Bigotry online: YouTube commenters' responses to the 'give nothing to racism' campaign in New Zealand
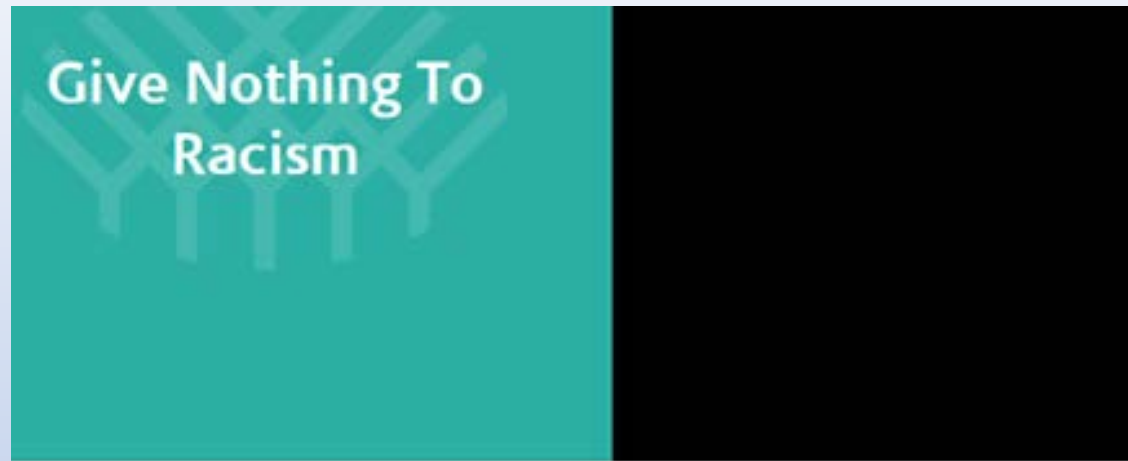
Philippa Smith

Institute of Culture, Discourse & Communication

Auckland University of Technology

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Auckland New Zealand.

Virtual Voices Project - (V V P)

- **Understanding speech and communicative behaviour in online environments.**

- **From dangerous speech to misinformation – where do we draw the line when it comes to free speech as a human right?**

- **What counter speech strategies in response to socially unacceptable discourse might be developed ?**

Social media as a 'virtual' public sphere?

Habermas (1989) "Public Sphere" of the 18th C intellectual bourgeoisie helped to shape public opinion through rational thinking, social capital and **freedom of expression**

the media act to facilitate discourse in a public sphere (2006)

'Virtual' public sphere in the digital age of participatory culture

for political communication

- opportunity for wider number of people to contribute to public discourses.... though amateur engagement may be "subjected to personal motivations" (Mahlouly, 2013)

CMC "fertile ground for conflict… linguistic aggression" (Hardaker, 2015)

Hate speech
abusive, insulting, intimidating, harassing, and/or incites to violence, hatred, or discrimination… race, ethnic origin, religion, gender, age, physical condition, disability, sexual orientation, political conviction, and so forth.

(Erjavec & Kovacˇic, 2012: 899)

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Two-people-talking-logo.jpg

Trolling – intentional "online antagonism undertaken for amusement's sake"

(Hardaker, 2015:202)

Flaming
"hostile and aggressive interaction"

(Thurlow et al, 2004:70)

Offensive speech

Bullying

Dangerous speech

Counter speech

 "any speech that counters, rebuts, or negates the effect in any way of speech that we dislike or disagree with" eg denounce or reaching out to persuade people to speak otherwise.

(Stossen, 2018)

Key questions

1. What discursive strategies are enacted in the expression of incivility on digital platforms?

2. What counter response mechanisms are used by others towards inappropriate behaviour/communication online?

https://givenothing.co.nz/

Discourse-historical Approach (DHA) of Critical Discourse Studies

(Reisigl and Wodak, 2001:40f)

Concept of 'context' based on:

1. the broader sociopolitical and historical context, which discursive practices are embedded in and related to.

2. the current context

3. the immediate, language or text-internal co-text;

4. the intertextual and interdiscursive relationships between utterances, texts, genres and discourses.

'Give Nothing to Racism' 2017

Taika Waiti –
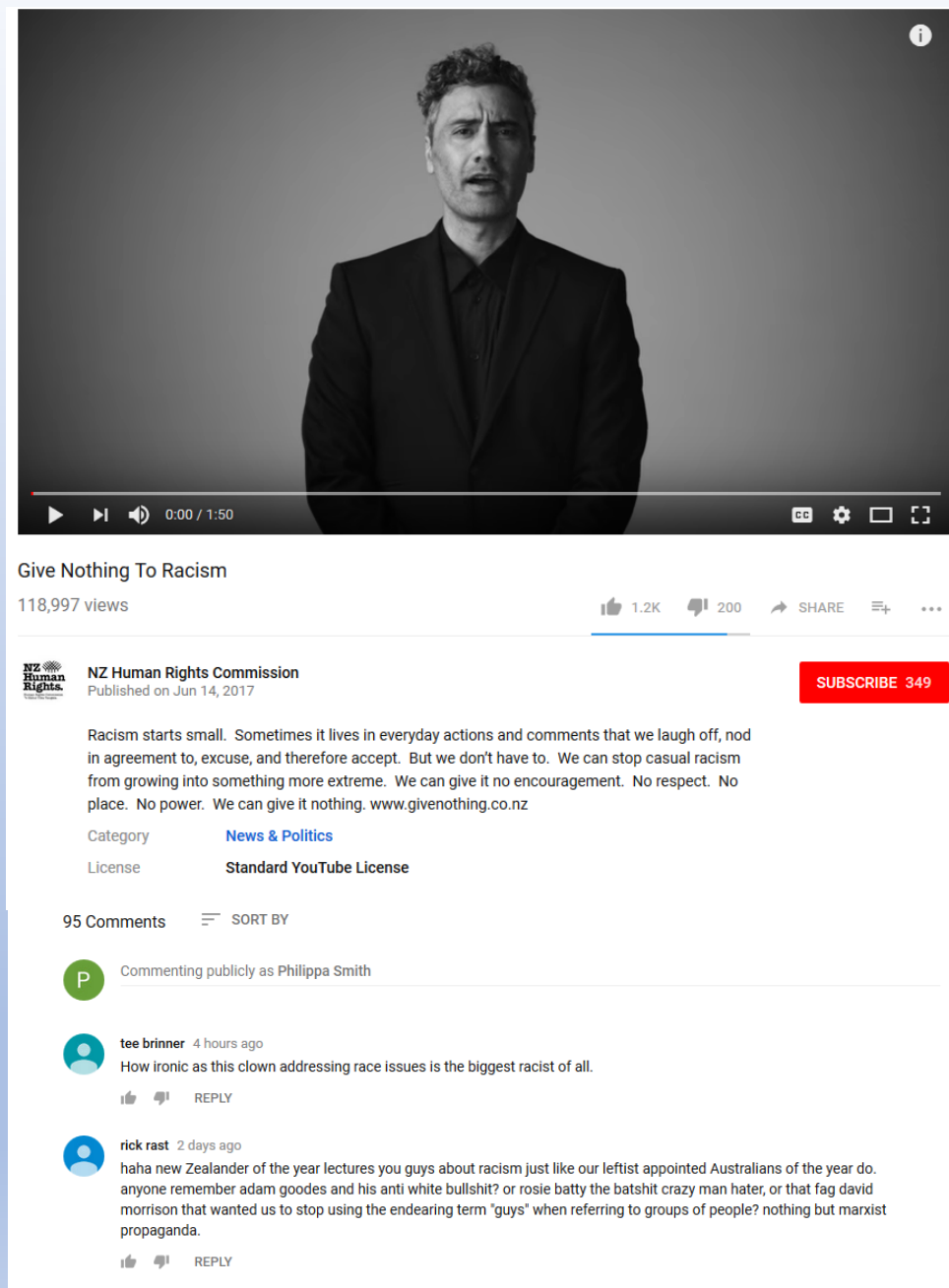Hollywood Film director
actor/comedian/photographer

Father is Maori, Mother Russian Jewish heritage

New Zealander of the Year 2017
for his commitment to exploring and promoting New Zealand's identity and his work to reduce youth suicide rates and poverty through providing creative outlets
(https://www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/celebrities/89693141/Director-Taika-Waititi-wins-New-Zealander-of-the-Year-award)

Movies include: Boy (2010); What we do in the Shadows (2014); Hunt for the Wilderpeople (2016); Thor: Ragnorak (2017)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g9n_UPyVR5s

Discursive practice of satire – negotiating subject positions in satirical discourse - (Simpson, 2003)
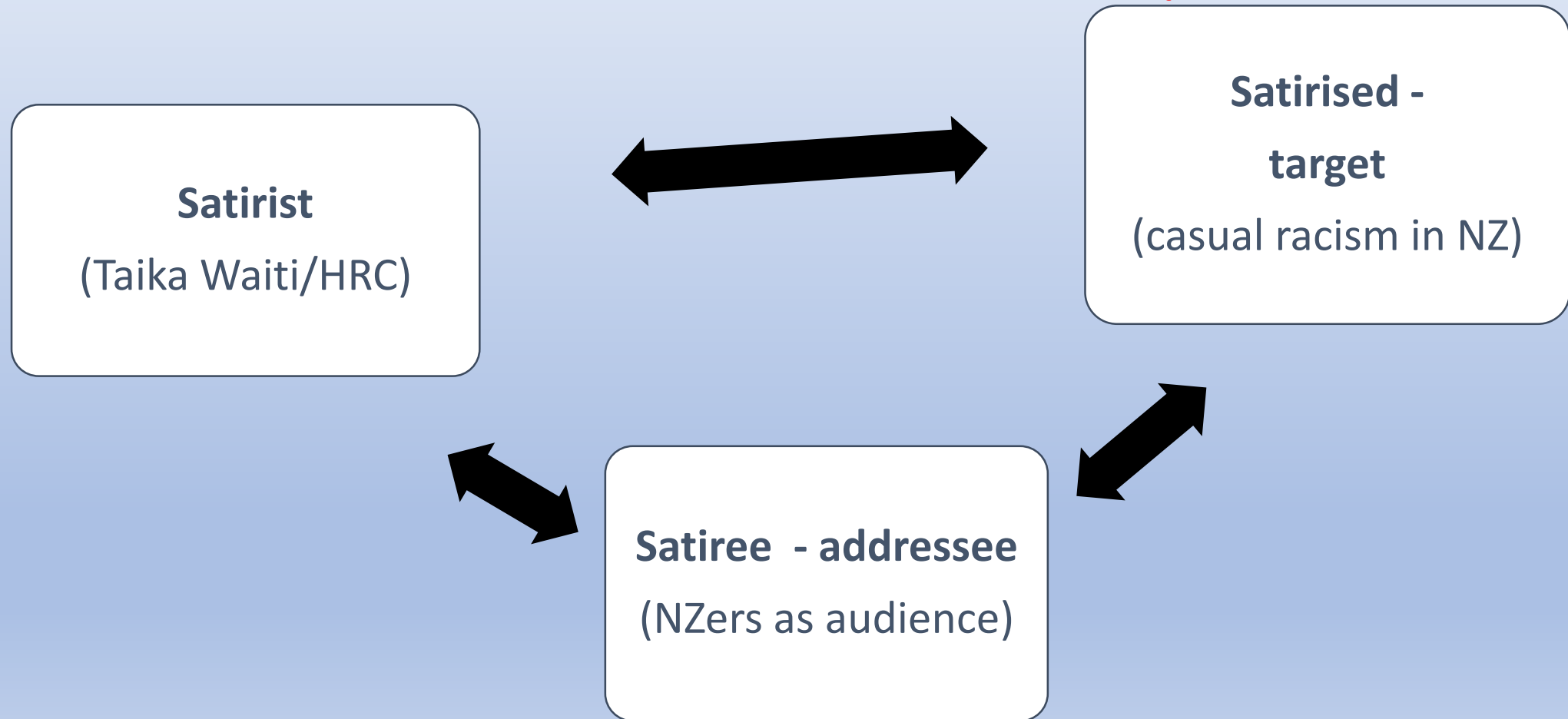
Give Nothing to Racism

NZ Human Rights Commission

YouTube video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g9n_UPyVR5s

115 comments below YouTube video collected 14 June – 27 July 2017

Types of Comments

- 4% — +ve video comment
- 16% — -ve video comment
- 56% — respond to comment
- 24% — new comment
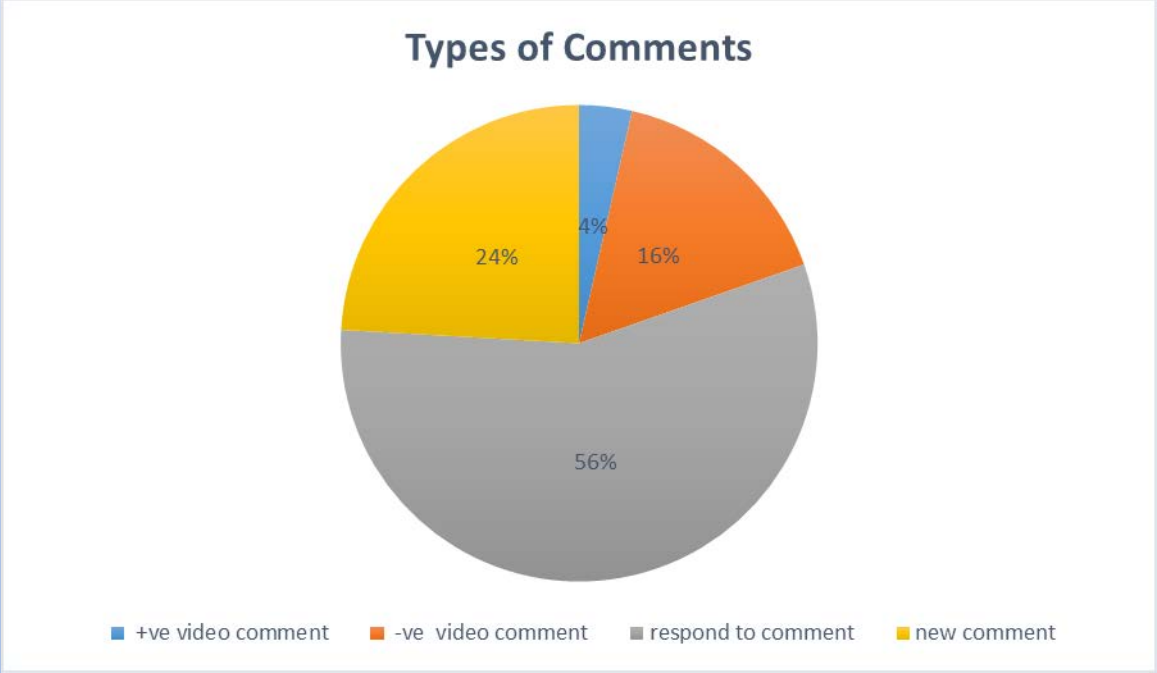
Discourses of racism/discrimination

Antisemitic (some times in response to Taika Waiti's background),

anti-Zionist (eg invented racism) and **anti-immigrant** (Muslim and Asian)

- Insulting, swearing, abusive, degrading and offensive language
- **Intertextual features**
  - Alt right language – 'leftoid whites', 'SJW', 'cuck'
  - Reported speech - sarcasm (ridiculing what someone has said)
  - Quotes from Mein Kampf
  - Use of symbols (((Trotsky))), or hashtags eg #proudracist

Argumentation strategies (topoi) resisting discourse of casual racism

Topos of denial of racism/Topos of politics

- NZ is not racist, therefore this video is Government propaganda against white people and trying to silence them

- Because it is NZ's general election year, the Government is politicising racism and wasting tax dollars with this campaign rather than spending money on more serious matters such as serial child abuse

- Because the Govt wants to encourage immigration to support the economy, the video targets white people to teach them not to be racist so that immigrants will feel protected

Topos of danger and threat

- Because most immigrants are uncivilised and make NZ a third world country, they should not come here

- Because casual racism is just joking, people shouldn't be oversensitive

- If immigrants don't like it here, then they should leave

Counter speech analysis

Taxonomy of 7 response types to (perceived) trolls:

(i)   Engaging by responding sincerely

(ii)   Ignoring the trolling attempt overtly or covertly

(iii)   Exposing the troller to the rest of the group

(iv)   Challenging the troller directly or indirectly

(v)   Critiquing the effectiveness, success, or 'quality' of the troller

(vi)   Mocking or parodying the trolling attempt; and

(vii)   Reciprocating in kind by trolling the troller

(Hardaker, 2015: 223)

The Flame War Polylogue

"Flames… witnessed in strings of utterances… in which one impolite utterance is followed by another…. involves sometimes more users in reciprocallly exchanging ad hominem attacks…which continues until one of the parties involved gets bored and is too tired to continue."

Arendholz, J. (2013: 101).

- When commenter X accuses Taika Waiti of being racist for casting a black woman as a 'white blonde norse woman' in Thor.

(A) agrees

(European)
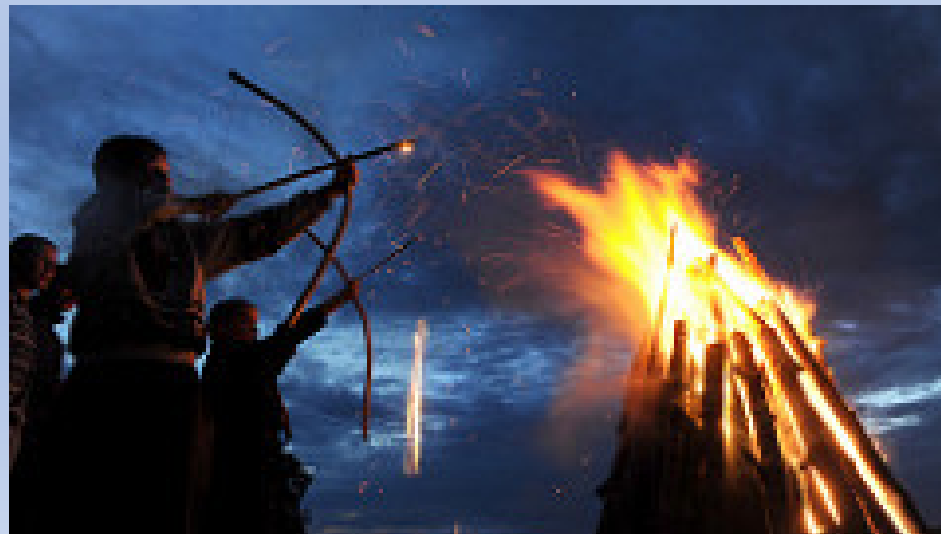
(B) rejects

(Muslim)

Photo by: VIKTOR DRACHEV/AFP/Getty Images)

A ...n – intertextuality – repeats MA's rhetorical question with direct quotes – then suggests that because US is predominantly white historically then no problem with it dominating creative output. Suggests **B** returns to a Muslim country that is repressive and less democratic.

direct quote serves to mock as well as to pin point a sentence he wishes to respond to, but allows him to attack MA for his muslim identity presumably based on his name.

B - "lol" and politely points out that his comment related more to the fact that historically people of colour were played by white actors. Then offers a humorous comment in response to buying a ticket – suggesting white people might also buy tickets back to Europe – infers that this is indicating the same thing when it comes to Americans who are all immigrants historically.

Engages – responds sincerely

A - direct quotes **B** from the last post – and suggests that white people's standards and values are of a higher standard and if they left US the likes of **B** would turn the country into a "Third World hell hole" – smiley face

Goads/baits

B responds that he will not stoop to **A** s level – this would be dishonourable (indicated his values), that he has Muslim and non-muslim white friends. Addresses GB by name with an exit expression **A**
"Have a good day" and highlights that everyone is human.
(Exit attempt)

A (troll): discursive strategies

- Does not address B directly by name – "mohammedan/s" "you Colorfuls"
- Pattern of beginning his comment by quoting B and then pulling it apart (12 times)
- Repetition (echoic quality) suggests sarcastic/mocking tone
- Taunts/goads B by making accusations against him and Islamic ideologies that B would find difficult to let pass by (homophobia, rape, human rights)
- Rhetorical questions that ridicule Islam
- Repeatedly suggests B goes back to his own country
- Talks in terms of 'we', 'white western civilisation' in superior terms to B
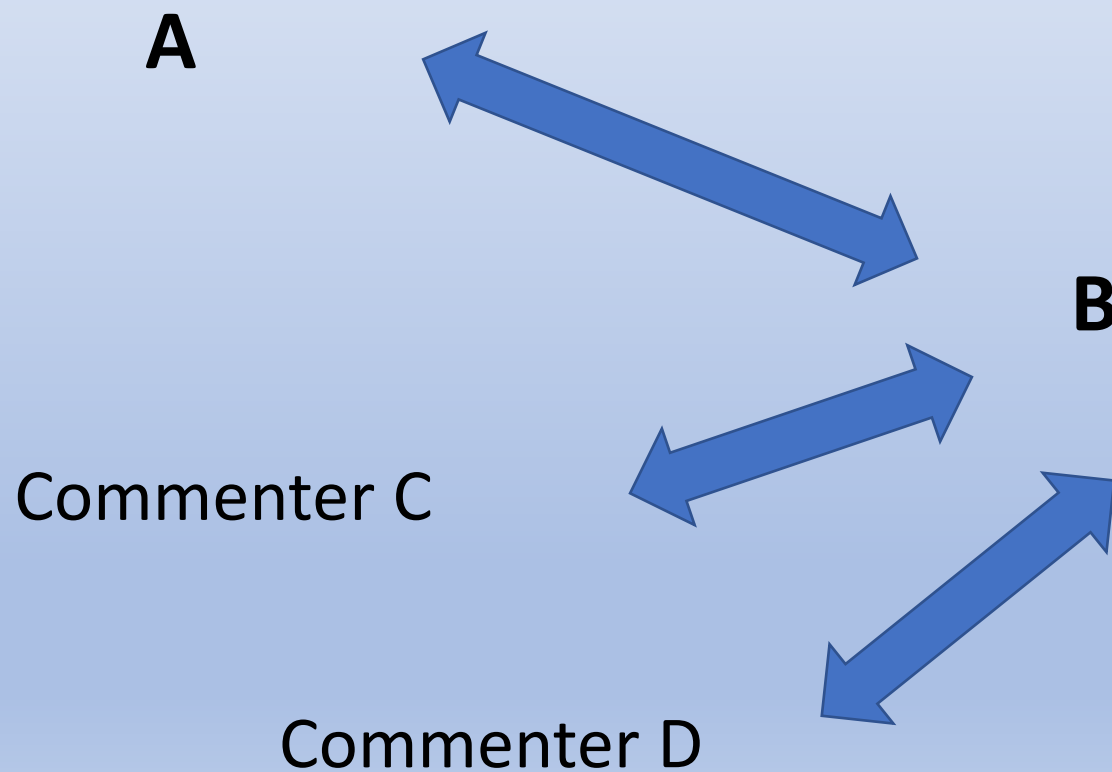
B: counter responses

- Initially responds politely/sincerely

- 2nd response attempts to exit conversation – does not wish to stoop to A's level, wishes A a 'good day', directly addresses him by name, infers that everyone is equal regardless of race/religion

- Re-enters discussion to defend the attacks A makes on him and on Islam

- Becomes frustrated, starts to quote A's statements (echoes A)

- B's discourse switches and starts to include his own inflammatory remarks about the superiority of Islam – (takes on the extremist persona of what A is suggesting) perhaps in an attempt to goad A or give him his own medicine - **"effective trolling rhetoric" (Phillips, 2015)**

Troll supporters arrive

Counter responses of B (in red)

(i)   **Engaging** by responding **sincerely**

(ii)   Ignoring the trolling attempt overtly or covertly

(iii)   **Exposing** the troller to the rest of the group (indirectly)

(iv)   **Challenging** the troller directly or indirectly

(v)   **Critiquing** the effectiveness, success, or 'quality' of the troller

(vi)   **Mocking or parodying** the trolling attempt

(vii)   **Reciprocating in kind** by trolling the troller

A - has the last say by reproducing five of B's 'inflammatory' statements from when he initially switched identity. This which serves to construct B negatively. A concludes by telling B one more time that he should be deported to Africa.

Outcomes for A = was he successful as a troll, or frustrated, thwarted?

Commenter E – "Why the f*** do I even read these comments anymore. I'm actually losing IQ."

Conclusions

- Should this type of online hate speech be taken down?

- Are we sanitising the internet if we do this and forcing this hateful discourse underground where it may fester and grow?

- Does counter speech work to challenge the hate speech offenders?

- Did our observation of this flame war make us more aware of hate speech and invoke our sympathy for B?

"Trolls amplify the ugly side of mainstream behaviour, but they aren't pulling their materials, chosen targets, or impulses from the ether. They are born off and fuelled by the mainstream world- it's behavioural mores, its corporate institutions, it's political structures and leaders- however much the mainstream might rankle at the suggestion."

(Phillips, 2015 :168)

Thank you!

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