

## I. INTRO

### II. There is an existing body of work on this topic

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Type of document: Empirical (some quant - surveys; mostly qual)

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## **I. INTRO**

- A.** ID and archiving are central features of online communities.
- B.** We want to analyze large-scale, anonymous, ephemeral community and culture.
  - i. Understand anonymity
  - ii. Understand ephemerality
- C.** 4chan has a reputation
  - i. 4chan created LOLCats, Rickrolling, and ragefaces.
  - ii. 4chan hactivism includes ballot stuffing Time's "Most influential person"
  - iii. Fox calls 4chan the "internet hate machine"
- D.** Goal of the paper is to use /b/ board as a lens to understand concepts of anonymity and ephemerality
- E.** We will perform a content analysis and two data driven studies
  - i. We will investigate ephemerality and deletion dynamics.
  - ii. We will investigate anonymity, participant practices around identity.



## **II. There is an existing body of work on this topic**

- A.** Existing forums have experimented across the spectrum of anonymity
  - i. Slashdot allowed users to use anonymous commenting, but pseudonymity became the norm.
- B.** Some studies have found that anonymity may foster a stronger communal identity

- i. Anonymity increases participation
  - ii. but it results in more “flaming”
- C.** Some studies have shown that choosing to remain anonymous will undermine credibility. (Rains 2007)
  - i. /b/'s community has developed alternative credibility mechanisms that work well.
- D.** There hasn't been much research done on ephemerality
  - i. Communities that have been studied expect people to rely on archives. Millen (2000)
  - ii. Ephemerality may have community-wide downsides – a lack of history tends to decrease cooperation in social dilemma games (Fehr and Gächter 2000). However, instituting permanence in previously un-archived chat rooms has elicited strong negative reactions (Hudson and Bruckman 2004)
- E.** These topics are not only of academic interest, but have practical implications for online social environments.

### III. 4chan and /b/

- A.** Created in 2004 by Christopher Poole
  - i. Users are anonymous by default
  - ii. Threads are not archived
- B.** Content posted on /b/
  - i. is intentionally offensive which contributes to the group's identity.
  - ii. is primarily themed content which includes an image

### IV. Ephemerality

- A.** increases user participation in order to keep threads alive
- B.** users choose what is archived (curation), which helps in providing for content for reposts and meme generation
- C.** On /b/, ephemerality and deletion create a powerful selection mechanic by requiring content the community wants to see be repeatedly re-posted, and potentially remixed.
  - i. This is critical to the site's influence on internet culture and memes.

### V. Anonymity

- A.** on /b/ is likely shaping a strong communal identity among a very large set of individuals.
  - i. the /b/ community uses non-technical mechanisms like slang and timestamping to signal status and identity.
- B.** Anonymity promotes sharing more ideas (experimentation) without fear of failure affecting their reputation, encouraging experimentation with new ideas and memes
- C.** Anonymity fueled disinhibition, allowing for more intimate posts.

D. /b/ has given rise to more fluid practices to signal identity. Because anyone can post a picture and claim to be that person, /b/'s posters have developed a practice of "timestamping" to guarantee authenticity. To claim identity, users often take a picture of themselves with a note containing the current day and time

## VI. Conclusion

A. The prevailing view amongst social scientists is that discouraging anonymity and ephemerality contributes to the success and popularity of a social network.

i. 4chan is a community that is almost entirely anonymous and ephemeral, yet manages to remain popular and successful.

B. As large Internet players like Facebook or Google evolve their models for identity and archiving, it becomes increasingly important to understand what happens in large communities that occupy the opposite positions on the user identity and data permanence design continuums.

The End

