

## HOW DO THE FACULTY MEMBERS GO FOR TROLLS? A VIEW FROM AN EMERGING COUNTRY

Elif Bugra KUZU DEMIR  
Buca Faculty of Education, Dokuz Eylul University  
Izmir, Turkey

Baris MERCIMEK  
Faculty of Education, Anadolu University  
Eskisehir, Turkey

Nihal DULKADIR YAMAN  
Faculty of Education, Anadolu University  
Eskisehir, Turkey

H. Ferhan ODABASI  
Faculty of Education, Anadolu University  
Eskisehir, Turkey

### ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the findings of an exploratory, qualitative phenomenological study and investigates opinions and evaluations of faculty members about trolls encountered in social media and mass medium. The research was carried out in Anadolu University in Turkey. A total of 18 faculty members from 9 faculties in 12 different departments responded to 4 interview questions. Faculty members' views on trolls were elicited through 2 rounds of semi-structured focus group interviews. Findings were based on content analyses of interview transcripts. Results are presented in four categories which emerged from perceptions, strategies, incidences and feelings. Trolls' aims and their success in doing so when it comes to the research group are discussed. This research concludes that purity, hazard and intelligence of trolls are still dubious facts for the Anadolu University faculty members.

**Keywords:** Trolling, social media, faculty members, computer-mediated communication.

### INTRODUCTION

*"I'm a professor of instructional technology and I have never witnessed how desperate the faculty could become with an introduction of any other new issue. The other day a colleague came into my room with her smartphone in her hand pointing me a picture of a back of a young person run over by a heavy police truck. I knew that the photograph was a troll and had nothing to do with the ongoing events, then. But I felt so bad to tell her that because she was so naive in believing what she saw, my comment would be traumatic for her."* H. Ferhan ODABASI

The rapid proliferation of technology brought up new issues on consensus that has been difficult to think of years ago. Transformation of communication is in the process of going from agreement to conflict. Once having features as facilitating communication, easing

information gathering and making people come together, the communication technologies replaced these favorable features with unfavorable ones, such as deception, humiliation and detraction for fun, privacy invasion, disregard for content creators' moral right and misuse of intellectual property. As the power of social media increases day-by-day, unethical uses have emerged correspondingly. In order to exemplify, during the interpersonal communication, identity issues such as fake and double identities have arisen by means of these emerging information and communication. In such a case, sharing biased, false, misleading and incomplete information has become easier to distribute. This is a concern when the information shared on the Internet, and especially social media, are personal relationship problems linked to their important life events. Thus it is not surprising to find that confidentiality, privacy, integrity and purpose of information can easily be misused for different actions by different groups. At this point, it is difficult to determine who or what should be blamed for this state of affairs. In such a case where students in higher education are affected from this, the faculty members are responsible for the adequate training and education of these students. Besides, they are believed to be the most potent ones in defense against this unsavory behavior.

When the faculty members are considered simultaneously with social media, there goes the paradox (Moran, Seaman & Tinti-Kane, 2011). Faculty members are known to incorporate sophisticated users of social media whereas higher education is known to have laggard members in technology use. Taking into consideration that the social media match different sites to the faculty members' varying personal, professional, and teaching needs, adoption rate of social media among faculty members tends to increase year after year (Seaman & Tinti-Kane, 2013). Despite the increase in utilization rates, there are problems that may be experienced in the use of social media. For instance, in a study about the use of social media, 80% of faculty members claim that "lack of integrity of student submissions" is an important barrier whereas 70% admit the same judgement for privacy concerns. As a consequence, it can be said that the faculty members should be aware that social media use is not only about passive reading or viewing; moreover it is a challenge for the faculty members that in order to be active, they should take in consideration the ethical issues. As in the example case mentioned above, approximately 40% of faculty members who posted content during the past month did so on more than one site (Moran, Seaman & Tinti-Kane, 2011).

Since the use of social media arises ethical issues as stated above, the concept of trolls and troll behaviors come into the limelight. Troll behaviors are defined as the behaviors to provoke (Taiwo, 2014) an emotional response for different users in which individuals can use expressions in free and relaxed manner with the help of secret identities (Donath, 1999; Hardaker, 2013; Weller, 2007; Williams, 2012).

Trolls are regarded as the ongoing development of an Internet subculture (Schwartz, 2008). Trolls act unreal behaviors, which take form from cultural differences. Offering high-level thinking skills and critical judgments, the troll hunting conditions are getting extremely difficult because of the fake identities. In order to understand the nature of trolls and the behaviors that the trolls exhibit, a comprehensive literature review should be done; however, there are a few studies that are troll-related in the literature. While Binns, (2012); Hardaker (2013) and Maltby et al. (2015) focus their research of trolls as individuals; Herring, Sluder, Scheckler, & Barab (2002) and Merritt's (2012) studies are concerned with the trolling behavior. Furthermore, personal and psychological processes of trolling are partially interested by the researchers conducting conceptual and linguistic studies such as in Buckels, Trapnell & Paulhus's (2014) study. Another conceptual study by Karppi (2013), focuses on the fake accounts of the trolls. On the other hand, another research conducted by Ozsoy (2015) plays a role in being a satisfying reference in the literature related to the political issues in trolling by supporting a different point of view. Besides the studies that

point out the negative aspects of trolling (Donath, 1999; Hardaker, 2013; Taiwo, 2014; Weller, 2007; Williams, 2012); there are studies that reflects the positive aspects like "kudos trolling" and "acceptable trolling" (Bishop, 2012; Coles & West, 2016).

Physical and psychological factors of an individual play a significant role in constructing and disseminating knowledge. This individual should use a tool between the source of the information (in this case the individual) and the other person who receives the information. At this point, the features of the tool such as appropriateness and effectiveness become very significant in terms of not distorting the true meaning. According to McLuhan (1994)'s "The medium is the message" theory, the messages in social media, the information in Internet and everyday social interactions gain their meanings by way of the tool used during the transmission process. With a postmodernist approach, not only the source and content but also the image of the tool matters for the trustworthiness of the messages. From this point-of-view, it can be said that the perception depends primarily on the media, then the message. In this context, thanks to the influence of the tool, trolling behaviors may affect intentionally or unintentionally the other people's minds. These affected people, then, may generate opposed information and respond to it so fast by means of effective social media features, that this process cyclically will resume until one is finally able to understand that s/he is trolled. This may not be so rare since it is proposed that emotional instability is related with social media use (Correa, Hinsley, & De Zuniga, 2010).

This research focuses on the faculty members and their points of views and strategies regarding trolls in social media. Although there has been consensus about the effect of mass media as being universal for different people (Meyrowitz, 1985), when it comes to faculty members, we cannot easily consider differences for them. Being at the utmost intelligence level to access right and full information (Ozdemir et al., 2006) has brought the faculty members to the focus of this research. As Meyrowitz (1985) claims, the effect of new means of production can affect variables as value systems or perceptions of truth. Turkey, in this sense, is not different than any other country. It is known that faculty members in Turkey use social media heavily, however there is no research carried out to prove this or how they handle information on social media. Hence, the aim of this study is trolls, a reality of social media especially for the faculty. Since the teaching and research skills of the faculty members are relatively high compared to the majority of the other members of the community, faculty members' views and perceptions about trolls have become more of an issue. Moreover, in order to take the argument further about the depths of the study field, conducting analyses related to their strategies of determining and questioning the accuracy of the information that they encounter during their use of social media is an important issue for the study.

### **Purpose**

Academicians' point of views regarding social media trolls. Thus, this study tried to investigate the faculty members':

- Understanding of what a troll is
- Use of ways for understanding a troll
- Incidence with a troll
- Feelings about troll experience.

### **METHOD**

In the present study, which examined faculty members' views about the trolls in social media, the qualitative research method was used. Qualitative research method allows developing a viewpoint regarding individuals' experiences and obtaining in-depth information about the values, behaviors and attitudes (Grbich, 2013).

## Research Model

The study was carried out as a phenomenology design method, one of qualitative research methods. Phenomenological study is conducted to gain insights of participants' lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2007). Patton (2002) claimed that "phenomenological approach focuses on describing how people experience some phenomenon - how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with other". The meanings conveyed by the experiences of faculty members in relation to trolls are interpreted within the framework of phenomenological design.

## Participants

The participants were determined on voluntary basis. In the study, 883 faculty members from a state university, Anadolu, in Turkey, were asked via e-mail to take part in the present study. A total of 29 faculty members wanted to participate in the study and responded positively to the e-mail. These volunteering faculty members were informed via e-mail about the place and time of interviews. 11 faculty members reported that they would not be available at the time determined for the interviews. Therefore, the remaining 18 faculty members were invited for the interviews. One day before the interviews, these 18 participants were reminded of the interview day via e-mail. The study fields of the participants varied with respect to their faculties. Table 1 presents the study fields of the participants considering their faculties.

Table 1. Backgrounds of the participants

Participants	Faculty	Department
Gul	Open Education Faculty	Distance Education
Vedat	Open Education Faculty	Distance Education
Metin	Open Education Faculty	Distance Education
Mert	Open Education Faculty	Distance Education
Yeliz	Faculty of Engineering	Chemical Engineering
Orcun	Faculty of Tourism	Department of Tourism Management
Cemil	Faculty of Science	Biology
Asli	Faculty of Education	Computer Education & Instructional Technologies
Isik	Faculty of Education	Foreign Language Education
Yagmur	Faculty of Pharmacy	Pharmaceutical Technology
Rifat	Faculty of Tourism	Department of Tourism Management
Ahu	Faculty of Engineering	Environmental Engineering
Haydar	Faculty of Education	Primary Education
Orhan	Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences	Business Administration
Yilmaz	Faculty of Business Administration	Marketing
Sami	Faculty of Aeronautics and Astronautics	Aviation Management
Irmak	Faculty of Education	Computer Education & Instructional Technologies
Yigit	Faculty of Education	Computer Education & Instructional Technologies

The departments of the faculty members participating in the study varied in science and social sciences. There were 13 faculty members in the field of social sciences and 5 faculty members in the field of science.

### Procedure

The study was carried out to determine the faculty members' perceptions of trolls and tried to investigate the strategies they used to understand the trolls, their experiences regarding trolls, and their feelings regarding their troll-related experiences. The research data included digital and written data in relation to the focus-group interviews. The reason to rely on a focus group interview is that in phenomenological studies, it is typically wise to carry out the long interview method, through which in-depth data can be collected on the research purpose (Moustakas, 1994). A focus group interview is a qualitative data collection tool, which is, conducted a small group of people, typically 6 to 10 people with similar backgrounds, on a specific topic. A focus group interview generally lasts for one to two hours in order to gain detailed insights of the participants (Patton, 2002). Within the scope of a study, more than one focus group interview can be held to obtain different perspectives. At this very point, the literature on focus group interviews emphasizes that using this method as a data collection tool can be advantageous in many ways, such as when the backgrounds/experiences of the interviewees match together so that the high-level interaction among interviewees lead to produce the best information, when the participants cooperative with each other, when there is limited time to collect information, and when individuals are hesitant to provide information during their one-on-one interviews (Creswell, 2007). Focus group interviews were held with faculty members from different fields for this study based on the fore mentioned rationale. Table 2 presents information about the focus group interviews. The semi-structured interview form used in focus group interviews included not only questions directed in line with the research purposes but also other probe questions directed at the end of the interview to help respond to the previously directed questions. This semi-structured interview form was finalized in line with the views of four field experts and one expert from the field of qualitative research.

Table 2. Information about the focus group interviews

Focus Group Interview	Place	Time	Number of Participants	Time
FGI1	Faculty Room Meeting	04.12.2015	10	87 min
FGI2	Faculty Room Meeting	18.12.2015	8	60 min

The research data were collected via two focus group interviews. The first focus group interviews were held with 10 faculty members and the second with eight faculty members.

### Data Analysis

The transcriptions of the audio-records of the focus group interviews held with the participants were examined by the researchers of the present study to see whether the transcription were valid and accurate. In line with this, the authors confirmed the correctness of the transcriptions by listening to the parts they randomly selected among the audio-records of the focus group interviews. For the analysis of the qualitative data obtained via the focus group interviews, the methods of content analysis and inductive analysis were used.

## FINDINGS

### The Faculty Members' Understanding of What A Troll Is

During the focus group interviews, the faculty members were first asked for their views about trolls. Within the context of the faculty members' responses to the question directed to determine their perceptions and awareness of trolls, it could be stated that their views about trolls were gathered under two themes: definition of troll and troll behavior (Table 3.). The theme of definition of troll included perceptual and descriptive explanations regarding trolls, and the theme of troll behavior included explanations regarding positive and negative behaviors of trolls.

Table 3. Faculty Members' Views about Trolls

Definitions of Troll	
Perceptions regarding Trolls	Fishing Mystical beings Graffiti
Troll Descriptions	Human (group or individual) Machine Personality traits
Troll Behaviors	
Positive Behaviors	Sharing real information Revealing the facts
Negative Behaviors	Transfer of information by marginal groups Manipulation/Distorting the meaning Provocation Offending/Insulting

While defining trolls, the faculty members used various perceptual statements and descriptions. According to the faculty members, concepts in association with trolling were used with metaphors. Most of the faculty members who participated in the focus group interviews resembled 'trolling' to the action of hunting, which is included in the meaning of 'troll'. In addition, the faculty members also resembled trolls to creators living in the forests in Norway, to dwarfs in Finland, to mystical beings in movies or to graffiti.

The faculty members, in their descriptions of trolls, reported different views about whether a troll is an individual or a group. Most of the faculty members believed that a troll was not effective alone as an individual and those groups with the same opinion could thus be regarded as a troll. In addition, there was one faculty member who stated a troll was not likely to be a human but a machine. During the focus group interviews, the faculty members pointed out that trolls are were intelligent, extraordinary but untrained people able to hide themselves, use technology well and pursue financial gains.

The focus group interviews also revealed that the faculty members considered trolls' behaviors to be positive or negative. Most of the participants focused on such negative actions of trolls as manipulation, provocation and offending. Manipulation makes it possible to direct the masses to the in accordance with a certain goal. Provocation allows provoking the target population to demonstrate emotional rather than reasonable reactions. As for offending, it includes such negative actions as offending the values and beliefs that individuals find holly. Despite these negative behaviors, some of the participants also mentioned positive aspects of trolls such as sharing the real information and revealing the facts. Table 4 presents direct quotations from the faculty members' views about trolls.

**Table 4. Direct Quotations of Faculty Members View about Trolls (Sample texts)**

<b>Views about Definition of Troll</b>	
<b>Views about Perceptions of Troll</b>	<p>"I regard trolls as fish feeding if I associate it with fishing." [FGI2-Asli]</p> <p>"...we see trolls in the modern era as well. Graffiti is in fact a troll. Well, whose slogans or posters in your hand. But, today, from a different perspective, not in a negative or positive respect, it is actually very important since it allows everyone to express their views, whether correct or not." [FGI1-Metin]</p>
<b>Views about Description of Troll</b>	<p>"At first, the troll reminded me of the little creators living in the forests in Norway. A troll may not be a living thing, but trolls could also be humans or machines that exist in media, especially in social media, to motivate, or sometimes to distort certain ideas." [FGI2-Orhan]</p> <p>"...there is an entertaining and fairly intelligent group. It is a group that trolls big companies and the web-pages of municipalities, creates an entertaining environment with the help of a very interesting message, and I think it is not that much harmful." [FGI2-Yigit]</p>
<b>Views about Behaviors of Trolls</b>	
<b>Views about Positive Behaviors</b>	<p>"...they may use fake accounts but give correct information. They may also give very secret and important information. And, this doesn't necessarily mean they are negative trolls as we mentioned before. That is, there could be sharing of real information without any negative aspects though it might be a fake account." [FGI2-Yilmaz]</p> <p>"....the media, well when you look at the media, you see Uğur Dündar [a famous Turkish journalist], and he says 'I will now tell you the words of a troll: the troll curses badly at me, and then he says it is the troll doing so.' None of them has shared any message in social media related to blood donation so far. Actually, trolls have always created negative perceptions whether they are real or not. As an academician, I have just recognized this during this interview. However, I always have thought so. I have always thought that there is something fishy if it comes from the troll. I don't know, but we generally have such perception." [FGI1-Cemil]</p>
<b>Views about Negative Behaviors</b>	<p>"...they don't reply to you, and their arguments or instruments could be visual and could even be a name. It associates what they defend. And you understand that because it is a speculation or manipulation. In fact, the number of these criteria could be increased..." [FGI1-Mert]</p> <p>"...trolls can do it for their own benefit although they believe it is not correct. It is something different. I didn't want to say that what science says is absolutely true. But, they believe in something, and they want to transmit their thoughts to us. And the other is a group of people who do so because they are paid. That is, I believe there are somehow negative perceptions regarding trolls." [FGI1- Cemil]</p>

**The Faculty Members' Use of Ways for Understanding a Troll**

Thanks to the first question, the faculty members' views about a troll as an individual and about trolls' behaviors were found out. Following this, the next question was direct to the faculty members to see how they understood whether a message they met in social media included any trolling behavior or not.

In line with the data collected via the focus group interviews, the faculty members' strategies in relation to understanding the trolls in social media were examined under the categories of content, source and personal qualifications (Table 5).

Table 5. Strategies used by faculty members to understand trolls

Content
Deceptiveness
Lack of flexibility
Reliability
Logicalness
Source
Trustworthiness
Privacy
Being a single-centered
Seeking for financial benefits
Troll-related background
Personal Qualifications
Expertise
Digital Wisdom
Experience

### **Content**

The faculty members point out that the content of the message delivered in social media should be interrogated to see whether it was sent by a troll and to understand a troll's behavior. The participants considered the interrogation of content under the sub-themes of deceptiveness, lack of flexibility, reliability and logicalness.

### **Deceptiveness**

The faculty members stated that individuals would feel obliged to be cautious against the content of a message if it included such deceptive elements as subjectivity and directivity or if it included speculative and provocative elements regarding social issues. The faculty members stated that when they met the presentation of a content as mentioned above, they could determine trolls and trolling behaviors by carefully examining the people who provided that content.

### **Lack of flexibility**

Another strategy used by faculty members to understand trolls is to evaluate whether the content is exact, stiff or flexible. If the content views a subject from a single point and rigidly closes itself to other viewpoints, then it is believed that the content tends to include trolling behavior.

### **Reliability**

According to the data collected via focus group interviews, confirming the consistency of a content with current scientific, historical and up-to-date information and determining whether this content includes the behavior of trolling is used as an important method by faculty members to determine whether the content includes any trolling behavior or not. Examples for the methods used under this sub-theme include interrogating the reliability of a message with scientific sources, confirming the consistency of a message shared by a person



with the daily-life sharings of that person, and evaluating whether the content shared is confirmed or supported by historical information.

### ***Logicalness***

If a content presented in social networks involves logical mistakes, then faculty members are likely to have doubts about whether the person sharing that content is a troll or not.

### ***Source***

In order to identify a trolling behavior in social media, faculty members reported that it would be necessary to investigate the source of the message besides examining that message. In this respect, the source, or the person demonstrating the trolling behavior, and certain characteristics of that person/source gain importance. The participants focused on the main theme of investigation of the source under five different sub-dimensions: trustworthiness of the source, privacy, belonging to a single center, troll-related backgrounds, and seeking for financial benefits.

### ***Trustworthiness***

Under the main theme of interrogation of the source, the sub-theme that the participants considered most important was the sub-theme of trustworthiness. In order to determine the trustworthiness of the source, the participants stated that they tried many different ways. While interrogating the trustworthiness of the source, most of the participants reported that they consulted people in their environment or in social media whose knowledge about the subject they trusted.

Another method of interrogating the source was confirming whether the people considered to demonstrate trolling behavior had fake or real social media accounts. In relation to this, the participants stated that they tried to learn whether the personal information provided by the account owner belonged to a real person or whether it included a speculative image or not. In addition, in order to determine whether the account was fake or not, the participants reported that they followed the account owners' statements in real life.

### ***Privacy***

According to the participants' views, the data regarding the accessibility and privacy of the source considered to demonstrate trolling behavior are important to determine whether that source is a real troll or not. A great majority of the participants stated that while determining whether an individual is a troll or not, they took the accessibility and permanency of the social media accounts of the suspected individual into account.

### ***Being single-centered***

Most of the faculty members defined the concept of troll not as a single person but as a group of individuals who came together for a common purpose. Depending on this definition, the participants claimed that these group members were dependent on a single person/center. The participants, who stated that images were used in a way to serve a common purpose even though the visuals or texts used in a content shared in social media vary, regarded the sources of such contents they believed to spread from a single center as a troll.

### ***Seeking for financial benefits***

According to the faculty members, in order to determine whether a source demonstrates a trolling behavior or not, it is important to evaluate whether that source takes financial advantage of the content that try to make spread.

### ***Troll-related background***

One of the faculty members stated that while determining whether an individual in social media demonstrate a trolling behavior or not, it is important to focus on the connection of that person with other individuals already considered by the society to be a troll. The participant also reported that there are troll network maps formed by different sources on the Internet and that one can understand whether suspected individuals are trolls or not by examining these maps.

### ***Personal Qualifications***

Regarding the main theme of interrogation of personal traits, the faculty members focused on the cognitive and affective efficacies of an individual while determining whether an individual is a troll or not. According to the faculty members, these efficacies included: (1) field knowledge about the content of the message shared by the troll, (2) awareness of such affective issues as common sense, feelings and knowledge, that is affective wisdom, and (3) existence of situations experienced by the individual in the past, that is experiences.

### ***Expertise***

The faculty members stated that determining whether a message shared in social media involves trolling or not could be difficult most of the individuals in a society. However, as faculty members, the participants believed that they would not have any difficulty understanding whether a trolling behavior was demonstrated by a troll or not if the message shared by that troll belonged to their own field of interest. In relation to this one of the participants stated;

*"we should view the issue from a scientific perspective if we are, as an academician, investigating a trolling behavior for research purposes, and we should view it from a different perspective if we are speaking in public. It will be quite easy to determine whether a troll is really a troll if it belongs to your field of interest and if we are talking about it among us as academicians."* [FGI1-Metin].

When the views of the participants were examined, it was seen that there was an obvious gap between individuals in a society and faculty members. The participants explained this gap saying that as required by their profession, they were individuals who criticized and interrogated the information rather than just accepting the information as it was.

### ***Affective wisdom***

Some of the participants stated that while determining the trolls, made use of cognitive processes as well as such affective factors as common sense and feelings.

### ***Experience***

In relation to determining whether a message involved a trolling behavior or not, one of the faculty members stated that one could refer to his or her past experiences.

Table 6 presents direct quotations regarding such strategies as content, source and self-knowledge used by faculty members to identify the trolls in social.

**Table 6. Direct Quotations of Strategies Used**

Main Themes	Sub-Themes	Samples of Faculty Expressions
Trolling as content	Deceptiveness	"And they appear in irrelevant situations and try to direct people. You always realize there is something interrupting the flow, and when the subject changes, they intervene this change and try to keep talking about the same previous subject." [FGI1 - Mert: Manipulative content] "... or, well, when the discussion turns into a certain ideology or ethnicity or in cases of a slogan, then you understand it." [FGI2 - Yigit: Speculative content]
	Lack of flexibility	"But as you read, you understand it. There are clear-cut judgments and inflexible sayings. They do not provide an alternative, and at that time, you understand it." [FGI1 - Gul]
	Reliability	"You immediately believe what he wrote or what he wanted to do. If you believe it by heart, then they really take control over your brain, and you just start to obey them. Thus, you have to be cautious and analytic. I think especially in this social media, you shouldn't immediately get engaged with this social media." [FGI2 - Ahu]
	Logicalness	"Probably, as required by our study field, we can rapidly make correct decisions regarding this. Sometimes, we are far from this social media, but logical mistakes, or logical patterns, that we call logical fallacies... provocation... when he makes this mistake, I mean logical mistake, then you just take a step backward." [FGI2 - Yigit]
Troll as source	Trustworthiness	"Quite difficult, but I sometimes hear from friends, colleagues or other individuals. For example, once, when retweeted, a fellow, whom I like a lot, said this is a troll, just watch out." [FGI2 - Haydar] "I directly look at the source of the news. I click on it to see who he is, or is it a group? Who do they serve? What do they mean? ..." [FGI1 - Orcun]
	Privacy	"... especially when they share an ideological view, they just try to hide their identities, use a different profile picture... they never use their real names, and when you look at the comments, you see that they shared a message but avoided making further comments below, but other individuals make numerous comments there." [FGI1 - Asli]
	Being single-centered	"I have realized that for example in Facebook, when you look at foreigners' trolls and yours, it looks as if all these trolls share from a single center. For example, when we look at the trolls during our political elections, well, elections will be held in USA as well, that is, the same things happen. Everything happens in the same way. I mean I see the same news shared in Turkey as the news shared in USA by the trolls in relation to the conservatives. The same sayings, the same items. Thus, it appears that there is someone in the center." [FGI1 - Gul]
	Seeking for financial benefits	"They can not always hide themselves. For example, scientists, say, Pirelli, or some other companies, come to a university, a scientist, and even his name is apparent. He says, in fact I say, manipulate everything. Now, social media looks the same." [FGI1 - Gul] "... well, they use it very well for drugs (talking about drugs or other related substances). That is, live fast, die young. Well, as you know, this is done by a company." [FGI1 - Mert]
	Troll-related background	"Well, actually, those are trolls on the Internet are already obvious. Today, it looks as if a network appeared, and in that network, everyone is doing something. We can follow them via that network. We can say this person is a troll, or that one is not... As I said before, there is a general structure over that network. There is a network everywhere on the Internet. Generally, I have the chance to predict who is a troll and who is not." [FGI2 - Orhan]
Characteristic as self-knowledge	Expertise	"If it is a scientific qualitative study examining use of trolling in social media, then we should speak differently as an academician, and if we are speaking in public, then we should speak differently. If we are to speak in terms of education, or if it is in our own field of interest, then it is quite easy to understand whether someone is a troll or not." [FGI1 - Metin]
	Affective wisdom	"We have a common sense, or when you analyze it in some way, and if it is right for you, then you say yes, it is right." [FGI2 - Sami]
	Experience	"As I said before, mostly my personal views and experiences guide me to decide on whether it is a troll or not." [FGI2 - Sami]

### **The Faculty Members' Incidence with a Troll**

The last interview question is aimed to address the examples of trolling that the faculty members witnessed via social media and mass-communication tools. The trolling behaviors examined in the study were classified under three main themes: political, socio-cultural and health.

#### **Political**

The interviews held with the participants revealed that trolls tended to direct the society intentionally from a certain political view to a different one. The effort to make a change in social perception is considered to be one of the important goals of trolling. It is thought that individuals do not interrogate or criticize media contents. There are statements that the target of trolling behavior is not these individuals. Another participant reported that the target of these behaviors not only includes uneducated people but also covers people with upper level educational background, and it was seen that the participant was also affected by these behaviors.

#### **Socio-cultural**

The participants reported that the cultural structure and values of a society guide trolling behaviors. The participants also claimed that trolls successfully analyze the target audience and try to transmit their ideas to others. In addition, it is thought that trolls not only aim at transmitting ideas to others but also tend to achieve provocative goals. Also, it was seen that the participants had doubts about whether the social media messages were reliable and real.

#### **Health**

During the focus group interviews, the participants reported several examples of trolling in the area of health that aimed at. In relation to delicate matters, the trolls tried to affect the target audience making use of similar experiences. The participants, while sharing their experiences, stated that they had difficulty perceiving the trolling behaviors since the internal structure of trolling involved latent identities and vague goals.

#### **Political-Health**

It is not always possible to use a classification for the presentation of the codes related to the themes formed in relation to examples of trolling during and at the end of the focus group interviews. It was seen that the participants' views belonged to three main themes and that the examples shared could be said to refer to two themes. This situation is regarded as effective performance of trolls, and it leads to anxiety in terms of its effects on the society. Some of the participants shared examples of trolling in cultural and political aspects. Table 7 presents examples of trolling that the faculty members witnessed via social media and mass-communication tools.

**Table 7. Examples of trolling**

Main Theme	Samples of Faculty Expressions
Political	<p>“Gezi Park* is a good example. The social events shared at the time of Gezi Park, the related visuals, the protests, people passing the Bosphorus Bridge on foot. In fact, the photos of those walking on that bridge were actually a photo of the people joining a marathon organized in previous years. Well, this was really a good example of trolling.” [FGI2- Irmak]</p> <p>“If I speak a bit subjectively, there were quite good trolls at the time of the elections. They were good for me, and I shared them. However, nothing like that happened in our country.” [FGI1-Isik]</p>
Socio-cultural	<p>“There was a very good one last week. A troll wrote a column with the name of Engin Ardiç [a Turkish journalist]. The troll imitated the writing style of Engin Ardiç, and you will certainly think it was a text really composed by Engin Ardiç. But, it was quite a provoking text, well, we try to be honest in politics... the troll had imitated so well that a number of people criticized Engin Ardiç. The troll was very successful, and it was an example of unbelievable intelligence. Rather than directly attacking the red lines of the opposition, the troll made use of a columnist, shared that text in social networking sites and reached a large number of people in just a few hours.” [FGI2-Yigit]</p> <p>“There was a life tree project against drug abuse. I shared it on my own page. After that, six Facebook profiles with the exactly same name appeared on the right of the screen. Also, the contents were quite similar. That was really interesting for me. It was as if there was a robot, and when you want to denounce it, they disappear.” [FGI1-Yeliz]</p>
Health	<p>“Two days ago, I saw breaking news. It says, if you have diabetes, there is quite an easy way, and you, with a great possibility, get rid of this illness. It says, lose weight, and don’t get fat. But, these trolls have a somewhat good side. They make you feel very well. It says, he is 150 kilos, and it will help recover from this illness without losing weight. Well, you really want to believe in this.” [FGI1-Metin]</p> <p>“There was a foreign group. For a long time, they demonstrated a trolling behavior in relation to removing the ban on marihuana. It cured cancer, and it was beneficial for stomachache... because my father died of cancer. At that time, for example, if they had said there was something like that, well, you really become emotional because the patient is your father.” [FGI1- Gul]</p>
Political-Health	<p>“Let me give examples from the past. Now, when you asked in that way, well, was there a troll in those days? There was an old woman selling lentils, do you remember her? -talking- Thanks to her, people ate lentils as a meal. She was so beneficial that, she was a troll at that time. Well, she appeared on TV, and we, of course, learned it later that the amount of lentils was too much in the country in that period. The question of ‘What can you cook with lentils?’ directed Turkish Republic... Well, it was actually correct. The troll appeared on TV. But now, these two examples, well, I used one of them a lot, too, and I think this had a trolling feature as well” [FGI1- Vedat]</p>

\*An environmental protest to save the trees in Gezi Park, Istanbul, turned into a countrywide fullfledged uprising against the government as a result of the use of teargas and water cannons during the police raid (Varnali & Gorgulu, 2014)

### **The Faculty Members' Feelings about the First Trolling Phenomena**

In this part, the participants' reactions to troll behaviors when they first met these behaviors were gathered. It was striking that few participants reported positive feelings. The fact that the faculty members had high levels of perception and judgment skills in general and specially in their own fields did not cause them to stay away from these behaviors. According to the following quotations, two of the participants defended themselves strongly against such behaviors and managed to avoid trolling behaviors.

*"Well, I just smiled sarcastically"* [FGI1- Metin]

*"Well, we are not that stupid. I didn't make any mistake ..."* [FGI2- Ahu]

In this part, which mostly included negative feelings, such feelings as "anger", "furiousness", "embarrassment", "confusion", "cursing", "entrapping", "being a sucker", "surprise", "restlessness", "dishonesty" and "shyness" were more frequently reported by the faculty members. In this respect, it would not be appropriate to say the target audience of trolls includes uneducated people. Therefore, trolling could be said to be boring and saddening and to bring about such emotions as annoyance. In addition, according to the quotations below, the fact that the faculty members were in such a situation led to questioning.

*"We attend a university, and we then believe in trolls... I totally find it nonsense."* [FGI2- Orhan]

*"I really laughed a lot at myself... We talk about it during lessons, but I myself believed in it."* [FGI1- Gul]

## **DISCUSSION**

This study tried to highlight the faculty members' point of view on trolls. In doing so the researchers tried to understand the faculty around 4 main issues regarding trolls;

- faculty members grasp of the meaning of what a troll is
- faculty members' strategies for understanding a troll
- faculty members' personal incidences with a troll
- faculty members' feelings about their experiences with a troll.

The findings revealed that the faculty members were familiar with a troll and they used different metaphors to talk about trolls. This use of metaphors for trolls indicated that they had sophisticated ideas to represent trolls within a symbolic system. The most striking point on trolls was that the faculty members were aware of the fact that trolls can convey positive attitude as well as a negative one and that does not alter the reality of them being a troll. Parallel to this claim was that the faculty members thought that the trolls are intelligent, extraordinary and creative people who are technology-minded.

As far as the faculty members' strategies for understanding a troll is concerned, they relied on content and source of trolls and their personal qualifications correspondingly. Faculty members said that they would crosscheck for the accuracy of the content and source and believed that their expertise and study field would help them to comprehend the reliability of trolls. They also revealed that they were rather hesitant to accept information at first sight and believed that it was their insight or digital wisdom that kept them from accepting information without questioning it.

The faculty members' incidences of trolls were mostly political, socio-cultural or health wise in content. They believe that it is due to the culture they live in since these issues arise more influential feelings in people in this side of the world. Based on these feelings the faculty members' senses on their experiences with a troll were listed as anger, confusion, shame, feeling trapped and waste of time. Cynicism was also a feeling to resort to.

The researchers' recommendations for further studies on trolling covers; handlings seminars on digital wisdom, digital accuracy and digital literacy for faculty which will help them master an understanding of trolling behavior on media. Any professional development opportunity on social media that involves up to date knowledge is a benefit for the faculty. An information ethics course covering privacy, property, accuracy and accessibility should also be a priority for other researchers who would like to convey information on social media.

## CONCLUSION

Although people at the beginning chose to use Internet for the anonymity it offered (McKenna & Bargh, 2000) as the practices have improved the anonymity issue has become to be a disadvantage. Social media as a part of Internet has not much to do with traditional media use (Correa, Hinsley, & De Zuniga, 2010). Many studies on social media use have concentrated on personality traits, demographic variables, and attitudes. However almost none of them were carried out with the faculty members understanding regarding trolls.

The above discussion has inspired that the faculty can be surveyed into trolls more deeply, and thus gave the researchers a motivation that the faculty members can be investigated in their perceptions of social media. From the analysis it can be understood that the faculty members do not assign trolls into strict categories as being totally evil or an angel but admit the intelligence level in them. This may be in accordance with Coles & West's (2016) research carried out in online sources. However, this situation should not be associated with the characteristics of trolls but rather with the visionary attitudes of the faculty members. Other studies carried out with different groups of participants may place trolls into different labels. Overall the researchers in this paper feel that they have contributed to research of new realities of social media, trolls and in doing so they referred to the faculty members an underused population in this kind of research.

The study was a satisfactory experience for the researchers in getting together with their colleagues on a popular issue in a research medium. The researchers are planning to continue to work on the issue by developing a scale for trolling behavior in a future study.

## BIODATA and CONTACT ADDRESSES of the AUTHORS



**Elif Bugra KUZU DEMIR** currently works as an assistant professor in the Computer Education and Instructional Technologies Program, Buca Faculty of Education at Dokuz Eylul University. She received her PhD. from Computer Education and Instructional Technologies Program at Anadolu University. Her research areas include social networking sites, use and adoption of emerging technologies, computer ethics, wearable technologies, qualitative and mixed method approaches.

**Assist. Prof. Dr. Elif Bugra KUZU DEMIR**  
Dokuz Eylul University, Buca Faculty of Education,  
Department of Computer Education and Instructional Technologies  
Uğur Mumcu Cad., 135. Sk., No: 5 35150, Buca/Izmir, TURKEY  
Phone: +90 232 440 08 08  
E-mail: [elif.demir@deu.edu.tr](mailto:elif.demir@deu.edu.tr)



**Baris MERCIMEK** is a research assistant in the Department of Computer Education and Instructional Technology at Anadolu University. He continues his doctoral studies in the same department. His research interests are multitasking, talent, cognitive load, instructional design and STEM education. He has publications in the mentioned areas.

**Res. Asst. Baris MERCIMEK**  
Department of Computer Education and Instructional Technologies  
Faculty of Education, Anadolu University, 26470, Eskisehir, Turkey  
Phone: +90 2223350580 #1930,  
E-mail: [barismercimek@anadolu.edu.tr](mailto:barismercimek@anadolu.edu.tr)



**Nihal DULKADIR YAMAN** is a research assistant in the Department of Computer Education and Instructional Technology at Anadolu University. She has published articles in both national and international peer-reviewed periodicals, national book chapters and papers submitted to international meetings. Her research interests are interaction in distance education, qualitative data analysis and instructional design.

**Res. Asst. Nihal DULKADIR YAMAN**  
Department of Computer Education and Instructional Technologies,  
Faculty of Education, Anadolu University, 26470, Eskisehir, Turkey  
Phone: +90 2223350580 #1922,  
E-mail: [nihaldulkadir@anadolu.edu.tr](mailto:nihaldulkadir@anadolu.edu.tr)



**Prof. Dr. H. Ferhan ODABASI** is a faculty member of Department of Computer Education and Instructional Technology. She has an MA in English language education and a Ph.D. in educational technology. She has offered several undergraduate and graduate courses on English language education and educational technology. She has supervised several PhD dissertations, published many articles in both national and international peer-reviewed periodicals, supervised and actively took part in national and international research projects, and prepared educational software. She developed "Hypervocab" with Steve Neufeld, and received the European Academic Software Award: Best Software in the Field of Language. She conducts research on safe, responsible and effective use of ICTs by children and families; parental awareness on Internet; professional development of teachers and higher education faculty; transformations stemming from the digital world; digital citizenship and ICT integration at K-12 and higher education institutions. She has been the primary national figure to resort to regarding safe, effective and ethical use of ICTs among children.

**Prof. Dr. H. Ferhan ODABASI**  
Department of Computer Education and Instructional Technologies  
Faculty of Education Anadolu University, 26470, Eskisehir, Turkey  
Phone: +90 2223350580 #1923,  
E-mail: [fodabasi@anadolu.edu.tr](mailto:fodabasi@anadolu.edu.tr)



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