GUEST EDITORIAL PREFACE

Guest Editorial Preface

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It is a pleasure to present this special issue of the International Journal of E-Politics on Internet Trolling. There is a strong selection of papers in this issue by Nikolaos Koumartzis & Andreas Veglis, Joanna Kulesza, Shefali Virkar and me, Jonathan Bishop.

What is striking about the selection of papers in this special issue is their scope and applicability to many aspects of the emerging agenda around Internet trolling evident in the mass media. The article of Koumartzis & Veglis is called '*The Internet Regulation and Online Censorship*,' which has significant relevance to problems around Internet abuse in its many forms. The paper points out that unlike is still thought by many, the Internet is not free from regulation, as it has been increasing for over a decade. This is a point a made in an earlier article, where I introduced the concept of 'sysop prerogative' to describe the extent and limitations of what a website manager – a systems operator, or sysop – can do (Bishop, 2011). This point is touched upon further in Joanna Kulesza's paper, '*Freedom of expression online – rights and responsibilities of Internet Service Providers*,' where she discusses the obligations of information society service providers, whereas Koumartzis & Veglis focus on technological solutions to government regula-

tion. They make a very important point that the problem now called Internet trolling has existed for some time. Indeed, Internet dictionaries have since the 1990s contained terms such as 'bozo list' and 'bozo filter' (Cowpertwait & Flynn, 2002; Edmonds & Gray, 2002; Jansen, 2002; Jansen & James, 1995) to refer to those concepts Koumartzis & Veglis discuss in relation to case studies of BT Plc's 'CleanFeed' and what they call the 'Saudi Arabia System.'

Shefali Virkar's article, '*Trolls Just Want To Have Fun: Electronic Aggression Within the Context of e-Participation and Other Online Political Behaviour in the United Kingdom*' as well as mine, '*Dealing with Internet trolling in political online communities: Towards the This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things Scale,*' both focus more on public policy and professional practice. Virkar discusses how services like the electronic petition platform offered by the UK Government plays and important role in facilitating freedom of expression, providing opportunities for the public to let the powers that be know their views. My paper devises a questionnaire (i.e. TIWWCHNT-20) that can be used to identify whether a person is suited to a particular online platform. The article argues that by seeing whether someone is disaffected with politics or whether they engaged will

reduce Internet trolling as it will mean they can use an online community with like-minded people. Those who are disaffected with politics might be suited to those online environments where politicians are being criticised personally rather than being on their policies and arguments to support them (e.g. Bishop, 2013). People actually interested in policy would likely get involved in a flame war – the sending a series of abusive messages – in these environments, in a way that if they used a forum where people are interested in discussing policy would mean it would be less likely to happen. Virkar points out that it has been argued Internet addiction has many of these properties, such as where this type of digital addiction can result in negative repercussions in the form arguments, lying, poor achievement, social isolation, and fatigue (Block, 2008).

Virkar warns in her article, however, that this form of managed and often disregarded approach by policy-makers may in fact represent a 'idiot box,' which will then need the solutions put forward by Koumartzis & Veglis. Where someone has the opportunity to be abusive, such as for the reasons suggested in my paper, then that will become the avenue for them to 'vent their spleen' in the form of a compulsion, as suggested by Virkar who calls this Internet addiction. Greater use of 'bozo lists' and 'bozo filters,' such as that presented by Koumartzis & Veglis, will help deal with the issues raised by Virkar and myself, and thus reduce the risk to information society service providers as highlighted by Kulesza.

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