatened" Int 4 : 45

"they could have received abusive comments, or sent— been sent indecent images, erm, basically anything they didn't want to receive." Int 5 : 14-15

"I'd say that [it becomes a criminal act] if they're actually causing psychological harm to the person, and that person is suffering negatively at all." Int 5 : 30-31

"if it caused them like; a mental er, health issues from it, so, if it caused them to have depression because of it or, if it caused them to have anxiety over it" Int 6 : 38 - 39

[When asked if it should be prosecutable] "I think you would have to have, like er, evidence of say like; mental health issues over it." Int 6 : 44 - 45

“prison sentences could be appropriate if, like I say, it was to the point of, like; say they were to the point of trying to kill themselves over it, or something like that, or they get to the point where they’re like; sectioned or something ‘cuz it hurt them so much” Int 6 :59 - 61

### **Person’s Perceived Rights.**

[Dictation of other’s rights.] Int 1 :55.

[A right to declare your own feelings in response to another’s actions.] Int 1 : 152 - 153.

“I think anyone is entitled to their opinion.” Int 1 :262

“everyone can have their opinion.” Int 2 94

“you could see something anywhere and it could offend you, but that doesn’t give you the right to—you can’t walk up to someone in the street ‘cuz you’ve overheard something they’ve said and [laughs] and go and... [start a conflict].” Int 2 : 115 - 121

“they have the right to say that they’ve been offended and they have the right to then take part in a discussion with the person who’s offended them to explain why they find that offensive” Int 3 : 145 - 147

“if someone infers something then the person’s allowed to be offended by that inference.” Int 3 : 221 - 222

“Everyone’s got a right to retaliate [to content online that has offended them]” Int 4 : 82

“as long as they’re not deliberately disrespectful, everybody’s got a right to say what they think.” Int 4 : 152 - 153

“I’d say my rights is to have all the information” Int 6 : 358 - 359

“I do think you have a right to try and filter things [that may upset you] like that away from your feeds” Int 6 : 363 - 364

### **Emotions recognised as harmful/counterproductive.**

[Public embarrassment as a punishment] Int 1 :104-105

“If you’ve lost your temper [in an argument], or lost your way, you’ve lost.” Int 1 :289

“[They can disagree] So long as they have a legitimate reason to have a differing view that isn’t some sort of knee-jerk emotional response” Int 3 291 - 293

[When asked if they pay attention to those who have opposing views] " No I pay less attention, ‘cuz I know it riles me up.” Int 4 : 231

### **Presumed lack of ethics/ presence of malice/ ignorance of “other.”**

They should know it’s something they shouldn’t do. Int 1:111 -112

Being as bad as them. Int 1 :120.

“just as bad as them.” Int 1 : 156

“The problem is theirs, not mine.” Int 1 :304

[I shouldn’t have my account deleted as I have done nothing wrong, others are worse]. Int 1 :339 - 343

[Online harassment is wrong] “when people voice it [an opinion] wanting to argue.” Int 2 : 197

“it’s very easy to cry victim but— I mean online I’ve come across people who cry victim all the time when actually their not being victimised but they think that their— in their world they are being victimised” Int 3 : 25-27

“they [people claiming internet harassment] want people to feel sorry for them and y’know to befriend them in that way because they feel victimised.” Int 3 : 27 - 28

“the guy turned out to be fifteen and was just being reactionary, just being y’know, because he was safe behind his keyboard he felt he was safe to do that and didn’t actually think of her as a person,” Int 3 : 79 - 81

“if you just sit back and let someone be offensive and not tell them why they may never know they are actually being offensive” Int 3 : 147 - 148

“if you’re polite and you put out why they’re offensive and they say “No fuck you, whatever” again, sorry for the expletive, you know that they are being offensive just to be offensive, they’re not being offensive due to ignorance or— and ignorance is always an excuse as far as I’m concerned” Int 3 155 - 158

“it turns into a broken record where you’re trying to move the discussion along and they’re just sticking to the original argument and yeah where they just keep going back and going back ‘cuz they don’t actually want the conversation, want the discussion, they just want to make a point and they want to keep making that point until you go away.” Int 3 : 164 - 168

[When asked if social media is a good place to share ideologies] “Yes and no. I mean, there are a lot of— a lot of people who don’t understand the difference between someone expressing an opinion and attacking someone.” Int 3 244 - 245

“A lot of people have agendas, and if you say a certain word that will trigger their agenda and that— suddenly you get a paragraph of y’know, what might well be copied and pasted from y’know whatever— whatever newspaper or sermon they have decided to y’know preach from.” Int 3 249 - 252

[When asked if contradictory information or content to things they post makes them angry.] “Only, again, if they’re purposefully argumentative or disrespectful, everyone’s got a right to voice their own opinions.” Int 4 : 201

[When asked about their reaction towards a contraction against them for its own sake] “Oh that’ll piss me off, no.” [Then asked if they would feel it is personal] “Yeah”. Int 4 : 205-209

“That basically as soon as the person is like; aware that their actions are damaging to the other person then that’s probably criminal.” Int 5 : 37 – 38

“yeah. If it’s like, the first time someone’s done it, they could just be really mean and ignorant, whereas if it’s the second time they’ve done it, then it’s— they’ve clearly— they know they are doing the wrong thing now.” Int 5 : 54-56

“I know somethings I’m going to talk about, even though I think they’re right and they’re good, the people might have different views on” Int 6 : 268 - 269

### **Presumed malleability of others**

“Say something that will inspire others to get off the fence.” Int 1 : 132 - 133

“One negative person in the room will create other negative people.” Int 1 :141 – 142

“If the person is saying something inflammatory because they want people to respond then they are not being attacked, y’know what I mean? ‘Cuz they want that explosion...” Int 3 : 132 - 133

“I think people definitely, purposefully encourage certain, like; trolls, basically” Int 5 : 85

### **What Online Harassment is not.**

“some people are larger than life characters and like the controversy, but controversy’s not the same as harassment.” Int 3 : 126 - 128

[When asked if abuse was not viewed as harassment because it was general statements rather than targeted at the participant.] “Yeah,” Int 5 : 68

“If it’s sustained, definitely, yeah. I mean if it’s just one comment and then they don’t leave it alone but never say anything again, I wouldn’t really call that harassment” Int 6 : 29 - 31

“If you don’t ask them to stop and you keep inflaming it, I think that would be a lot more difficult to suggest they are harassing you, because you’re— you’re keeping up the communication with them” Int 6 : 142 - 144

### **Using the system to attack others.**

“there’s trans friends, it’s happened to them before. Just because they’ve used their— their new name rather than their old name. And someone has had an axe to grind and has reported them to Facebook and Facebook has just taken their account off for no reason” Int 3 : 356 - 359

**Online Harassment is commonplace.**

“taking up jail time for threatening someone online is ridiculous. [laughs] the prisons would be full” Int 4 : 46 – 47

“People bait each other all the time on the internet, I mean YouTube for instance you go to like; a celebrities video and all of their fans will be there and someone will just come on and basically just shitpost [to post something inflammatory or redundant simply for the sake of doing it] them.” Int 4 : 65 - 67

**Online Harassment used to get attention.**

“Yeah, usually. They usually just want people [celebrities] to take notice of them and so forth.” Int 4 : 73

[When asked if they consider bating harassment to be a form of publicity] “Yeah.” Int 4 : 77

“I think people definitely, purposefully encourage certain, like; trolls, basically” Int 5 : 85

**Social damage.**

“it could be bullying over a long time where it’s more subtle and it’s just subtly attacking them and making people think negatively of them” Int 6 : 23 – 25

“if it did any damage to the kind-of, social circles, if basically they convinced their friends not to like them anymore” Int 6 : 36 - 37

“if say they’ve sad something about their work and that er, either didn’t get them a promotion or I mean, had them sacked from that job then that would definitely be something that is y’know probably very illegal” Int 6 : 45 - 47

**Identity on Social media****Access to Social Media viewed as a right, or a necessity.**

“banning from social media, for a time frame. So it’s kind of imprisoning them, in a sense from using social media. That might be a kind of, good punishment for people like that” Int 6 : 53 - 55

**Social vulnerability of identity online.**

“I think that its— it’s kind of different to real life, where in real life, in real life it’s a lot harder for people to spread their opinions about you to everyone you know.” Int 5 : 205 -206

**Conflict between in-groups.**

“one of the things that really annoys me the echo chamber, because I wouldn’t be talking to the person, I’m talking to an echo chamber.” Int 3 : 187 - 189

“this guy who had voted leave attacked me instantly; started calling me a “remoaner,” “oh you’re one of these remainder idiots,” calling me a “moron” called me all sorts of— and basically attacked me for a single tongue in cheek sentence in the middle of an entire paragraph, and that was just like; well, he obviously had an agenda and was putting that agenda on me.” Int 3 : 315 - 319

“if someone regurgitates [copies and pastes information about an argument] at me then sometimes I do provoke them back, just to show that just regurgitating— I will challenge them to try and back up what they’re saying.” Int 3 : 344 - 345

“they just want everyone to agree with them, and I think it’s fair that they should find out that; no actually there are people out there that have opinions that are just as valid as the other side of the argument.” Int 3 : 425 - 428

[When asked if they would post inflammatory content with the goal of provoking a conflict] “yeah, I probably wouldn’t do it like; specifically a person, but a grou— a type of people definitely” Int 6 : 303 - 304



[When asked how they react to people directly contradicting them on Facebook] “I will get annoyed, and I will get kinda frustrated, especially if I think it’s quite obvious that what I’m saying is, not right, but it the general consensus” Int 6 : 376 – 377

[When asked how they respond to inflammatory posts or content made by somebody on social media] “I’m usually angry at the cause not the particular person” Int 6 : 423 - 424

#### **Conflict between individuals.**

[When asked if they pay closer attention to those with conflicting ideologies to their own as an opportunity to contradict them] “Yes, definitely, yes” Int 6 : 390

#### **Real-life/Online identity discrepancy in others observed.**

“You’ll find on Facebook they’re actually not who you thought they were.” Int 1 : 395 - 396

[Life on Facebook is a “rose-tinted” depiction of the posters life.] Int 2 : 162 - 167

“It might be different to pe—, I mean people might see that as different, I don’t see it as different.” Int 6 : 192 - 193

#### **Real-life/Online discrepancy expected.**

“they’d [Internet harassers] have to face their victim and actually have a face-to-face interview with them and apologise and discuss it” Int 5 : 43 - 44

#### **Strongly identify with their online persona.**

“I’m no different, what you see is what you get.” Int 1 :218

“They see me the same.” Int 1 :219

Consider it to be an accurate representation of yourself. Int 1 : 235 - 239

“I don’t deal with it at home, I don’t deal with it in my everyday life, why should somebody else be allowed to put that into my life when I don’t want it to be there?” Int 1 : 420 - 422

[When asked when/if online harassment should be considered a crime] “when it becomes systematic to the point where the person starts questioning their own identity, is when you start— start drawing that line.” Int 3 : 50 - 51

“It’s pretty much me but with slightly better grammar maybe” Int 4 : 123

“It might be different to pe—, I mean people might see that as different, I don’t see it as different.” Int 6 : 192 - 193

#### **Assumed that a personal identity is known from the constructs online identity.**

“People do know me.” Int 1 :249

“hopefully people will feel the same about me [as their online persona].” Int 1 : 269

#### **Recognise differences between a real life and online identity.**

“I’m not a very outgoing person on Facebook” Int 3 : 232

“Yeah, they’re different, their umm more well formatted” Int 5 : 121

#### **Platform to influence others.**

“Special moments that I think will inspire others.” Int 1 :190.

Duty to counteract the media and give “positive” influence. Int 1 : 231 - 233

[After stating that it’s okay to have an opinion] “there is voicing your opinion and then there’s voicing your opinion and wanting to argue.” Int 2 : 96

“I think it’s very good as a way to reach out across the world to different people who wouldn’t necessarily meet anyone like that” int 3 : 279 - 280

[have you ever posted something deliberately so that a person will maybe see it and know how you feel, in order to provoke a reaction from them?] “Yup. Yep.” Int 3 : 340

“But Facebook I kinda see as; the entire world in a room, so I mean; I can talk to the world, some of them might listen, some of them won’t.” Int 6 : 186 - 188

"I think so, yeah. I think it's a very powerful medium and I think it should be er, used— carried on to be used that way and I hope that never changes. But no, it's very powerful, and with the negatives there is far more positives that go with it" Int 6 : 229 – 231

"I do want to have that opportunity to steer them into what I think is the right way of thinking" Int 6 : 391 - 392

### **Biased self-portrayal.**

"...generally I'll only put positive things on." Int 1 :224- 225

[Life on Facebook is a "rose-tinted" depiction of the posters life.] Int 2 : 162 – 167

[When asked if their offline identity and online identity are different] "while I say "not really" at the same time based on this; you get to sit back and think about what you post and where you post it and while I try and be a compassionate person on Facebook and I am a compassionate person in real life that compassion does not come forward as much in real life as it does in Facebook" Int 3 : 206 - 209

"Yeah, they're different, their umm more well formatted" Int 5 : 121 [Immediately followed by]

"Well my Facebook self is just as weird as my real self but I guess I'm not actually— no, I dunno, actually, I think. It's pretty much me but with slightly better grammar maybe" Int 5 : 122 - 123

"I did get a lot of comments off people going; "oh my god, your life is absolutely amazing, you get to go to all these great events and just go around having a good laugh all the time, and that's your job, that's amazing." But to me, as a personal person, I'm sat here in my bedroom Monday to Friday with my little laptop doing a few things for it and stuff like that, and they don't see that side of it." Int 6 : 195 - 200

"So, I mean they think what they're seeing, y'know on social media, is me. While I know that that's a part of me, a bit of me, kind of thing. But I do like to— I don't like to pretend to be someone on the internet, I try to be genuine" Int 6 : 200 - 202

"it's what I want the world— what I think the world should see of me, what I want them to see of me. I won't put everything up" Int 6 : 209 - 210

### **Acceptance of social media as a platform for ideology.**

"I think it's fine to do it." Int 1 :256

"I think anyone is entitled to their opinion." Int 1 :262

[When asked if Facebook is an appropriate place to share religious, political or social ideologies]

"Yeah." Int 2 : 174 - 177

[When asked if social media is a good place to share ideologies] "Yes and no. I mean, there are a lot of— a lot of people who don't understand the difference between someone expressing an opinion and attacking someone." Int 3 244 - 245

[When asked if Social Media is a good place to voice ideologies] "To a degree, a small degree." (Int 4 : 135)

"if you've got something like urm, Reddit, where you'll obviously have different posts about different subjects that would invite that kind of contribution." Int 5 : 141- 142

[On Facebook] "I quite like issues and politics, so I like reading through people's opinions generally" Int 5 : 159

### **Reluctance to share ideology.**

"rarely do I actually go out there and shove my beliefs down other people's throats." Int: 1 :248-249

[After seeing hundreds of posts about ideologies] "In my head I'm thinking "oh well I think this." But it's not worth getting involved. Int 2 : 184-185

[When asked if social media is a good place to share ideologies] "Yes and no. I mean, there are a lot of— a lot of people who don't understand the difference between someone expressing an opinion and attacking someone." Int 3 244 - 245

[When asked to describe their reaction to people sharing their ideology on social media] “Facepalm, just it makes me want to beat my face against the table, bloodily, to a pulp. It just—” Int 4 : 140 - 141  
 “I don’t believe in trying to change people’s minds, you’ve got your own minds. Leave people alone.” Int 4 : 158 - 159

[When asked if social media is a good place to share beliefs/ideologies] “I think that it depends the kind of thread, and the kind of participants, you’re with. Maybe” Int 5 :134

[When asked why they don’t share their ideologies/beliefs] “I am also aware that usually when people have decided they’re in one ballpark they don’t change their opinions.” Int 5 : 179 -180

“but it [having a perspective challenged on social media] hasn’t changed my opinion, but I’ve kind of become more like; I dunno— less, less inclined to post about it again.” Int 5 : 257-259

### **Self-alteration to appease others.**

“Yeah I do. I do change things [posted online]. If I do think it’s gonna upset somebody then I probably wouldn’t even post it.” Int 1 :318 – 319

“I would write something down and I would look back at it and I’ll think “no, that can’t be done, I’ll put it down, I’ll change it.” Int 1 :323 – 325

“there’s been a couple of times that I’ve taken things down . Then it’s— when I’ve typed things in the heat of the moment.” Int 2 : 227 - 228

“on Facebook you don’t want to— well, you’ll feel very conscious about spamming other people’s newsfeeds with your opinions” Int 5 : 145-146

“Okay, yeah well, if I have like; and emotional post, I post it then I refine it, and usually it’s something like; highly political; like Russian, and I have people from Russia— and I’ll just slightly reduce it— I know I usually do delete it ‘cuz it’s probably best not to antagonise them” Int 5 : 170 - 173

“I usually when I get into these kind of debates, and stuff like that with people I will err re-write and edit, and I’ll definitely read over what I’ve said and I will try and edit things” Int 6 : 289 - 291

“I do have kind of a think where I do like; worry about what other people’s like; opinions and thoughts. So I may kind of like; change what I’m saying when I realise it might come across as, y’know what I mean, differently” Int 6 : 291 - 293

### **Personal Investment.**

“There’s lots of things I’ve saved ... all my info and my photos that are on Facebook would have gone [if it was deleted].” Int 1 :364 – 366

[When asked if they enjoy positive feedback on their content.] “yeah-yeah-yeah.” Int 2 : 169 - 172

[When asked what they prioritise in posting] “Just extreme emotions more than anything” Int 4 : 110

[When asked what kind of events they post] “Personal, it’s almost always personal” Int 4 : 114

“I would be really devastated if Facebook was deleted because there is a lot of stuff chronicled on their which I don’t have anywhere else.” Int 4 : 164 - 165

“My Facebook’s very private” Int 5 : 115.

“[when you speak about ideologies/beliefs on Facebook] Facebook it’s much more personal” Int 5 : 145

[When asked how they would feel if their Social Media accounts were deleted.] “I’d feel very isolated form everyone” Int 5 : 185

[when asked how they would react to sudden absence of social media profiles] “Yeah, I’ll— I’ll freak out, yeah” Int 6 : 230

### **The emotional response to a conflict.**

[When asked how they respond to individuals contradicting them on social media] “it irritates me, but I like it because it’s stimulating” Int 5 : 232

[When expanding on above statement] “it’s definitely depressing it’s does not make me feel good.” Int 5 : 239

[Continued elaboration on the above] “it also actually makes me really worry about what I post in future” Int 5 : 23 -240

“I don’t agree with them and I will put that, and we sometimes get into heated discussions which, y’know what I mean, some people could look at and say “that’s harassment” but we all just kind of like arguing with each other” Int 6 : 240 - 242

[When asked to expand.] “well ‘cuz, they’re [Opinions] mine” Int 6 : 324

### **Control and re-enforcement of the in-group.**

“If I think it’s somebody who is a horrible person, then I’m sorry I wouldn’t put them on Facebook.” Int 1 : 387 – 388

“something like Facebook where you can block people and chose who you’re talking to” Int 3 : 189 – 190

“I do have quite a few groups where they are, and I hate to say the word, safe spaces for people of my identity” Int 3 : 193 – 194

“I post quite a lot of erm, solidarity posts, is what I will prioritise so if someone’s having a bad day I will prioritise sending them a post to let them know, that they are not alone” Int 3 : 194 – 196

“if someone’s being attacked I will step up to their defence if possible. Yeah.” Int 3: 200

“I’m more likely to erm, identify with someone who show’s solidarity to them then to look for solidarity myself” Int 3 : 232 – 233

“We like to know that were not alone, and it does promote that whole thing of; you are not alone, there is another person like you” Int 3 : 281 – 282

[When asked if they feel they have a right to control information on their news feed] “I think we do that anyway, just as human beings, y’know?” Int 3 : 380

“[When asked if they had ever experienced harassment] P: Once or twice, like a few years ago when I was part of an online community, yeah.

I: So was it, about that community? Or was it just— it happened?

P: It was another member of that community.” Int 4 : 53 - 57

[When asked if they block or censor individuals ] “Not very often, only when I get really annoyed, I don’t have many family and friends on my newsfeed for that reason.” Int 4: 181 – 182

[When asked if they have to block/ban anyone.] [I don’t have to ban many people because] “About three people. Yeah, it’s not a lot. I’m very selective in the first place [laughs].” Int 4 : 187

“I think it’s [Public contradiction of posted content] a handy way of double checking general consensus and usually if someone feels strongly about a post” Int 5 : 240 - 241

### **Control of information within the in-group.**

“I don’t deal with it at home, I don’t deal with it in my everyday life, why should somebody else be allowed to put that into my life when I don’t want it to be there?” Int 1 : 420 - 422

[Have a right and a reasonability to control the information on a FB feed] Int 1 : 398 – 401

“I don’t want them saying things so that other people see what’s on my Facebook they’ve said” Int 1 :388 – 389

[Do you feel you have a right to control what information and content you have on your news feed?] “Yes. Yeah.” Int 2 : 296 – 299

“I never stop my posts, but sometimes I do customise my Facebook to make sure a certain person doesn’t see it.” Int 3 : 332 – 333

“I tend to block anyone that just harps on about something like; oo! Political things” Int 4 : 145 – 146

[When asked if they have a right to control the information and content they are exposed to.] “Of Course.” Int 4 : 196

[When asked if they feel they have a right to control the information in their newsfeeds.]

“Yes!” Int 5 : 201