

Student survival guide -trolls & democracy

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Research

- ▶ Created after research on extent of problem started at WJEC 2016
- ▶ Snapshot of research available at [InPublishing](#)



A screenshot of the InPublishing website. The header includes the InPubWeekly logo, the main title "InPublishing", and navigation links for "REGISTER FOR MAGAZINE", "NEWS MEDIA", "CONSUMER/B2B MEDIA", "DIRECTORY", "DIARY", "PODCASTS", "WEBINARS", "GUIDES", and "JOBS". A search bar is also present. The main content area features a large banner with the text "TO PERCEPTION SAS... AND BEYOND" and "ADVERTISEMENT MANAGEMENT". Below the banner is a featured article titled "Democracy under threat? Journalists need help in handling internet trolls" by Claire Wolfe, dated 07/02/2019. The article text reads: "The nature of journalism puts reporters in the firing line of internet trolls. Claire Wolfe argues that without being properly trained in how to deal with attacks, journalists could self-censor their comments online and dilute their role as guardians of freedom of speech and the exchange of ideas." The Trade House Media logo is visible in the bottom left and right corners of the page.

Research



- ▶ Wolfe C, (2018) 'Democracy under Threat? Journalists need help at handling Internet Trolls', in Anti-social Media? Ethical Space: The International Journal of Communications Ethics Abramis Academic: Suffolk.
- ▶ Wolfe, C in Mair, J et al (ed) (2018) Book chapter: Democracy under Threat? Journalists need help at handling Internet Trolls, in Anti-social Media? Suffolk: Abramis academic publishing

Research

- ▶ Interviewed 20 journalists and 40 journalism undergraduates. As with other studies it showed women were targeted more than men.
- ▶ Examples included an experienced national journalist having his Facebook page destroyed after he infiltrated and exposed a Fascist party and writers suffering troll-fests
- ▶ Many cases since eg [Louise Minchin BBC Breakfast-troll unmasked & jailed](#)
- ▶ MAY 2021 Unesco surveyed 901 journalists from 125 countries. Nearly three-quarters of women experienced online hostility/a quarter threatened with sexual violence and death (minorities targeted more) April 2020 the [Media Freedom Rapid Response Unit](#) Europe-wide mechanism, which tracks, monitors and responds to violations of press and media freedom in EU Member States and Candidate Countries.

Safeguarding & confidence building

- ▶ Students need guidelines ideally **before** any incidents
- ▶ Confidence to know how to communicate safely online
- ▶ Awareness of importance of debate for democracy
- ▶ Know where to get support & guidance

Survival Guide- 25 recommendations

1. Make sure you identify what support material/guidance there is before embarking on developing your career online. You wouldn't start driving without reading the Highway Code so why hurtle into a potentially dangerous space online without taking precautions and finding out what to do if something goes wrong.
2. Keep up-to-date with your knowledge of the laws around harassment online and digital security.
3. Ensure all non-essential work profiles are private. This will help you to develop- and be able to distinguish- a private and public profile online.



4. Set up a small network with a few fellow students to discuss good practice online. Share any negative comments/ incidents that may involve you-before responding/taking action if possible. This can also help to identify any trolls targeting particular groups and identifying if they need to be blocked. In some cases, it may help if they are visibly supporting your comments. There can be strength in numbers.
5. However, ensure anyone responding in your network, and also any friends avoid becoming abusive themselves or this will undermine your case should it be necessary to make a formal complaint.
6. Never reply to a comment instantly and in anger. Allow time to cool down, discuss things with your support network and or tutor before deciding whether to respond and, if so, how.



7. Never post anything when under the influence of alcohol or drugs as this is when you are likely to make poor judgments
8. Consider work carefully before publication.
9. Ensure you have researched your topic well and make fact-based statements. Take particular care over unconfirmed rumours/unverified facts, especially with breaking stories.
10. If you have made a genuine mistake, correct it and apologise. Do not engage further.



11. Remember that posting online means you are effectively broadcasting- and potentially to a worldwide audience. Posts that you may think are restricted through 'private' settings can quickly be shared with wider audiences.
12. Try to avoid statements that may be taken the wrong way or interpreted incorrectly.
13. Think carefully about issues that are challenging or controversial in any way and be prepared for some negative feedback. Journalists tend not to state their political preferences or anything that compromises their impartiality.





14. Be confident in your views and opinions – they are as valid as anyone else's- do not stop writing after being targeted by a troll, as that is what they want.
15. Remember whatever you write is out there and cannot be removed-even if you delete it.
16. Ask for tutor guidance when you are unsure if feedback is passionate disagreement (even if painful) or an abusive attack. Seek help in handling the comment where necessary. Try not to be embarrassed by what might have been said. Tutors will have seen much material like this before and can offer some good advice. All material will be treated sensitively and confidentially. etc. Rape or death threats are serious and should not be ignored.



17. Remember that when you respond to comments you are replying to 'the world' not just that person commenting online.
18. Ignore some comments. This can at times be the solution to avoid getting into more of an argument or unhealthy debate. You can just thank them for their contribution and leave it. Turn notifications off.
19. Try not to take it personally. This can be hard, but where you are blogging as a journalist, think of yourself as a professional doing your job (even if you aren't yet being paid). You are continuing the important role as guardians of freedom of the press and freedom of expression.



20. Don't let it show that you have been riled/upset. Try to rise above it and be upbeat and personable to everyone, even if it's tempting not to be! Remember that for every negative comment there are many positive ones.
21. With persistent and offensive comments keep reporting the abuse to those who can block it (Facebook/Twitter etc.) until it stops. Be aware of in-Tweet report buttons
22. Remember that you are likely to be of greater interest to trolls if you work in the media industries so take care with all posts- work and private.



23. If you have been abused/threatened take a screen shot as evidence if needed. This is particularly important if you are being physically threatened, as the police will likely need contacting with a view to a prosecution.
24. Certain topics are likely to attract unpopular opinion. These include issues involving gender issues, feminism, politics, race, religion and sports, especially when you have made your preference known. Do not be put off writing about them, but responses should aim to explain your argument clearly with supporting facts.
25. Hide any outrageously rude or offensive comments such as extreme racist, sexist and homophobic views. This can also be done on comments about YouTube uploads.

Seminar task- in breakout groups



- ▶ Q1. Have you ever suffered abuse/felt threatened after posting material online or on social media?
- ▶ Q2 If so how have you dealt with it?
- ▶ Q3 Do you feel this has curbed your ability/willingness to express yourself online/on social media?
- ▶ Q4 Read the materials published by Claire Wolfe in the folder in Learning resources and decide how you could handle Internet Trolls. Draw up a list
- ▶ Be prepared to share your views and your list with the whole group.

Questions?

- ▶ Thank you for listening
- ▶ Happy to respond to questions either in this session or afterwards . Email c.wolfe@worc.ac.uk

References

▶ **Publications:**

- ▶ Wolfe C (2019) 'Democracy under Threat? Journalists need help at handling Internet Trolls, in Anti-social Media? Reprinted in by-monthly magazine InPublishing (Jan 7 2019)
https://www.inpublishing.co.uk/kb/articles/democracy_under_threat_journalists_need_help_in_handling_internet_trolls_2044.aspx
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