

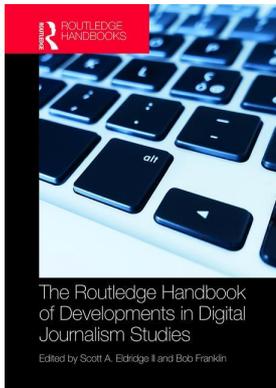
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DEFAMATION IN UNBOUNDED SPACES

Journalism and social media

Diana Bossio and Vittoria Sacco

Normally a new hairstyle wouldn't warrant a court summons, but Ziggy Mossmani was adamant that his hair had made him the target of defamation in the mainstream media. Mossmani's choice of a distinctive 'mullet' haircut, which was shaved at the sides to showcase long black hair at the back, came to public attention in 2015 when photographer Jeremy Nool posted a photo of Mossmani at a birthday party on his Facebook page. Over the next months, the post gained some notoriety, with thousands of comments and memes made about Mossmani's hairstyle. The memes and comments were shared widely via a number of social media platforms, including through the creation of a new Facebook page called "The Holy Mullet". While the memes about the hairstyle were mostly the creation of external Facebook users, it was the mainstream media's reportage on the social media phenomenon and subsequent nationwide attention that drew Mossmani's ire. He proceeded with legal action against the mainstream media organizations the *Daily Mail*, *The Daily Telegraph*, and radio station KIIS FM, arguing that the attention of journalists, rather than the memes themselves, had made him the subject of ridicule. Underlying Mossmani's lawsuit is a particular understanding of journalism's legitimacy and authority in society. Mockery of Mossmani's hairstyle in the mainstream media 'of record' is thus much more likely to injure his reputation than a meme on social media – even if that meme is seen by many more people. While Mossmani could reasonably expect ridicule, mockery, and even contempt as part of the flows of social media communication about his hairstyle, his lawsuit suggests an expectation that journalism's social authority will mean adherence to more stringent ethical and legal standards.

Mossmani's court case is a contemporary example of the new dynamics of journalism and defamation in online and social media-enabled environments. While traditional journalism continues to be framed by particular norms of ethical conduct, the modes of communication that have framed these norms have fundamentally changed. Indeed, the emergence of social media communication environments has changed the traditionally 'one-way' communication relationship between journalists and their audiences (Singer et al., 2011). In the context of journalism, social media has assisted in creating seemingly 'unbounded spaces' for user participation where audiences are able to critique, re-present, dismiss, or even completely ignore the journalist.

Focusing on defamation, this chapter uses examples from the Australian news media to illustrate how traditional norms of public and participatory communication are contested and negotiated by journalists and their audiences in online spaces. We frame this analysis with conceptualizations of public dialogue in online spaces. Indeed, the ideal of participatory communication

(Jenkins, 2006) is the creation of online publics that allow for dynamic civic engagement in social and cultural issues (Lévy, 1997). This ideal has been framed by the representation of unified groups working collaboratively within networks to debate and prompt change (Livingstone, 2005). However, the reality of this participatory online culture has been much more complex. In particular, traditional norms of public dialogue – framed by professional ideologies and governmental and legal norms – have become sites of contestation in online spaces, as audiences resist or recreate the power structures that frame public dialogue, sometimes in deliberately defamatory ways, such as trolling or flaming. Journalists themselves are often engaging with or being targeted by deliberately defamatory commentary and discussion, which are seemingly part of online news flows and often posted without repercussion. Journalists however, are still bound by professional, ethical, and legal norms of practice in these spaces. Journalists have thus had to find ways to negotiate new forms of online engagement to safely and productively participate within online cultures prioritizing authenticity and, sometimes, to deal with deliberately disruptive and defamatory content. This chapter begins by describing the traditional legal and social frameworks for understanding defamation and its importance in journalism practice. We then explore how these norms have been contested in social media spaces that prioritize particular communication cultures, including disruptions to public dialogue in the form of trolling and flaming. Finally, using examples from the news media in Australia, this chapter illustrates how journalists are using new online practices to negotiate civil dialogue in ‘unbounded’ online spaces.

Journalism and defamation

The law of defamation is a traditional protection against public attacks on the character and reputation of a person. Though laws of defamation are particularized according to country, its origin in the Western liberal tradition is based on the damage that public slander or defamatory publication could inflict on individuals, their personal reputations and their business dealings. Defamation is in fact one of the oldest injuries recognized in law; the ancient Romans first utilized a kind of actionable defamation law to prevent aggrieved parties using violence to uphold their reputation (Troiano, 2006: 1451). The law was adopted more broadly in seventeenth-century England after the political and judicial decline of the English monarchy and its subsequent failure to protect the reputation of the royal court from the burgeoning and unregulated popularity of the printing press (Veder, 1903: 547). The theory underpinning the law of defamation is that a person’s reputation is invaluable. Indeed, in the violent and hierarchical era of Roman rule and even until the English monarchy, dishonor was most often an element in a civil action – and a good reputation its best defense (ibid: 548). While much has changed politically and socially since then, reputation and good standing in the minds of others is still seen as an important measure of a person’s personal and professional character, and thus, the publication of offensive and untrue statements by journalists and others is still an actionable offense.

Defamation was not actually a concern for journalists until fairly recently; journalists were in fact initially the unregulated purveyors of social and political gossip and intrigue. The industrialization of news in the early 1900s was marked by a period of ‘yellow’ journalism, where newspaper editors competed for audience attention with tabloid-style scandals and opinionated reportage (Schudson, 1978). However, the increasing professionalization of journalism beginning in the 1920s resulted in an ideological preoccupation with norms of legal and ethical professional behavior. New journalism professional associations in the US and Britain created codes of ethics for practice, with the aim both to engender societal trust through responsible reportage and to cement journalists’ social status as the only providers of reliable news. Traditional norms of ethical journalistic practice emphasize both truth and objectivity above all else. Through adherence

to accurate and unbiased reportage, journalists maintain a social contract to uphold and animate democracy by providing information that enables public discussion and debate. Just as dishonor was the motivating factor in the initial definition of defamation laws, defaming a person or organization in reportage would also mean dishonoring the ideological framework of truth and objectivity inherent to journalistic practice.

This framework of journalism practice assumes a particular kind of communicative relationship with the public. Traditional journalistic practice is framed by understanding of the public as a stable and unified mass audience, reliant on journalism for reliable information. Benedict Anderson's (1983) early conception of an "imagined community" understood the public as socially constructed through the shared representation of a public, an affinity created through media representation of a national, unified public to which it 'speaks'. The conception of a socially constructed and unified public has been an important aspect of the understanding of journalism practice and the reifying of journalism's importance to society. Within this conception, audiences behave as part of an ordered social structure that conforms to the 'correct' versions of both media engagement and unified public dialogue that contributes to democracy. This, of course, creates a power dynamic that is exploited by journalists and their organizational structures to ensure their dominance in public and social life (Ang, 1991: 23). However, these previously stable and industrialized conceptions of audience have been disrupted somewhat by the social actions and interactions afforded by social media technologies.

In this chapter, social media are defined as:

web-based services that allow individuals to: 1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system; 2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection; and 3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

(boyd and Ellison, 2008: 211)

Digital technologies and the creation of new online spaces such as social media platforms inevitably shift the form of communication between journalists and their audiences from a one-to-many approach to a many-to-many conversation (Rosen, 2006). Similarly, the increasing use of online and social media has enabled audience participation in the different stages of news production, distribution, and response (Deuze et al., 2007). The emphasis on participation and sharing of personal expression and content, especially on social media, has meant user comments, Facebook and Instagram 'likes', tweets, and other forms of informal discussion have become increasingly important aspects of engagement with news. Furthermore, traditionally 'silent' news audiences have increasingly directed the content of online news and social issues through these forms of engagement (Lewis et al., 2014).

The social possibilities of online communication were forged around the de-territorialized, nonhierarchical and expressive nature of the medium, where individuals would be able to forge multiple relationships and groups according to interest (Vedel, 2003: 246–247). Many scholars have been enthusiastic about the positive social and political potential of online and social media-enabled communication. While some have suggested online potential to create a virtual public sphere (Loader, 1997), others have claimed that the web represents an open and egalitarian space for citizenship (Lévy, 2002) as well as a place where individuals can interact without interference from governmental and market power (Morris and Delafon, 2002). These online and social media spaces could thus bring greater engagement and participation in democratic society (Bimber, 1998; Rheingold, 1991). Research about social media has been similarly positive about the potential to foster civic engagement and collective action because of its connectedness, speed of communication, relative cost-effectiveness, and power to engage feedback loops (Obar et al.,

2012). Indeed, positive reciprocity and exchange for mutual benefit has been shown to increase the possibilities for more active discourse and participation and strengthening community links (Sankaranarayanan and Vassileva, 2009).

On the other hand, other research has criticized an overly positive approach to online and social media communication, suggesting they are simply additional channels for political debate (Margolis and Resnick, 2000) or a tool that only empowers those who can access technologies, platforms, and languages (Fraser, 1990). Others (Koch, 2005: 160–161) have suggested that online and social media communication has fallen short of the ideal of public communication because of its distributed nature and the poor quality of online discussion. Some research (Thelwall and Sud, 2011) has shown that users usually make singular contributions to debate, access only opinions they share, and often disrespect other users' opinions if they differ from their own. It is therefore relevant to keep examining how traditional norms of public dialogue are negotiated in online spaces, in particular in the context of journalism.

Online spaces and challenges to civic dialogue

The differing views about the effect of online and social media on news and public dialogue illustrates the difficulty of defining norms of communication in online public spheres. The global links and distributed nature of communication on social media platforms has meant traditional 'rules of engagement' between journalists and audiences have fundamentally changed. Social media enables discussion between larger groups of disparate users based on shared interest in a topic, event, or commercial activity and linked through sharing of content, hashtags, or 'likes'. Bruns and Burgess (2011) define these connections as "ad hoc publics", where short-term discussion networks might appear around particular events, posts, or content and some users might become influential through their engagement with these topics or events. For example, an ad hoc public can form around a Twitter hashtag, creating short-term discussion or influential social commentary. Ad hoc publics are thus not static and may change or become part of established online communities over time.

As different social media platforms curate and mediate content more actively, streams of online engagement mimic news flows. Bruns and Burgess (2011) suggest, using Twitter as an example:

these days, a curated version of the hashtag stream may even be broadcast alongside television news coverage or displayed on a public screen. Furthermore, the speed with which individual users can initiate social media discussion about an event, which can then create an ad hoc public, also suggests the new dominance of the audience over professional journalists in the news cycle.

Within these social media spaces, news becomes a distributed conversation where a number of individuals are responding simultaneously to events as a kind of "ambient journalism" (Hermida, 2011). Social media interactions can thus be seen as an aggregated form of journalistic content, experienced as a constant ambient presence in social media spaces but becoming more explicit when major news breaks. Shaw et al. (2013: 23) suggest this results in a "public and collective" expression of public affect about particular news events, with or without connection with traditional news organizations and journalists. Social media platforms encourage interpersonal connection through networks of followers; similar to Anderson's idea of 'imagined communities', most users imagine this community of followers when posting information about themselves or events – and furthermore, that those followers are just like them (Bruns, 2011).

Thus, what has changed in this new constitution of public dialogue and civic engagement is the roles of participants and the rules of engagement in participatory forms of communication.

Crawford (2009: 528) suggests online spaces create interconnection through “access to the details of someone’s everyday life, as prosaic as they often are, which contributes to the sense of ‘ambient intimacy’ in social media”. This constant access to ambient intimacy, as well as the dominance of affective content based on personal opinion and experience and, finally, the centrality of the user in the construction of ad hoc publics engaged with news, creates public spaces with very different cultures, politics, and rules of civic engagement. Indeed, participants in such complex and distributed online publics collectively negotiate the roles – and rules – of social relations in these spaces, with these negotiations unfolding through both positive and negative feedback (Shaw et al., 2013: 26). While the interpersonal connections forged in online spaces through sharing personal emotion and experience on social media empowers audiences and creates communities, they can also create negative interactions and experiences. As Crawford (2009: 528) suggests, this online intimacy can “generate discomfort, confusion and claustrophobia, amongst a range of negative effects. People often express anger, sadness, fear, and resentment. They may also misrepresent themselves and lie”. Participation in the intimate relations of online communication do not always adhere to the traditional rules of civic engagement and can thus result in aberrant forms of communication.

In this chapter, we situate trolling and flaming as aberrant forms of online communication, defined as deliberately defamatory acts aimed at disrupting the norms of public dialogue online. Trolling can be defined as the act of posting inflammatory or off-topic material online to create discord in online discussion. Trolling is somewhat complex in intent, though most online communities understand trolling as disruption to online discussion. The most common type of trolling is a form of dark humor, where trolls deceive users into an angry or emotional response by convincing users that they believe their offensive statements. Other types of trolling include attempting to thwart discussion of political or social issues as a form of activism or silencing particular online commentators. Flaming differs from trolling because it is a less complex act; flaming is simply the act of posting offensive messages sent to a particular person through discussion forums, social media, or messaging services. A group of users may direct ‘flames’ to one person, or two or more users can essentially trade insults over time in a ‘flame war’ – the intent simply to victimize other users. Both trolling and flaming are intentionally offensive and defamatory and have the intent to disrupt online public dialogue.

Describing participation in online communities as a kind of “digital citizenship”, McCosker (2014) suggests these kinds of aberrant behaviors are often seen as problematic because they do not adhere to the ethical and legal boundaries of traditional public communication. Aberrant online behaviors like trolling and flaming disrupt the democratic and participatory potential so often celebrated in online spaces; however, McCosker (2014) argues

a truly pluralistic participatory experience includes not just being affected by new forms and flows of networked media content and communication, but also the power to affect with new forms of reciprocal capacity to act out and even ‘act up’.

Thus, while idealized or unitary modes of participatory online engagement represent this disruption as defamatory and undemocratic, these aberrant behaviors can actually serve to better animate public engagement by allowing contested interactions.

While trolling and flaming are often meant to offend, some of these aberrant online behaviors are also meant to express disagreement, opposing opinion, or even satire. For example, Bergstrom (2011) suggests trolling is often intended to make another user the victim, but often as the result of a joke. While this would often be considered defamation in traditional public spheres (and is often considered defamation by the victim), trolling and flaming appear to be part of the communication flows of online communities. However, trolls or flammers sometimes also intend to

deceive or manipulate online discussion for a particular political aim (Osnos, 2016). Similarly, there have been examples of on- and offline stalking, particularly of females, on social media emerging from misogynistic and homophobic attitudes (Sierra, 2014). Thus, many of these discursive forms of aberrance (quite apart from physically dangerous behaviors) are the affective forms of participation enabled by the intimate and distributed character of social media communication and might intensify or fall away depending on engagement and interest (McCosker, 2014). For many users, these forms of communication are simply part of broader digital citizenship, the participation and contribution to social and cultural life through the particular affordances of social media. While these combative forms of behavior can be part of the flows of information on social media, they differ exponentially from the tightly governed, structured forms of communication created by traditional norms of professional journalism.

Journalistic participation in social media spaces

Journalists have used new forms of online and social media communication by engaging with audiences online, using online content in reportage, and collaborating with audiences in the investigation and distribution of news. This audience engagement is represented by participatory or reciprocal forms of journalism, defined as the process by which journalists and their audiences are involved in the news production cycle and community-building activities that gravitate around news (Singer et al., 2011). However, online interactions between journalists and audiences have not always fulfilled the characteristics of participation due to ongoing tension about just how open professional journalism practice should be to audience interaction, especially potentially defamatory commentary. While these can sometimes be productive challenges serving to illustrate where innovation or reconstitution of journalism practice can improve public dialogue, there have nonetheless been issues in the structure and governance of this public dialogue, particularly when users engage in aberrant online behavior.

While the ambient flows of social media discussion create cultures of ‘authentic’ communication that can be both civil and aberrant and that affect users without repercussion, professional journalism is framed by its ethical and legal commitment to civil public dialogue. Therefore, even in these unbounded spaces, journalistic reportage is still regarded as a product that adheres to professional practices and represents ethical social dialogue. For example, the former Australian Treasurer Joe Hockey successfully sued one of Australia’s largest media organizations, Fairfax Media, for defamation following the publication of two tweets. The treasurer was awarded \$80,000 for two tweets reading: “Treasurer Hockey for sale”, which were distributed on Twitter via Fairfax’s Victorian newspaper *The Age* (Joe Hockey, 2015). In finding for Hockey, Justice Richard White acknowledged the need to promote news stories; however, he said the “140 character limit on tweets would still have permitted alternative forms of eye-catching promotion of the articles” (ibid., 2015). Justice White’s assessment suggests journalists must continue to abide by traditional modes of verification, accuracy, and objectivity, despite changes in communication technologies and their associated dialogue cultures. Thus, it seems journalists and news organizations are still held to professional, ethical, and legal boundaries even in seemingly unbounded online and social media spaces.

As journalists have transitioned into online practice, they have increasingly had to delve into the “contested publics” that form around particular news content (McCosker, 2014). As well as discussion and engagement with news events, journalists are also exposed to and interact with comments on news stories, which can often be defamatory, obscene, racist, and insulting to both the journalist and subject of news (Noci et al., 2012: 52). Within social media and news website comment sections especially, there is extensive scope for aberrant participation. Recent studies have shown news events, especially those mentioning politics and religion, are most likely

to garner confrontational and negative commentary by online users (Thelwall and Sud, 2011). Compared to other forms of online engagement, comments on news events can be continually defamatory because they are difficult to delete and, if shared, reach a large number of people (Carter, 2015). Journalists have suggested the most difficult aspect of engaging with online audiences is the negativity and abuse that anonymous comments can foster. Hiding their identity empowers online users to voice the strongest opinions and theories, often exceeding the norms of civil public dialogue (Santana, 2014). Moreover, research has shown comments by anonymous authors have been divisive, rather than unifying online communities and discussion (Hlavach and Freivogel, 2011: 31). Finally, it was shown that in online communities where people could not participate anonymously, participants were more inclined to adhere to community rules (Blanchard et al., 2011). Despite the aims of participatory and open communication in online spaces, journalists and news organizations have found it impossible not to structure, govern, and moderate public dialogue about news in some way.

In this context, many media organizations have implemented guidelines about how journalists can and should participate in online discussion. The two most common strategies to moderate online news comments are pre- and post-moderation. Post-moderation is preferred by organizations because it is less labor-intensive and costly than pre-moderation (Reich, 2011). Post-moderation does not review comments prior to publication; thus, media organizations consider themselves “not legally responsible for the content of those contributions the moment they appear” (Singer et al., 2011: 124). However, there is a legal responsibility to respond in post-publication moderation, and if organizations fail to do so, especially in the case of abusive comments, they could be legally prosecuted (Canter, 2013). Thus, the repercussions of unbounded online spaces do apply to professional journalists and their news organizations and thus, several traditional practices are often implemented to ensure costly business or reputational damage. When post-moderation is effectively applied, it has been shown to decrease abusive comments. However, it has also led to fewer comments and less engagement with online news (Hille and Bakker, 2014). For example, some media organizations have effectively ‘outsourced’ comment moderation to social media platforms, rather than enable comments on their own websites. Several media organizations and publications, including *USA Today*, *Popular Science*, and Reuters, have ceased reader comments on their websites to encourage discussion on social media platforms (Ellis, 2015; see also Ksiazek and Springer, this volume, Chapter 36). This has worked to decrease the number of anonymous, abusive comments, but there has also been a subsequent reduction in the number of posted comments overall (Hille and Bakker, 2014). Furthermore, interaction has been more prominent between different users rather than with journalists (ibid, 2014). This is probably related both to journalists’ lack of time and fear of losing their institutional authority in online discussion spaces. Journalists thus seem to replicate a system of one-way communication, failing to utilize engagement capabilities on these platforms due to the legal and ethical ramifications of ‘uncivil’ dialogue (Domingo, 2008). While this reversion to traditional communication formats has stifled some abusive commentary, other journalists have actively negotiated their own and their audiences’ participation in online spaces to productively respond to defamation and abuse.

Journalistic negotiation of social media spaces

Journalists have varied many of their traditional practices to participate in online communication in an ethical and professional way. But can journalists truly participate in ‘unbounded spaces’ when this labor can result in potentially dangerous forms of incivility? While much research has focused on why aberrant behaviors occur and how they impact on users, there has been little focus on the way trolling, flaming, and other potentially defamatory commentary forms part of online labor, particularly for journalists and other media content producers. Furthermore,

there is little information about the kinds of engagement professional communicators believe are adequate to work within these complex and disruptive online spaces. The labor of online journalists and commentators, particularly female, LGBTI, and ethnically diverse journalists, has been impacted by defamatory trolling and flaming directed at them in online spaces. According to recent analysis by the *Guardian* of more than 70 million comments left on its site since 2006, they found the highest level of trolling was addressed to women, ethnic and religious minorities, and LGBTI people, regardless of the topic discussed and despite the majority of their opinion writers being white men (Gardiner et al., 2016). Similarly, an Australian survey developed by national steering committee Women in Media supported by the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (Australian Media, 2016) found female journalists were most likely to experience trolling, while freelancers are most likely to be cyber-stalked (see also Nettleton, this volume, Chapter 32).

The Australian columnist Van Badham has experienced first-hand the defamatory trolling that comes with online journalism. Badham writes mostly about feminist issues, which she suggests makes her a particular target for defamatory comments and trolling. She has also been subjected to offline stalking, threatening materials sent in the mail, and one online menace even impersonated her partner and her friends (O'Brien, 2016). Badham (2014) suggests female journalists and columnists are particular targets for flaming and trolling, as this reflects the broader misogyny that attempts to silence women within society: "The experience of being cyberstalked, poison-penned, monitored, physically followed, threatened, vexatiously litigated and even subject to bomb threats is a matter of record amongst [. . .] women". These trolling behaviors are perpetrated mainly by anonymous sexist and misogynist 'keyboard warriors', enabled by the culture of online and social media platforms (O'Brien, 2016).

Female columnists have negotiated their own 'rules of engagement' for dealing with trolls and defamatory comments in online spaces. Badham for example, receives up to 100 defamatory and abusive comments per day, and while she does employ tactics like blocking and ignoring commenters, occasionally she will engage with abusive or trolling commenters. She will employ tactics like 'kittening' – replying with images of kittens to repetitious trolling – or using mockery to "make an example" of some trolls (Case, 2014). This simulates the affective-expressive intent of the original trolling; these engagements are not meant to be dialogical but rather express the often-confrontational nature of discourse in online and social media spaces. Furthermore, 'counter-trolling' by using witty remarks or other playfully disruptive modes of response cleverly reflects the expressive and inflammatory intent of trolling without engaging in potentially defamatory acts.

Other female columnists like feminist writer Clementine Ford have employed much more vigorous governance of participation in 'her' online spaces. Ford uses her Facebook page to discuss her columns and feminist issues. It is also the site of the most virulent abusive commentary, and thus Ford places limits on the kinds of discussion that take place on her page. For example, the first post pinned on her Facebook page states:

This is a feminist page. It is my page. I post about things that I'm passionate about or that interest me, or issues in society that I want to see change [. . .]. You may not share all of my opinions, and that's okay. But this is my page, and I will keep posting my opinions. Not yours and not anybody else's. If this doesn't suit you, perhaps consider whether or not this is the right place for you.

In this way Ford asserts her 'ownership' and control of both her Facebook page and the discourse that appears on it – this is somewhat unusual for typically open and participatory online spaces. Some online researchers (Crawford, 2009: 529) have suggested users often lose control over communication in ambient social media spaces due to the 'always on' nature of online technologies.

However, in the negotiation of the roles and rules of online spaces, Ford has merged traditional broadcast controls over spaces attributed to her with other participatory forms of online engagement.

Ford also actively responds to trolling or flaming she receives, using screenshots of abuse with identifying information so perpetrators are publically shamed by her large number of followers. In one such incident, Ford shared a screenshot of a sexually explicit comment she received from a man whose Facebook profile listed his employer. Ford posted an image of the comment, along with other posts from the man's Facebook page. She then emailed the images to his employer, asking if they were aware of his behavior. Some days later Ford shared a message sent by the employer announcing the man's employment was terminated after an investigation into his online behavior. Ford received a deluge of abuse accusing her of causing the man to lose his job, but Ford was unrepentant in her use of a fairly traditional form of response to defamatory content. She suggested in another post: "He is responsible for the things he writes and the attitudes he holds", and these attitudes would not be acceptable in professional practice (Clementine Ford describes, 2015). In her online "Daily Life" column, published by Fairfax, Ford said her justification for these responses was based on her own negotiation of the roles and rules of online engagement: "There are basically no consequences for men who behave like this, so we have to start making consequences for them" (ibid, 2015). Ford's response suggests online spaces do not have the ethical or legal boundaries around what constitutes civil public engagement and, thus, no consequences for the personal and professional injury aberrant discursive behavior might cause.

There is no doubt trolling and flaming does have material consequences, especially for female journalists and media producers. Female journalists have reported ongoing abusive commentary and stalking behaviors have resulted in lost professional labor, wages, and personal time due to consistent logging and responding to trolls and flammers (Friedersdorf, 2014). Some have suggested the impact of dealing with this behavior has a chilling effect on female journalists, evidenced by the dominance of men in online spaces (Dumas, 2016). While there are methods for ignoring, blocking, and reporting abusive online commentary, it is often very difficult for female journalists to engage in online public dialogue without also needing to negotiate aberrant behaviors that come with it. Journalists like Ford suggests the real solution is for

society to collectively challenge the kind of behavior that thinks it's ok for people to either publicly or privately message you things about violence that they want to do to your body, violence that should be done to your family, all with the intent of scaring you into silence.

(Dumas, 2016)

For Ford, this has meant engaging her large online following to reflect the same confrontational discourse back to trolls and flammers. For example, a man sent a message to Ford's Facebook page threatening to rape and bash her. Ford then shared the message publicly as a screenshot on her Facebook page, which has about 45,000 likes (Caggiano, 2015). The screenshot garnered hundreds of comments from other users on the social media platforms of the identified troll. The man who sent the abuse subsequently apologized, ironically after receiving a number of comments on his social media. In publically apologizing, he said, "everybody should think before they post trolling comments online, as they may receive a bigger response than they intended" (ibid, 2015). While the lack of acknowledgment of the misogyny inherent in his apology shows that Ford's technique does not necessarily create social change, it does effectively reflect onto the perpetrator the personal and professional injury trolling and flaming can inflict. Rather than going through the impossibly costly and laborious process of suing every troll or flamer for

defamation, Badham and Ford have shown reflecting the characteristics of aberrant behavior back onto the perpetrator still allows an authentic engagement with social media cultures of public dialogue but is also professionally safe and legitimate.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have focused on forms of defamation to understand how social media platforms simultaneously empower and limit the spaces for dialogue between journalists and news audiences. While aberrant online behavior such as trolling and flaming is intentionally defamatory, it can be seen as part of the ambient news flows of communication on social media, where ad hoc publics form around shared interests or issues but also attract divisive and confrontational forms of dialogue. While the ideal of online communication is to be participatory and unified around shared civic goals, sites of contestation in public spaces, even those that are intentionally uncivil, can also act to animate online discussion and action. This aberrant behavior has been described as an unacknowledged aspect of the culture of social media interactions, much maligned and yet often occurring without repercussion. Nonetheless, for professional journalists engaging in this space, not only are there still repercussions for their own unprofessional behavior in social media spaces, but they are also often the target of abusive dialogue. As defamation suits against journalists and news organizations have shown, change of publication platforms and their associated cultures has not exempted journalists from the very ethical and legal norms that they strove to commit to in order to engender public trust and their own authority in the public sphere. While that social authority has become much more diffuse, journalists' product – the news – is still framed by the norms of journalism practice that uphold civic engagement with audiences. Therefore, this chapter has shown journalists, especially those who risk being victimized and silenced by targeted abuse, have had to negotiate their own forms of social media 'rules of engagement' in 'unbounded' online spaces. Without professional, ethical or legal norms to fall back on, journalists are instead negotiating new forms of online engagement that prioritize online cultures of collaboration and authenticity but also structure some boundaries around deliberately defamatory or abusive content.

Further reading

This chapter has benefitted from prior research published by McCosker (2014) on trolling, as well as Crawford's (2009) earlier work on listening on social media. Understanding of journalists' negotiation of online spaces was informed by Hermida's (2011) "Fluid Spaces, Fluid Journalism: Lessons in Participatory Journalism" and Hille and Bakker's (2014) "Engaging the Social News User: Comments on News Sites and Facebook". An excellent contextual resource for this chapter was the edited collection *Participatory Journalism: Guarding Open Gates at Online Newspapers* (2011) produced by Singer et al. The incredibly misogynistic and damaging impacts of trolling of female journalists continues to be underrepresented by critical work in academia but is bravely reported by some of the female journalists and news organizations cited in this chapter.

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