

User Unknown: The Incidence of Trolling Among Asteans

Jennifer E. Alipante

Bicol State College of Applied Sciences and Technology, Philippines. jealipante@astean.biscast.edu.ph

Abstract - Internet trolling has been prevalent not only among the older demographic section of the internet users but also among students who are having the most internet hours in terms of usage. There has been little, if none at all, studies about trolling perpetration or victimization among College of Arts and Sciences students of the Bicol State College of Applied Sciences and Technology (BISCAST). Thus this descriptive, exploratory research profiles students of BISCAST, called Asteans, and their social media usage, and as a result if they have experienced internet trolling, or if they themselves troll other people. The respondents (N=199) are students of the 5 course programs under the College of Arts and Sciences, namely the BS Entrepreneurship, BS in Exercise and Sports Science, Bachelor in Physical Education, BS in Electronic and Multimedia Computing, and BS in Food Technology. Results show that 100% of the students surveyed have at least one social media account. Facebook and You Tube are the social media sites mostly being utilized. Seven out of ten students are aware of internet trolling. Three out of ten students have experienced being trolled. The study made use of a self-made questionnaire using frequency, mean, and percentile as statistical tools to get the result.

Index Terms - internet trolling, social media, Philippines, Social Science, screen time

INTRODUCTION

The promise of the free speech in the social media has resulted to people using these platforms to spew comments, both pleasant and hateful, hiding behind the veil of anonymity. Those who still believe in an old saying that “sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me” was obviously not born in the 21st century.

Over the years, the definition of trolling has evolved. A definition of trolling which is popularly understood is lifted from Reddit, itself a social media, as “The art of deliberately, cleverly, and secretly pissing people off, usually via the internet, using dialogue. Trolling does not mean just making rude remarks: Shouting swear words at someone doesn’t count as trolling; it’s just flaming, and isn’t funny. Spam isn’t trolling either; it pisses people off, but it’s lame. The most essential part of trolling is convincing your victim that either a) truly believe in what you are saying, no matter how outrageous, or b) give your victim malicious instructions, under the guise of help.” [1]

Definitions from scholarly literature were also included to complement the aforementioned definition and to give additional clarity to the term trolling. According to Hardeker, trolling is the deliberate (perceived) use of impoliteness/aggression deception and/or manipulation in CMC (computer-mediated communication) to create a context conducive to triggering or antagonizing conflict, typically for amusement’s sake [2]. An internet troll is one who posts controversial opinions with the intention to incite anger from others in order to distract people from the real controversies [3]. Thus, a troll is an “individual who, for personal amusement, post online comments or content that tend to be disruptive, aggressive, or inflammatory, in order to provoke a reaction from an audience” [4].

In 2019, the global internet usage accelerated to 4.39 billion. It recorded a 9% increase from the previous year with 399 million additional users. There is additional 9% social media users from last year’s 3.192 billion to 3.48 billion in 2019, or an increase of 288 million. Out of this figure, 3.26 billion people use social media on mobile devices [5].

In the same year in the Philippines, 70.7% of the population are internet users, compared to the global average of 45% [6]. Those belonging to ages 18-29 are the largest internet users, which is about 94% of the users. In fact, in a report from social media marketing and management Hootsuite, as well as the annual overview of data by We Are Social, Filipinos spend an average of 10.02 hours daily on the internet, on any device, and spend an average of 4 hours and 12 minutes in social media sites [6]. This despite that the fixed internet speed in the Philippines is only 19.0mbps, or only 1/10th that of Singapore’s at 190mbps, as reported by Ookla’s Speedtest Global Index.

The incidence of online trolling has perpetuated and victimized people from all walks of life as long as one starts using social media sites. No longer are negative comments limited to rectangle boxes at the end of each post, but posts are now strategically written to provoke negative responses.

Trolling initiated by the younger demographic members who are mainly students, has prompted the researcher to look into trolling incidence happening within the years that the children are supposed to be educated not only in academics but also in manners acceptable to society. There is also a substantial evidence that the younger people use social media more than the older demographic of the population. [7]

In May 2016, an election period in the Philippines, a post in a social media platform written by the daughter of then outgoing Mayor from the Visayan Region made headlines when she spewed vitriol in the social media platform Twitter. Her tweet targeted the rival of her uncle for the position of the Vice Presidency in the then ongoing national election, calling her “son of a bitch” and “dumb”. At that time, the subject of her anger was edging her uncle by almost 200,000 votes. The post has since been deleted and

the account deactivated. She was 16-years old at that time. Her mother, a former actress turned politician, issued an official apology in her own social media account, and picked up by news and entertainment agencies [8]. In May 12, 2016, in the same election period, another 16-year old student posted in her social media account that she wished the same Vice Presidential candidate to have switched places with her husband when the latter died in a plane crash. She also called her “evil”. This was revealed by the Vice President herself in an interview that was picked up by a news agency [9]. The student later apologized, a move pushed by the school she was attending at that time.

As more young people spend time in the internet without regard to the possible repercussion of their words and actions, the Supreme Court published a ruling saying “Self-regulation on the internet is the best means of avoiding privacy violations, but schools should participate in disciplining and educating children to be a good digital citizens” [10].

In spite of these efforts, problems in internet trolling is constantly increasing. Four hundred new users sign up for Facebook every minute, and Facebook Messenger has over 1.2 billion monthly active users. But out of that figure, about 83 million Facebook accounts are bogus, and function either as duplicates, accounts made for things other than people, or accounts made to distribute spam [11].

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study will expand on the previous researches exploring the social media usage of tertiary students. What social media sites do they have account with? How many hours do these students access their social media accounts? This study will also explore the incidence of online trolling among Asteans. Do some Asteans consider themselves trolls? Do they have experiences of being trolled?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research involved a survey method, and respondents were chosen through random sampling. The 199 participants took part at a survey conducted at the Bicol State College of Applied Sciences and Technology (BISCAST), a state college located in Southern Luzon located in Naga City in the Bicol Region, Philippines. The respondents are the students enrolled in any of the five course programs under the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) namely the BS Entrepreneurship, BS in Exercise and Sports Science, Bachelor in Physical Education, BS in Entertainment and Multimedia Computing, and BS in Food Technology. A self-made questionnaire was distributed to the students enrolled in the first to fourth year. The survey was distributed in February, 2019. This will be almost the end of the second semester. In this period, the students will have clocked ample time using the internet, the activity which the research aims to see the trolling incidence.

The survey conducted took place inside the classroom. The students were assured of their anonymity, the survey will be confidential, and thus they will be encouraged to be more truthful about their responses without fear that their academic grades will be affected.

The researcher used the 4-item Global Assessment of Internet Trolling (GAIT) [12] interspersed with the self-made questionnaire to get a more comprehensive trolling behavior. Validation of the self-made questionnaire was made through a panel of 3 experts in the field of Information and Communications Technology. The questionnaire received a very positive response.

The survey instrument was used to collect the demographic information of the respondents. It also asked for the age and gender *in real life* since in the veil of anonymity, the respondents may not reveal real information about themselves. Rather, they may provide information that they prefer to use online.

The respondents were asked about their behaviour online, the number of hours they spend surfing the internet daily, the sites they utilized. The survey also asked if the respondents have experienced being trolled, or if they themselves trolled other people in a social media platform.

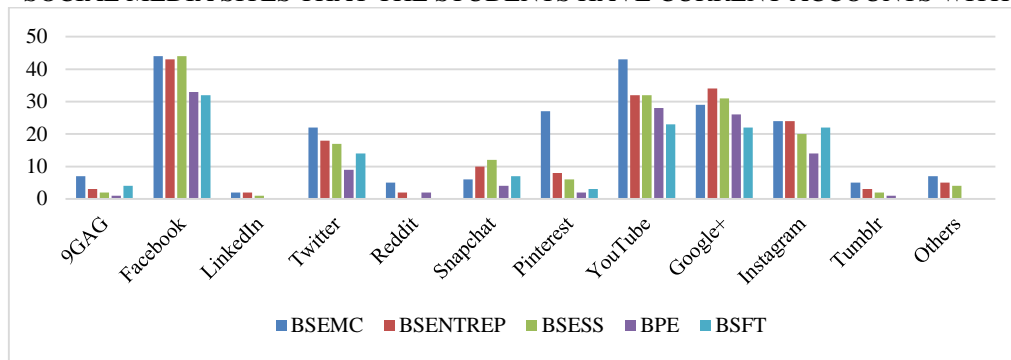
Limitations in this study include the representation of social desirability by the respondents. They might have answered the questionnaire to represent a different self. And along with the problem that arises with self-report method, there might be recall biases and unreliable memory. Despite the limitations, this research can offer several key findings and a preliminary benchmark into the social media and trolling behaviour of Asteans, and offers areas for future research.

Ethical considerations were also made, telling the respondents that taking part in the survey is purely voluntary, that they are giving their consent to the researcher to publish the result of the study while retaining their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses. They were also assured that they will be made aware of the results of this study, and that the possible result will benefit their cohort, the institution, and the community.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 shows that the social media accounts of students from different courses. Results demonstrate that CAS students are active in social media with 100% of students has at least one active account in a social media site. Facebook is the most utilized social media site by all students surveyed, having 196 active accounts, followed by You Tube with 158 active accounts, Google+ with 142 active accounts, Instagram with 104 active accounts, and Twitter with 80 active accounts. The least utilized sites are Tumblr, Reddit, 9Gag, and LinkedIn. These results can be attributed to the accessibility and features of these leading social media sites. Facebook and Instagram are social media platforms accessible from Internet-connected devices such as personal computers, tablets, and smartphones. Students can post photos, comment in other user's posts, and message other users through this platform. Facebook can also be accessed for free without charging from the user's mobile data. The widespread popularity of Facebook and its number of users confirms the latest data that Facebook has 2.3 billion active users monthly [13].

FIGURE 1.
SOCIAL MEDIA SITES THAT THE STUDENTS HAVE CURRENT ACCOUNTS WITH



Among the surveyed courses, BS-EMC has the highest number of students who have accounts in almost all social media platforms, except in Snapchat, which is dominated by students from BS Entrepreneurship, along with LinkedIn, and Instagram. Perhaps the reason for this is because the academic outputs of students under BSEMC are media-content related. Their source of information in terms of education are technology and updates on entertainment such as film, advertising, and other technology-based related content are available in these various platforms.

FIGURE 2.
FREQUENTLY VISITED SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

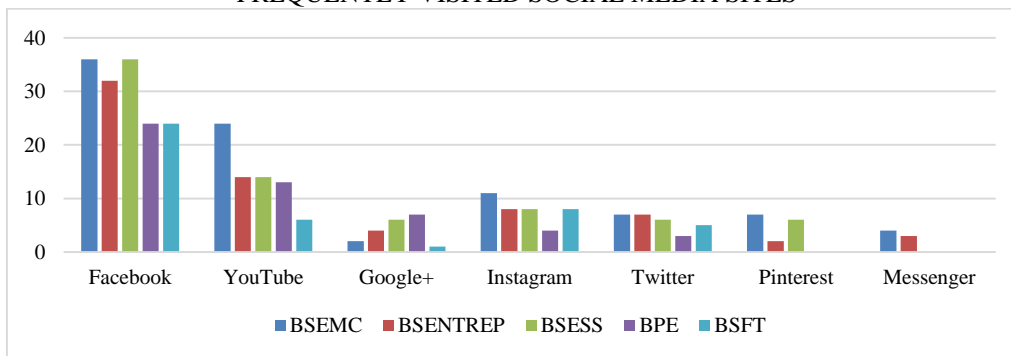


Figure 2 shows the social media sites frequently visited by the students. Although there are nearly 12 sites identified in the study, most students visit seven primary sites. These sites include Facebook, You Tube, Google, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest and Messenger. The figure also shows that BS-EMC frequently visits Facebook, You Tube, Instagram, while BPE students do not frequently visit Pinterest and Messenger. This result confirms previous published studies wherein 65% of undergraduate students felt that social networking is either somewhat or very important to them [14]. However, the ranking of the primary social media sites used by undergraduates are different for each course.

TABLE 1
SOCIAL MEDIA UTILIZATION

Indicator	Percentage
<i>Hours Spent Using Social Media</i>	
0-1 HOUR	27%
2-3 HOURS	28%
4-5 HOURS	16%
5 HOURS	7%
6 OR MORE	20%
<i>Usual Time using Social Media</i>	
During free time	55%
During class discussion	10%
During lunch break	32%
Before bedtime	3%
<i>Frequency of Posting</i>	
1-5 TIMES	79%
6-10 TIMES	11%
11-15 TIMES	2%
16-20 TIMES	2%
20 OR MORE	3%
N/A	3%

As shown in Table 1, 28% of the students spend an average of 2-3 hours per day on social media sites. However, there are 20% of them that spend 6 or more hours per day on social media sites. For college students whose coursework run only up to 6 hours per day, 2-3 hours of social media already accounts for up to 50% of their time. Data also shows that 55% of the students usually access social media sites during their free time but 10% access the social media during classwork. This daring practice might lead to procrastination in finishing their coursework, as explored in a study made by Wang, Chen, and Liang in 2011. In their published study, as much as 57% of their respondents say social media has made them less productive [15]. Asteans are also prolific posters in the social media, where 79% of the students surveyed said they post comments and pictures up to 5 times a day in their social media accounts, and 83% of the students check their social media before going to bed. This frequency of accessing social media sites is consistent with previous studies wherein nine of every ten students indicated visiting social sites with college freshmen spending 20.2 hours, sophomores spending 15.7 hours, juniors spending 10.6 hours, and seniors spending 15.4 hours each week visiting social media sites. Facebook was used for an average of more than 2 hours per day or 15.3 hours per week per student. In Twitter, students indicate spending 11.7 hours per week sending tweets or a total of 204 tweets per week, and 13.1 hours receiving tweets [14].

TABLE 2.
PURPOSE OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

	Purposes on Using Social Media	Percentage
1.	To be updated on the latest issues	29%
2.	To be entertained	27%
3.	To combat boredom	21%
4.	For Classwork	22%
5.	Others	1%

In Table 2, 29% of the students use social media sites to be informed of the updates on latest trends and issues; 27% of the students claim that they are using social media sites for entertainment purposes and to ease boredom (21%). However, 22% of the students use social media for classwork. Teachers have previously explored the added value of social media in education [16], but some authors point out that social media were never developed for pedagogical uses [17].

TABLE 3.
INDICATORS OF ONLINE ACTIVITY

Indicators	Frequency	(%)	Rank
Have already met in person the so-called friends on social media	144	72	1
Aware of Online Trolling	136	68	2
Social media affects relationship with loved ones	96	48	3
Consider his/her self as addicted to social media	68	34	4
Experienced being trolled	59	29.5	5
Used real account or use another (anonymous) account when trolling	41	20.5	6
Engage in online trolling	24	12	7
have sent people to shock websites for the fun of it	18	9	8
like to troll people in forums or the comments section of websites	7	3.5	9
Identified his/herself as an internet troll	5	2.5	10

As demonstrated in the results, as much as 7 out of 10 students have awareness of trolling for the whole time they spent on social media. These students picture a troll to be an attention seeker, and also as a bad influencer. Almost one-third or 59 of the students surveyed has experienced being trolled. Twenty-four or 12% of the students are engaged in online trolling, seven (3.5%) students likes to troll people in forums or the comments sections of websites and five (2.5%) students identifies his/herself as an internet troll. Their roles are either poster or commenter. However minimal this figure is, there are trolling incidence happening among the students of BISCAS. Also, 28% of the students use their real account when they engage in online trolling, but there are 21% of them who use anonymous accounts. Anonymity in the internet has been explored by Widyanto and Griffiths, saying that it “removes the threat of confrontation, rejection and other consequences of behaviour” [18]. This disinhibition allows people to behave differently online in a way they might not be confident doing offline.

Majority of the students say they have met in person their so-called friends in the social media, but there are still 18% whose friendship is purely virtual. This means they are friends with strangers they have never met in real life. Almost half of the students say social media has affected their relationship with their loved ones. Although the researcher did not use any test to show qualifications of individual with an addiction, the contextual meaning of the word addiction was used in the questionnaire and 68 answered they consider themselves addicted to social media. While a previous study show that social media addiction affects approximately 12% of users across social networking sites [19], Asteans has an alarming rate of 34%.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Trolling has perpetrated the school zones, and the students are a vulnerable group where they can be victims or perpetrators. It is also a fact that already exist among Asteans.

Trolling is still an ongoing phenomenon that perhaps many has started witnessing without necessarily having an idea of what it is. The school should take note of this and take advantage of the students' use of the social media to draw policies and raise awareness related to trolling. Without these policies, students who perpetuate trolling might hide under the guise of academic freedom and freedom of expression, thereby compromising the very standards of quality learning. Students who are victims might continue to experience abusive behaviour without a set of policies they can lean on. The existence of policies, however, can lead to a new level of awareness that will avoid future trolling perpetration and victimization among Asteans.

Future research of this topic has been started by this researcher for students enrolled in the current school year, when a more online education and blended learning has taken place. Since the scope of the study are the students, further research should include victimization of the faculty members as well. Since online education is widely used alongside face to face instruction, faculty members could also be direct targets for comments, both praise and hateful alike.

More than ever, internet usage will serve as a large part of education. As long as students open their social media accounts for reasons including classwork, trolling will more or less happen.

REFERENCES

- [1]. ELI5: What is a Troll. (2015). [Community forum]. ELI5.
https://www.reddit.com/r/explainlikeimfive/comments/24czbr/eli5_what_is_a_troll/
- [2]. Hardaker, C. (2013). "Uh.... not to be nitpicky, but... the past tense of drag is dragged, not drug.": An overview of trolling strategies. *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict*, 1(1), 58-86
- [3]. Bourque, Andrei and Hayley Irvin. "Answering a Social Troll – What You Need to Know". February 5, 2015 (December 24, 2018). https://www.huftingtonpost.com/andre-burque/answering-a-social-troll_b_6625654.html
- [4]. Escartin, Maria Corinna Priscila. "Rogue Cops Among Rogues: Trolls and Trolling in Social Networking Sites". *Philippine Sociological Review* (2015). Vol 63. Pp 169-190
- [5]. Digital 2019: Global internet use accelerates. (2019, January 30). We Are Social.
<https://wearesocial.com/blog/2019/01/digital-2019-global-internet-use-accelerates>
- [6]. PH takes top spot as heaviest internet users worldwide—Report. (n.d.). Cnn. Retrieved February 17, 2021, from <https://cnnphilippines.com/lifestyle/2019/02/01/2019-digital-hootsuite-we-are-social-internet-philippines-facebook.html>
- [7]. Big divide in internet use in Philippines by age, education level – report. (n.d.). Rappler. Retrieved February 17, 2021, from <https://www.rappler.com/technology/pew-internet-use-report-philippines-march-2020>
- [8]. Cristina Gonzales-Romualdez apologizes for daughter's tweet vs Leni Robredo. (n.d.). PEP.Ph. Retrieved March 20, 2021, from <https://www.pep.ph/news/311/cristina-gonzales-romualdez-apologizes-for-daughters-tweet-vs-leni-robredo>
- [9]. Jesus, J. L. D. (2016, May 11). Basher wishes 'evil' Leni Robredo had died instead of Jesse. INQUIRER.Net.
<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/785050/bashers-wish-evil-leni-robredo-died-in-jesses-plane-crash>
- [10]. G. R. No. 202666. (n.d.). Retrieved March 20, 2021, from https://lawphil.net/judjuris/juri2014/sep2014/gr_202666_2014.html
- [11]. 75 super-useful Facebook statistics for 2018. (n.d.). Retrieved March 20, 2021, from <https://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2017/11/07/facebook-statistics>
- [12]. Buckels, E. E., Trapnell, P. D., & Paulhus, D. L. (2014). Trolls just want to have fun. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 67, 97–102. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.01.016>
- [13]. Kirkpatrick, D. (2018). The Facebook Defect. *Time*, 191(15), 38-44.
- [14]. Case, C. J., King, D. L., & Case, J. A. (2019). SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE AND TROLLING: A LONGITUDINAL INVESTIGATION OF UNDERGRADUATE BUSINESS STUDENTS. *Global Journal of Business Disciplines*, 3(1), 1.
- [15]. Wang, Q., Chen, W., and Liang, Y. (2011). The Effects of Social Media on College Students. Johnson & Wales University, Providence, RI. http://scholarsarchive.jwu.edu/mba_student/5
- [16]. Bate, F. (2010). A longitudinal study of beginning teachers' pedagogical identity and their use of ICT. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 6, 1042–1061.
- [17]. Bruneel, S., De Wit, K., Verhoeven, J., & Eelen, J. (2013). Facebook: When education meets privacy. *Interdisciplinary Journal of E-Learning and Learning Objects*, 9, 125–148.
- [18]. Widyanto, L., & Griffiths, M. D. (2011). An empirical study of problematic Internet use and self-esteem. *International Journal of Cyber Behaviour, Psychology and Learning*, 1(1), 13-24.
- [19]. Alabi, O. F. (2012). A survey of Facebook addiction level among selected Nigerian University undergraduates. *New Media and Mass Communication*, 10, 70–80.