

Unveiling the Dynamic Interplay: Trolling and Disney Adults in Reddit Communities  
A case study of the Reddit community

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# Unveiling the Dynamic Interplay: Online Trolling and Disney Adults in Reddit Communities

## Abstract

Fandoms are everywhere, thanks to the spread of the internet. The internet has empowered fans within their communities but has also facilitated the spread of negativity and trolling. Trolling behavior often involves verbal attacks on online community platforms. In the context of fandoms, this trolling manifests as spreading stigmas about obsessive fan behaviour or judging the fans themselves as socially awkward, for example. Rather than ignoring the trolls (Don't feed the trolls), responses to trolling behaviour are common. This raises the research problem of understanding how these interactions can unfold and affect the targeted community.

This thesis focused on the interaction between trolls and Disney adults, a fan group that has increasingly faced online negativity in recent years. The main research question that helped investigate this interaction is: What is the nature of the interactional dynamic between trolls and Disney adults in online community Reddit? This research was intended to help fill the gap in the literature on trolling behaviour targeting specific fandoms, particularly Disney adults, by examining how stigmatizing perceptions are propagated by trolls on Reddit and how these interactions affect and are managed by the community, thereby providing insights for better moderation policies, and fostering a more inclusive online environment.

The method employed in this study was thematic content analysis, a qualitative research approach. Nine Reddit threads were scrutinized, focusing on the top ten and controversial comments to the original posts, totalling 249 comments analysed. This examination revealed four primary themes: 'trolling behaviour,' 'stigmas associated with Disney adults,' 'troll response strategies,' and 'group dynamics.' Firstly, the study identified the trolling strategies used by trolls to propagate stigmas about Disney adults on Reddit. These strategies predominantly involved indirect and subtle methods to disrupt online discussions without overtly revealing their troll identity. Secondly, the research documented the specific stigmas propagated about Disney adults, including perceptions of obsessiveness, immaturity, and social awkwardness. These stigmas primarily targeted the fans' behaviours but also extended to personal attacks. The third major finding explored how Disney adults respond to these stigmas and negativity. Contrary to the 'don't feed the trolls' approach, Disney adults often engage directly with trolls, challenging them and critiquing their behaviour. Lastly, the study uncovered insights into group dynamics, revealing that trolling behaviour tends to strengthen the in-group cohesion among Disney adults. They unify in defence against troll comments and provide explanations for their passion for Disney. In contrast, trolls, considered the out-group, reinforce their positions by creating and reinforcing echo chambers of

negativity. The interactional dynamic between trolls and Disney adults revolves around a recurring pattern of stigmatization, defensive response, and community cohesion. Trolls propagate negative perceptions, prompting assertive reactions from Disney adults. This ongoing exchange not only demonstrates the resilience of the Disney adult community but also illustrates how these interactions influence online discourse and community cohesion strategies.

**KEYWORDS:** Fandom, Disney adults, trolling, stigmas, response strategies, group dynamics

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## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Topic description

From screaming Stylers in Amsterdam to Swifties fighting for concert tickets, and from Harry Potter obsessions to Barbie mania, it's clear that fandoms are everywhere. Fandoms are described as social spaces where people develop deep and lasting emotional connections to specific media objects, such as TV shows, movies, music, or celebrities (Harrington & Bielby, 2010, 435).

Since the internet has been a part of our society, fandoms have become more and more common (Young, 2016, p. 1). The internet has empowered fans within their fandoms, allowing them to openly express their creativity and interpretations of their favourite texts without the constraints of traditional media (Williams-Turkowski, 2020; Hills, 2008, p. 262). The internet has facilitated fandom into a dynamic and interactive space where fans can express themselves creatively, engaging in critical discussions, and form lasting connections with like-minded individuals across the globe (Hills, 2008, p. 262).

While the internet has numerous benefits for fandoms, it also has its downsides. The rise of the internet has significantly contributed to the spread and evolution of trolling behaviour (Sanfilippo et al., 2017, p. 2). Trolling, characterized by provocative, disruptive, and often antagonistic actions, has become increasingly prevalent in various online platforms (Jenks, 2019, p. 56). As online platforms have become more accessible and widespread, trolls have found new avenues to engage in provocative and disruptive activities. The anonymity, reach and interconnected nature of the internet have contributed to the growth of trolling behaviour and its impact on online communities (Sanfilippo et al., 2018, p. 2).

Online communities that foster user discussions often encounter trolling behaviour (Craker & March, 2016, p. 79; Todd & Melancon, 2019, p. 472; Campbell, 2017, p. 7; Brubaker et al., 2021, p. 2; Fichman & Sharp, 2020, p. 1). Some researchers specifically examine trolling behaviour directed at fandoms (Loehr et al., 2020, p. 314; Cohen et al., 2017, p. 193; Lopes, 2006, p. 387). For example, a fan upset about The Last Jedi created an edited version of the movie with the female characters removed, which was widely mocked on social media by the actors and director of the movie (Lucasfilm, 2017). In this case, trolling the troll was effective in addressing the problem. However, Vietnamese American actress Kelly Marie Tran (plays in the movie) became the focus of a targeted harassment campaign, with many attackers were motivated by politics, racism, and sexism, or were aiming to stoke societal discord (Loehr et al., 2020, p. 314).

A fandom that also experiences trolling behaviour online are adults who are fans of Disney, often referred to as Disney adults. These individuals, frequently millennials without children, exhibit an intense passion for all things Disney. They regularly visit Disney parks, build collections of Disney merchandise,

and fully immerse themselves in the magical world of Disney (McOmber, 2022, p. 1). In recent years, the term 'Disney adult' has acquired a negative connotation, as reflected in headlines such as 'Disney Adults are the most terrifying people on the planet and they need to be stopped , 'How 'Disney adults' became the most hated group on the internet,' and 'Are 'Disney adults' mentally ill?'(Haynes, 2020, p. 1; Dickson, 2022, p. 1; Swensen, 2023, p. 1). There is also a video on YouTube where Disney adults discuss and debunk various assumptions about themselves. Some of the assumptions addressed include Disney adults never really had a childhood, being a Disney adult is caused by mental illness, they buy every piece of Disney merchandise, and Disney adults have disposable income (Padilla, 2024).

Negative views, assumptions, and critiques regarding adults who are passionate about Disney have spread widely across various channels, including media platforms, critics' reviews, and mainstream entertainment forums. This is also evident on the Reddit platform. Reddit is a dynamic online platform where users generate content, engage in discussions, and form communities. Known for its diverse user base, Reddit features content ranging from links to images and is characterized by user interaction, community moderation, and shared interests (Thukral et al., 2018, p. 663; Weninger et al., 2013, p. 3).

On Reddit, you can discover threads (discussions) with titles like 'I HATE Disney Adults,' 'Adults obsessed with Disney weird me out,' and 'Disney adults are weird af. ' However, on Reddit, you will also come across threads titled: "Embarrassed to be a "Disney Adult" ... I'm not, babyyyy! I love it!" and "Disney Adults Unite!". In both types of threads—one with a negative tone towards adults and the other with a positive tone towards Disney adults—there is an opportunity to explore the discussion within the threads. Is the interaction in the threads with a negative tone only among trolls, or do Disney adults also respond to troll comments? Do trolls also engage in Reddit threads where the original post aims to unite Disney adults? This research will explore the interactional dynamic between trolls spreading negative perceptions about Disney adults and, simultaneously, examine how is responded to that negativity. This leads to the following research question: What is the nature of the interactional dynamic between trolls and Disney adults in online community Reddit? To answer the research question, three sub-questions have been formulated:

Sub-question 1: What specific trolling behaviours are observed in discussions about Disney adults on Reddit, and what are the potential stigmas being propagated against them?

Sub-question 2: How do Disney adults and other members of the Reddit community members react to such trolling behaviour and associated stigmas?

Sub-question 3: How does trolling impact the group dynamics within Reddit threads?

The interactional dynamic between trolls and Disney adults on Reddit was explored by conducting a thematic analysis of the original posts, comments, and comment replies from nine specific Reddit threads focused on the topic of Disney adults.

## 1.2 Academic and societal relevance

Research into trolling behaviour in online environments is not new. Previous studies have identified various trolling strategies used in these settings (Craker & March, 2016, p. 79; Todd & Melancon, 2019, p. 472; Campbell, 2017, p. 7; Brubaker et al., 2021, p. 2; Fichman & Sharp, 2020, p. 1). However, there has been little to no research conducted on trolling behaviour targeting a specific fandom. Additionally, research has paid little attention to Disney adults, despite the label causing significant online controversy, making it a nuanced and captivating phenomenon worthy of academic study. Furthermore, this research holds significance as it tackles a current issue in the digital age—examining stigmatizing perceptions propagated by trolls regarding Disney adults on Reddit. Previous literature indicates that stigmatization in online environments has become more severe (Yang, 2023, p. 1). This research will add academic value by shedding light on the stigmatization phenomenon within a specific online community. Additionally, this research provides insights into how online communities respond to and manage disruptive behaviour like trolling. By examining the strategies used by Disney adults to defend against troll comments and how they use Reddit as a supportive network, this thesis deepens the understanding of online community dynamics.

This research holds societal relevance by examining the interactional dynamics on Reddit, crucial in the era of integral digital platforms. It explores how digital culture shapes societal attitudes towards groups like Disney Adults. Furthermore, the research can help destigmatize the topic by highlighting specific trolling strategies. By shedding light on the particularities of troll behaviour, it can inform better moderation policies and tools to manage and mitigate trolling behaviour. This can lead to safer and more inclusive online environments. Additionally, in uncovering the stigmatization of Disney adults, this research can empower this group and other marginalized communities by validating their experiences and encouraging acceptance and inclusivity.

## 1.3 Thesis outline

In the following sections of the thesis, a theoretical framework will be giving surrounding the concepts of fandom and ageing, trolling behaviour, stigmatization theories, response strategies to trolling and group dynamics in online communities. The theoretical framework will outline literature related to the concept and ends with a conceptual framework that explains how all the concepts are connected.

Afterwards, a section on the methodology will explain the qualitative research method to examine the

research question and the corresponding sub-questions. It also encompasses the way the concepts in the research are measured. Next, the results of the data are reported. A discussion of the findings will answer the research question, where after a conclusion can be reached regarding the interactional dynamic between trolls and Disney adults on Reddit. Lastly, the research limitations concerning the research design are suggested and advice and directions for future research will be provided.

## 2 Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Fandom

Fandom refers to a dedicated and enthusiastic community formed around shared interests in specific media objects, such as TV shows, movies, books, music, or sports teams (Hills, 2019, p. 88; Harrington & Bielby, 2010, p. 435). This multifaceted concept thrives on sustained and meaningful engagement, including practices like consuming, interpreting, and even producing content related to the chosen media (Hills, 2019, p. 88; Harrington & Bielby, 2010, p. 435; Williams-Turkowski, 2020, p. 78). Deep emotional attachment, social interaction, and community building characterize fandom, offering fans a profound sense of belonging, identity, and shared passion.

#### 2.1.1 *Fandom among adults*

Hills (2019, p. 88) and Harrington & Bielby (2010, p. 435) suggest that a fandom evolves over its life course, impacting fans' identities and practices. They argue that fan engagement is shaped by life transitions, including childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and later life, which influence interactions with media objects and the formation of communities. Normative life changes, like entering the workforce or starting a family, can also affect the availability of time and resources for fan practices.

Society often scrutinizes adults who engage in fandom, whether it's related to toys, movies, or video games (Heljakka, 2017, p. 98; Geraghty, 2018, p. 170; Harrington & Bielby, 2010, p. 435). Particularly, adults who express affection for children's culture may encounter negativity or scepticism (Geraghty, 2018, p. 170). Critics may sometimes view adults engaging with children's culture as individuals who have not fully grown up or who are clinging to elements of their youth that should have been outgrown (Geraghty, 2018, p. 170). Traditionally, adulthood has been linked to responsibilities, maturity, and societal expectations of abandoning childhood pursuits like playing with toys (Heljakka, 2017, p. 98).

Harrington & Biebly (2010, p. 440) suggest that engaging in media-related passions or fandoms challenges conventional ideas of adulthood, redefining acceptable adult behaviour and interests. They emphasize societal norms regarding age-appropriate enjoyment. For example, older fans of artists like Kate Bush or music group like the Spice Girls may face judgement or hesitation in expressing their fandom publicly due to concerns about age-appropriate interests. Their paper also highlights how some adult fans may feel the need to conceal their fandom from others, including co-workers, neighbours, and family members due to age considerations and the perceived low value of their chosen media object (Harrington & Biebly, 2010, p. 440). The points made by Geraghty (2018, p. 170), Heljakka (2017, p. 98) and Harrington & Biebly (2010, p. 440) reflects the ongoing disparities in how adult fans experience and

express their fandom in public influenced in part by age norms and societal attitudes towards adult engagement with fan culture, challenging the notion that adults can't have their fandoms.

### *2.1.2 Disney adults*

This study delves into the enduring passion of Disney fandom among adults. Many express a lifelong attachment to Disney since childhood, continuing into adulthood (Williams-Turkowski, 2020, p. 78). Disney fandom is deeply rooted in cultural nostalgia and a shared love for Disney's storytelling, characters, and theme park experiences. Fans form emotional connections and engage in communities to celebrate their passion for Disney (Kiriakou, 2017, p. 106). The impact of Disney on childhood experiences and globalized identities contributes significantly to the formation of its fandom (Kiriakou, 2017, p. 106). Within this cultural context, Disney fandom flourishes at the convergence of nostalgia, storytelling, consumerism, and community (Kiriakou, 2017, p. 106). This fandom comprises various subcultures, each characterized by unique traditions, behaviors, and social dynamics (Williams-Turkowski, 2022, p. 183; Giles, 2017, p. 15). Scholars recognize that Disney holds significance for adults, not just children, with many actively participating in Disney events and expressing their love for the brand (Apollonio, 2023, p. 13; Williams-Turkowski, 2020, p. 78).

Despite the presence of adult Disney enthusiasts for years, and Disney acknowledging this demographic through initiatives like the "Fun for Adults at Disney World" website (2018), passionate adult Disney fans often face judgment (Apollonio, 2023, p. 13; Williams-Turkowski, 2020, p. 78). The term 'Disney adult,' originally neutral, has acquired a critical tone since 2020, reflecting a cultural disposition to pathologize adults who enjoy children's media (Apollonio, 2023, p. 13). This negative stereotype portrays them as overly sentimental and lacking engagement with societal issues, contributing to the broader trend of dismissing adults who are fans of children's media (Apollonio, 2023, p. 13). This study explores the complexity of this emerging label and its implications for adult Disney fans.

The studies conducted by Heljakka (2017, p. 98), Geraghty (2018, p. 170), and Harrington & Bielby (2010, p. 435) offered valuable insights into the societal attitudes and norms shaping the experiences of enthusiasts of children's culture. By comprehending the challenges and stigmas encountered by adults openly expressing affection for children's culture, a deeper investigation into the dynamics of Reddit surrounding Disney adults became feasible. This understanding facilitated an exploration of how societal perceptions, including negativity, scepticism, and judgement towards adults who embrace children's culture, influence the interactions between Disney adults and trolls online, thereby contributing to a more nuanced comprehension of the research topic (Heljakka, 2017, p. 98; Geraghty, 2018, p. 170; Harrington & Biebly, 2010, p. 435).

## 2.2 Trolling

Trolling is the practice of engaging in deceptive, destructive, and disruptive behavior in internet social settings, lacking an apparent instrumental purpose. It involves exploiting sensitive issues to provoke emotional responses, typically for the troll's amusement (Cheng et al., 2017, p. 1226; Buckels et al., 2014, p. 100; Brubaker et al., 2021, p. 2). Research has explored trolling on many online forums that welcome discussion among users including Facebook (Craker & March, 2016), Twitch (Todd & Melancon, 2019), Twitter (Campbell, 2017) and Reddit (Brubaker et al., 2021, p. 2; Fichman & Sharp, 2020, p.1).

The definition of trolling may be straightforward, but defining trolling behaviour is more complex because the classification of behaviour as trolling relies on individual users' interpretations and judgments, rather than objective criteria (Hardaker, 2015, p. 211). Cook et al. (2017, p. 3330) highlighted in their study the lack of consensus among researchers regarding what constitutes trolling behaviour. Some researchers consider behaviours such as personal insults and exclusion tactics as trolling, while others may view them as separate phenomena (Cook et al., 2017, p. 3330). Users may perceive certain actions, comments, or interactions as trolling based on various factors such as tone, context, relationships between individuals and previous experience with similar behavior (Hardaker, 2015, p. 211; Sanflippo et al., 2017, p. 34).

Brubaker et al. (2021, p. 2) explored how Reddit users see trolling behaviours, including their thoughts on how trolling functions within the community. According to their research, trolling is seen as occurring on Reddit when individuals behave in ways that go against expected behaviour or authenticity in discussion threads, disrupt conversations, and provoke emotional reactions, even if they don't necessarily mean harm (Brubaker et al., 2021, p. 2). They also note that the perception of trolling can be contradictory, as actions and language considered outside the usual online norms might be seen as trolling by the community, even if the person being labelled a troll didn't mean any harm. These studies show that trolling is subjective, influenced by community norms, and can differ among individuals within online communities. Additionally, the various motivations and personality traits of those who engage in trolling behaviours also result in different responses and strategies for dealing with trolling (Cook et al., 2017, p. 3330; Hardaker, 2015, p. 211; Brubaker et al., 2021, p. 2; Sanflippo et al., 2017, p. 34).

### 2.2.1 *Trolling behaviour*

Trolling can take shape in different forms. In most literature researchers refer to verbal trolling (Cheng et al., 2017, p. 1226; Hopkinson, 2013, p. 11; Brubaker et al., 2021, p. 2). Verbal trolling refers to the use of language in comments that are intended to provoke, upset, or disrupt online discussions or interactions (Brubaker et al., 2021, p. 2). Hopkinson (2013, p. 12) discusses in his research three stages of

the progression of a verbal trolling incident, starting from the initial provocation (baiting) to the subsequent reactions (biting) and eventual escalation of conflict (flaming).

The baiting stage marks the beginning of a trolling attack, where the troll posts a provocative message to elicit reactions from other participants (Hopkinson, 2013, p. 13). The biting phase, as described by Hopkinson (2013, p. 13), occurs when targeted individuals or participants respond to the troll's provocation. This phase involves various reactions to the bait, ranging from engaging in arguments to expressing emotions or falling into the trap set by the troll. Lastly, the flaming phase represents the escalation of conflict and hostility in the interaction, characterized by heated arguments, insults, aggressive language, and a breakdown of civility (Hopkinson, 2013, p. 14). For the investigation into the nature of the interactional dynamic between Disney Adults and trolls on Reddit, all stages were crucial.

### 2.2.2 *Trolling behaviour strategies*

Trolling behaviour can be explored by examining trolling strategies identified by Hardaker (2013, p. 58). Hardaker (2013, p. 58) investigated the tactics and behaviours of individuals involved in trolling in two large USENET discussion groups: one on horse breeding and the other on football. The trolling strategies she identified range from over, easily observable ones to cover, hidden or non-obvious styles.

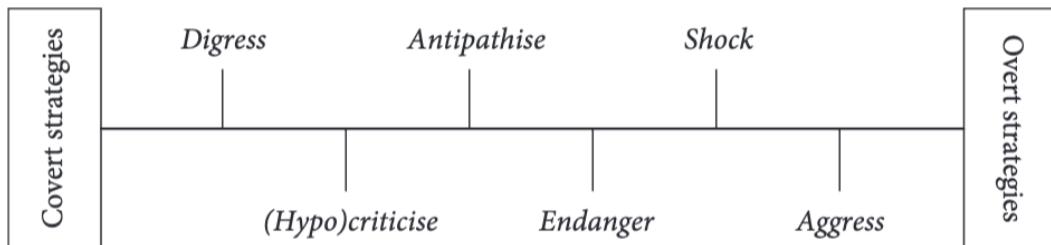


Figure 1 Scale of trolling strategies (Hardaker, 2013, p. 80)

On one end of the scale lies the "aggress" strategy, which entails deliberately provoking others into aggressive responses through actions like name-calling or using foul language. "Shock" trolling involves posting about sensitive subjects such as religion, death, or human rights issues. These styles bear resemblance to flaming (Hopkinson, 2013, p. 15). Shifting to more covert strategies, "endanger" trolling involves giving bad advice under the guise of innocence. In "antipathy" trolling, the troll creates a hostile context to provoke emotional responses covertly. A "(hypo)critical" troll excessively criticises others for minor issues while often making similar mistakes themselves. Lastly, "digress" trolling, the most covert style, involves leading others off-topic through spamming or introducing tangential subjects (Hardaker, 2013, p. 69; Paakki Henna et al., 2021, p. 427). By organizing trolling behaviours along this scale, a clearer understanding emerges of the diverse strategies trolls can use to disrupt online conversations.

(Hardaker, 2013, p. 80; Paakki Henna et al., 2021, p. 427).

All the discussed studies revolve around the topic of trolling, a primary focus of this research. The studies by Hopkinson (2013, p. 75) and Hardaker (2013, p. 80) are both relevant for investigating trolling behaviour towards Disney adults on Reddit. Hopkinson's (2013, p. 8) study aids in understanding the progression of a verbal trolling incident, between trolls, Disney adults, and other Reddit community members by dividing the incident (original posts, comments, and comment replies) into stages such as baiting, biting and flaming. Hardaker's (2013, p. 80) study contributes to analysing trolling behaviour, as her scale can be used to identify the trolling strategies employed against Disney adults. Regarding these studies and to answer the main research question, the following sub-question is posed: What specific trolling behaviours are observed in discussions about Disney Adults on Reddit?

### 2.2.3 *Responding to trolling behaviour*

Online communities can foster a safer, more positive, constructive, and inclusive environment by effectively addressing and mitigating the impact of trolling behaviour (Herring et al., 2002, p. 372; Binns, 2012, p. 556). Managing trolling begins with identifying trolls, analysing trolling strategies, patterns, and triggers, and employing moderation techniques along with the use of technical tools and clear guidelines (Herring et al., 2002, p. 373; Binns, 2012, p. 556). On Reddit moderators are used to address behaviours like trolling and other norm violations (Chandrasekharan et al., 2018, p. 2). This study does not examine how Reddit moderators manage the trolling behaviour of trolls targeting Disney adults. Instead, the focus is on how Disney adults responds to the negativity they receive.

Previous research on managing trolling behaviour consistently emphasizes the saying "don't feed the trolls" (Coles & West, 2016, p. 238; Sun & Chen, 2021, p. 7; Binns, 2012, p. 548; Yang & Fichman, 2017, p. 1803; Hardaker, 2015, p. 211; Golf-Papez & Veer, 2022, p. 91). This phrase refers to the strategy of ignoring or abstaining from engaging with trolls in online communities, as outlined in various studies. The goal of this approach is to deny trolls of the attention and reactions they seek, ultimately diminishing the impact of their disruptive behaviour (Coles & West, 2016, p. 238; Sun & Chen, 2021, p. 7; Binns, 2012, p. 548; Yang & Fichman, 2017, p. 1803; Hardaker, 2015, p. 211). While many studies have concluded that "don't feed the trolls" is an effective strategy, there are indeed other strategies that can be applied if trolling behaviour is identified as such. Herring et al. (2002, p. 380) found in their study on trolling behaviour in feminist online discussions that the women often responded naively because they did not immediately recognize the trouble as trolling or connect it to broader patterns of anti-feminist harassment.

In Hardaker's (2015, p. 208) study on reactions to trolling, she identified seven response types,

ranging from fully naive (i.e., seemingly unaware of the trolling) to fully cynical (i.e., seemingly fully aware of the trolling): engaging, ignoring, exposing, challenging, critiquing, mocking, and reciprocating. Similarly, Coles & West (2016, p. 239) found in their study that individual users sometimes engage in countertrolling or participate in debates or discussions. However, Golf-Papez & Veer (2022, p. 103) argue that responding may signal to trolls and invite further attacks, potentially influencing other trolls to engage in similar behavior. Yang & Finchmen (2017, p. 1804) report similar findings, emphasizing the importance of thoughtful responses. They suggest considering strategic responses that do not escalate the situation further and take power away from the troll. Additionally, seeking support within online communities can help individuals cope with negativity or trolling. Discussing experiences with others can provide emotional support and perspective (Yang & Finchmen, 2017, p. 1802 ).

The discussed studies on responding to trolling contribute to addressing the following sub-question: How do Disney adults and other members of the Reddit community members react to such trolling behavior and associated stigmas? In this context, Hardaker's (2015, p. 208) study is relevant as she identified specific response strategies to trolling: responding sincerely, exposing the troll to the group, challenging the troll directly or indirectly, critiquing the quality of the trolling attempt, mocking or parodying the troll, and reciprocating with trolling. These strategies help in answering the sub-question.

### 2.3 Group dynamics

Reddit is a vibrant online platform where users generate content, engage in discussions, and organize communities. It's known for its diverse user base and open nature, with content ranging from links to images (Thukral et al., 2018, p. 663; Weninger et al., 2013, p. 3). The combination of user interaction, user-generated content, community moderation, structured discussions, and shared interests makes Reddit a dynamic online community (Weninger et al., 2013, p. 3).

However, the community-driven nature of the platform can lead to both positive and negative outcomes. Weninger et al. (2013, p. 3) discuss potential consequences such as the spread of misinformation and trolling behaviour. According to Oddny et al. (2023, p. 62), Reddit can foster echo chambers, where users primarily encounter attitudes and opinions that align with their own, potentially limiting exposure to diverse perspectives. Farrell et al. (2019, p. 89), describe the platform's infrastructure, including features like karma points, subreddit systems, easy account creation, and loose governance policies, which can create an environment conducive to the spread of toxic behaviours and ideologies of what the study refers to as 'toxic techno cultures'. Massanari (2014, p. 13) describes Reddit as a multifaceted platform that embodies participatory culture, community dynamics and playful interactions. In her study she portrayed Reddit as a complex space where communities interact, create content, and

shape the platform's culture. The positive aspects according to Massanari (2014, p. 2) of Reddit are its participatory nature, and community engagement and the negative sides include the marginalisation of voices and the presence of problematic content, such as the interplay between altruism and cynicism, the dynamics between new and long-time users, and the contested nature of playful discourse on the platform (Massanari, 2014, p. 15).

The driving force behind Reddit is its users, who are responsible for generating a wide range of content, including misinformation, trolling behaviour, echo chambers, and toxic techno cultures. This behaviour can have an impact on group dynamics between trolls, Disney adults and other Reddit community members. Trolling behaviour has the potential to disrupt discussions, spark inter-group conflicts, create division, polarize group members, erode trust, and challenge community norms (Brubaker et al., 2021, p. 2; Pluemavarn et al., 2011, p. 3). These disruptions can create barriers to communication and collaboration between groups affecting the overall dynamics of the community. Hopkinson (2013, p. 10) discusses in his study how trolling contributes to the formation of in-groups and outgroups within online communities. In-group members, who share similar values and opinions, may unite against trolls, strengthening their cohesion and identity. Trolls, as outgroup members, may provoke conflict and challenge the community, leading to alliances among in-group members. Hopkinson (2013, p. 12) also found that trolling behaviours can create both antagonistic and supportive networks within online communities. While often seen as destructive, trolling can strengthen community bonds by fostering active engagement and forming ad hoc alliances through verbal conflict.

These studies contribute to the research conducted in this paper by offering insights into the dynamics of online communities, with a particular focus on Reddit, where users create content, participate in discussions, and establish communities (Thukral et al., 2018, p. 663; Weninger et al., 2013). Research by Weninger et al. (2013), Farrell et al. (2019, p. 93), Oddny et al. (2023, p. 62), and Massanari (2014, p. 13) indicates that due to the community-driven nature of the platform, practices such as trolling can emerge. The trolling behaviour cannot be examined based on these studies; a separate section is dedicated to it. However, in exploring the interactional dynamic between online trolls and Disney adults, it's essential to consider how trolling affects group dynamics within Reddit threads. This aspect can be explored using insights from Hopkinson (2013, p. 18), aiding in addressing the sub-question: How does trolling impact the group dynamics within Reddit threads?

## 2.4 Stigmatization theories

This study will examine the stigmatization of Disney adults by trolls on Reddit. Stigmatization entails attaching negative labels to individuals or groups (Yang, 2023, p. 2; Cohen et al., 2017, p. 193;

Lopes, 2006, p. 387), grounded in factors such as race, gender, and others (Lopes, 2006, p. 390; Cohen et al., 2017, p. 193). Goffman's concept of stigma, as emphasized by Lopes (2006, p.389), highlights the social construction of stigma, where negative attitudes and stereotypes are perpetuated within a social context.

Stigmatization in online environments, particularly within the entertainment industry, has grown more severe, with the support of online media contributing to the expansion of fan communities (Yang, 2023, p. 2). Online platforms like social media can amplify stigmas against fan groups through the rapid dissemination of information and the formation of echo chambers where negative perceptions are reinforced (Xia, 2022, p. 1841). The ease of inducing speech in large fan gatherings often leads to more extreme behaviours, and the rapid spread of secondary information fuels controversies, making fans more disposed to stigmatization (Yang, 2023, p. 2). The growth of stigmatization in online environments is also attributed to the anonymity provided by these platforms. Hardaker (2013, p. 60) refers in her study to the disinhibition effect in online communication, which describes the phenomenon where individuals feel less inhibited and more inclined to engage in behaviours they might avoid in face-to-face interactions. This effect can lead to the escalation of trolling behaviours due to the reduced sense of accountability and consequences in online communication (Sanflippo et al., 2017, p. 34).

In 'The Adoring Audience' by Lewis (2002, p. 1), the formation of stigmas around fandom is explored, revealing a complex interplay of social, cultural, and historical factors. According to Lewis (2002, p. 9), stigmas surrounding fandom highlight how fans often face negative stereotypes and labels, such as obsessive, abnormal, trivial, silly, and dangerous. Fans may also be stereotyped based on gender or age, leading to their marginalization and exclusion from mainstream culture. This emphasis on stereotypes and sensationalizing fan behaviour creates a culture of shame and secrecy, with real-world consequences such as social isolation, discrimination, and harassment (Lewis, 2002, p. 9). According to Lopes (2006, p. 387) stigmatization shapes cultural landscapes and effects the production and consumption, and reception of popular culture. For example, he discovered that the stigma of comic books being exclusively for children had hindered their evolution into more adult genres and narratives.

In the digital age, stigmatization often revolves more around judging individuals based on their chosen popular culture fandom rather than evaluating their fan behaviour (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 195). For instance, despite science fiction/fantasy fans being socially accepted for their abilities, they are often labelled as physically unattractive and socially undesirable (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 202). The broader societal impact of stigmatizing fandom lies in its potential to discourage productive civic behaviours associated with being a fan (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 202).

The studies provide valuable insights into the mechanisms and consequences of stigmatisation in online environments, particularly within fan communities. Yang (2023, p. 2), Xia (2022, p. 1841), and Hardaker (2013, p. 60) showed the factors that contribute to the development of stigmatization, including the influence of social media and the disinhibition effect in online communication. These studies suggest that on Reddit, there is a greater likelihood of stigmatization due to its nature as a social media platform where users can remain anonymous. Lewis's (2002, p. 9) research found that stigmas surrounding fandom can manifest in stereotypes and labels that sensationalize fan behaviour. Her research is relevant because these forms can be used to shape and explore the stigmas surrounding Disney Adults. Lopes' (2006, p. 387) research delves into the implications of stigmas within a broader societal context, exploring how they affect the consumption, production, and reception of popular culture. This study will not examine the impact of stigmas. This aspect could be explored in a follow-up study. The study by Cohen et al. (2017, p. 195) indicates that stigmas are now more focused on judging the individual rather than the fan behaviour. This is an important point to consider when examining the stigmas surrounding Disney adults, which may relate more to fan behaviour or the individual. This will be addressed by the following sub-question: What are the potential stigmas being propagated against them?

## 2.5 Conceptual framework

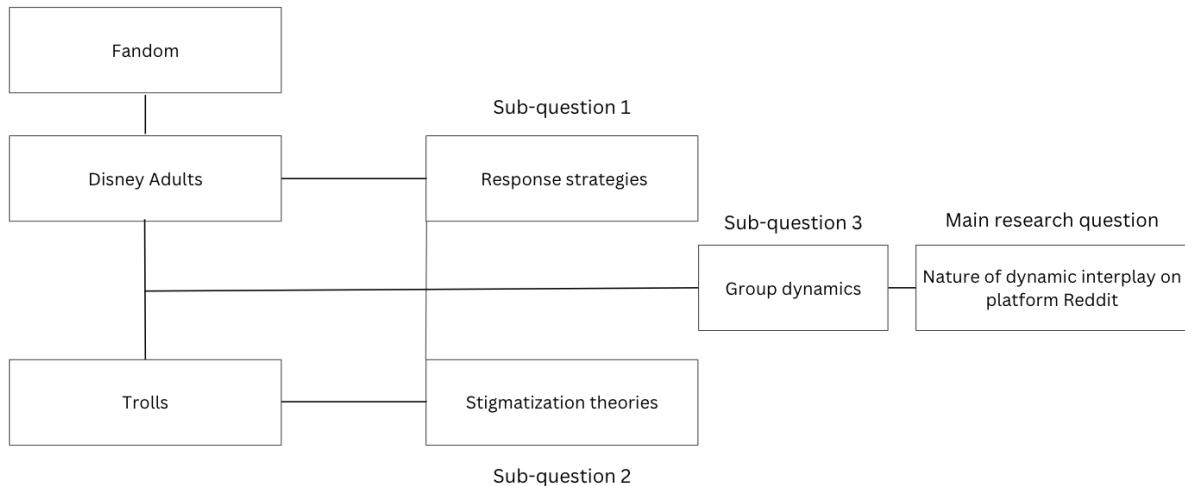


Figure 2 Conceptual framework

In short, this chapter reviewed literature related to fandom and aging, Disney adults, trolling,

stigmas, responses to trolling, and group dynamics. These concepts are illustrated in Figure 2, and three sub-questions related to these concepts were developed. The framework shows the connections between these concepts to explore the nature of the interactional dynamics between trolls and Disney adults in the Reddit community.

The framework operates as follows: within the broader Disney fandom, a specific group is studied: Disney adults. Literature indicates that enjoying children's media is often seen as inappropriate for adults, and adults who express this interest publicly can face criticism from trolls (Heljakka, 2017, p. 98; Geraghty, 2018, p. 170; Harrington & Bielby, 2010, p. 435). This criticism often manifests as verbal attacks. According to the literature, these verbal attacks can stigmatize the targeted group (Yang, 2023, p. 2; Cohen et al., 2017, p. 193; Lopes, 2006, p. 387). Responses to the stigmas spread by trolls can vary (Coles & West, 2016, p. 238; Sun & Chen, 2021, p. 3; Binns, 2012, p. 558; Yang & Fichman, 2017, p. 1804; Hardaker, 2015, p. 211). While it is generally advised not to "feed the trolls," there are other response strategies that Disney adults and Reddit community members can use (Hardaker, 2015, p. 211). From the literature it became evident that this trolling behaviour can also affect the group dynamics within Reddit threads, leading to the formation of in-groups and out-groups (Hardaker, 2015, p. 211). Therefore, examining the stigmas propagated by trolls, the responses from Disney adults, and the formation of in-groups and out-groups will reveal how these groups engage with each other. This includes the nature of their communication, conflicts, and any recurring themes in their interactions. This analysis aims to answer the research question: What is the nature of the interactional dynamic between online trolls and Disney Adults in the online community Reddit? The following chapter will discuss the research method and operationalization of the discussed concepts.

### **3 Methodology**

In this chapter the methodology for this research is presented. To successfully gather the data, required to answer the research question, a qualitative method of data collection was implemented. This research aims to answer the research question by investigating the interactional dynamics between trolls and Disney adults on Reddit. This chapter outlines how the sample was created, how the data was collected, and how the data collection was analysed based on the insights and perspectives discussed in the theoretical framework.

#### **3.1 Qualitative approach**

The study adopted qualitative methods to explore the nature of the interactional dynamic between trolls and Disney adults in online community Reddit. To answer the main research question, three sub-questions have been developed. The first sub-question examined the trolling behaviours observed in discussions about Disney adults on Reddit and the stigmas propagated against Disney adults. Sub-question two explored the responses of Reddit community members, including Disney adults, to these perceptions. The final sub-question explored how trolling behaviours influence the group dynamics on Reddit, including the formation of in-groups and outgroups.

Qualitative research is characterized by its focus on understanding the complexities of human experiences, behaviours, and social phenomena through in-depth exploration and interpretation of qualitative data (Flick, 2018, p. 5). This approach allows researchers to uncover rich, context-specific insights and explore diverse perspectives, contributing to a deeper understanding of the research topic (Flick, 2018, p. 5). This research is qualitative because it sought to explore and understand the complex interactional dynamics between two distinct groups within online communities. This question aligns with the principles of qualitative research as it aimed to delve into the experiences, interaction, and behaviours of individuals within their natural settings (Flick, 2018, p. 6). It involved an interpretive approach to uncovering the meanings and nuances of the interactions between trolls and Disney adults, which are best explored through qualitative methods. Additionally, the research question does not seek to test a specific hypothesis but rather aims to understand and describe the social phenomena ‘from the inside’, making it well-suited for qualitative inquiry (Flick, 2018, p. 4)

#### **3.2 Sampling**

Sampling is a critical aspect of qualitative research as it involves selecting participants or sources of data that are representative of the population or phenomenon being studied (Flick, 2018, p. 3). Qualitative research often involves non-probability sampling methods, where participants are selected based on specific criteria that are relevant to the research question (Flick, 2018, p. 3; Schreier, 2013, p. 8).

This approach helps to ensure that the sample is relevant to the research question and that the analysis is focused on the most informative cases (Schreier, 2013, p. 8).

Reddit is selected due to its hosting of threads where conversations about Disney adults are prominent. Reddit allows users to submit "posts" containing text, website links, and images. This original post (OP) initiates a Reddit thread. Each post contains its own comment section wherein users may "comment" on the post and respond to existing comments (Bhandari & Sun, 2021, p. 2422). Purposive sampling technique was employed to gather relevant data from specific subreddits on the Reddit platform. While there are not many subreddits dedicated explicitly to Disney adults, discussions (threads) on this topic can be found in subreddits such as r/WaltDisneyWorld and r/DisneyWorld. In various other subreddits, Disney adults are also a prevalent topic, including r/unpopularopinion, r/petpeeves, r/offmychest, and r/iamthemaincharacter. What these four subreddits share is their role as platforms where users can openly express personal experiences, opinions, and irritations within a supportive community. Despite not having "Disney" in their titles, the mentioned subreddits frequently feature threads about Disney adults, making them relevant additions to the research.

In these threads, OPs are categorized with 'flairs' indicating content type, like 'story' for text threads and 'image' for image threads. Threads with 'discussion,' 'story,' 'brag,' and 'satire' flairs were prioritized as they often feature in-depth discussions or personal stories. Threads were purposely sampled, ensuring flexibility and diversity in data collection. The selected threads had "Disney adult" in the title and displayed a negative, positive, or ambiguous tone towards Disney adults. Comments and comment replies to the original posts (OP) within the threads were also considered and purposely selected for analysis. An overview of the selected Reddit threads can be found in Appendix A.

### 3.3 Data collection procedure

The search function on Reddit was utilized to identify posts initiating discussions (threads) about Disney adults. During the data collection process to address the primary research question and its sub-questions, it was essential to gather data from both trolls and Disney adults on Reddit. To collect data from both parties, the examination focused on the original post (OP) which starts a thread. From the original posts, it was determined whether trolling behaviour was present based on the criteria outlined in the theoretical framework (Cheng et al., 2017, p. 1226; Buckels et al., 2014, p. 100; Brubaker et al., 2021, p. 2). It was also identified if the original post was made by a Disney adult, indicated by statements such as "I am a Disney adult" within the text. By selecting Reddit threads in this manner, the researcher hoped that the original post would prompt specific comments from both Disney adults and trolls. Additionally, threads were selected where it was unclear from the OP whether the author was for or against Disney

adults. In addition to considering both parties, the threads were also selected based on the tone of the message, the number of comments, and the latest activity. From this research, nine threads concerning Disney adults were selected. An overview of the threads can be found in Appendix A.

Analysing solely the OPs proved insufficient for the analysis. Therefore, the comments on these OPs were also scrutinized. With an average number of +/- 320 comments per post, it was impractical to review them all. Consequently, a selection process was necessary. The selection was facilitated using Reddit's filtering function, which offers options such as best, top, new, controversial, old, and Q&A. For the analysis, attention was directed to the first 10 comments in the controversial and top categories. This choice was made because controversial comments are pertinent to the topic and often spark heated debates, given their balanced ratio of upvotes to downvotes. The top filter was selected because it highlights comments with the highest number of upvotes or downvotes, making them significant reactions to the initial post that initiated the thread.

In a Reddit thread, comments often elicit replies. These comment replies can serve to rectify misunderstandings, provide additional context, and enrich the overall comprehension of the discussed topic (Krausman, 2019, p. 249). Therefore, the analysis also encompassed comment replies that were relevant to the research. Relevance was determined based on whether they contributed to stigmatizing perceptions, response strategies, and/or opinions. By examining both comments and replies, a more holistic view of the discussions surrounding the topic of Disney adults was obtained, resulting in a more nuanced understanding of the scholarly content and potential avenues for future research (Krausman, 2019, p. 249).

The data was copied from the Reddit platform onto a Word file on the researcher's computer for manual analysis. In total, 249 comments were analysed. An overview of the selected comments and comment replies is included as a separate document submitted with the thesis.

### **3.4 Operationalization**

The research investigated key concepts from the theoretical framework: trolling behavior, stigmas and response strategies, and group dynamics. All concepts were explored through the analysis of posts, comments, and comment replies on Reddit threads around Disney adults.

#### *3.4.1 Trolling behaviour*

The theoretical framework acknowledged that trolling is a multifaceted concept, emphasizing the need for continued research. In this study, the focus was on the behaviour of trolls who spread negative perceptions, stigmas about Disney adults on Reddit. To observe their behaviour, the study employed

Hardaker's (2013, p. 80) scale of six trolling strategies. Appendix B demonstrates the operationalization of these strategies in identifying trolling behaviour on Reddit concerning Disney adults.

#### *3.4.2 Response strategies*

This research not only examines the behaviour of trolls but also the response of Reddit community members including Disney adults to the negativity associated with the label "Disney adults." Hardaker's (2015, p. 208) seven response types were applied to explore the response strategies. Appendix C illustrates how these response strategies were operationalized. This overview was used to analyze posts, comments, and comment replies on Reddit to reveal the responses strategies employed by Reddit community members including Disney adults.

#### *3.4.3 Stigmas*

Furthermore, alongside analysing troll behaviour, this study delved into the potential stigmas associated with Disney adults. Within the theoretical framework, various forms of stigma were identified (Lewis, 2002, p. 11; Cohen et al., 2017, p. 195). Stigmas surrounding fandom can manifest in stereotypes and labels such as obsessive, abnormal, and silly, which sensationalize fan behaviour. These stigmas may also include assumptions about fans' social behaviours, interests, or lifestyle choices. Additionally, stigmas may extend to the judging the individual themselves, influenced by factors like gender, age, or physical appearance. In the analysis, it was investigated whether the posts, comments, and comment replies addressed stigmas related to fan behaviour or judging the individuals themselves.

#### *3.4.4 Group dynamics*

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the interactional dynamic between trolls and Disney adults, there was also an examination of the impact of trolling behaviour on group dynamics in a Reddit thread centred around Disney adults. This involved observing the formation of in-groups and outgroups in a Reddit thread based on shared values, opinions, and responses to trolling behaviour. The analysis of in-groups and outgroups is derived from Hopkinson's (2013, p. 10) study. The formation of in-groups and outgroups was observed through patterns of solidarity, alliance formation, and conflict resolution strategies among different groups.

### **3.5 Analysis**

This study utilized thematic analysis as its primary analytical approach, focusing on identifying, examining, and presenting recurring patterns or themes within the dataset (Schreier, 2013, p. 7). According to Braun and Clarke (2008, p. 80), themes in thematic analysis encapsulate significant aspects of the data relevant to the research question, facilitating organized responses or meanings within the dataset. Categorizing themes ensures alignment with the research question, aids in extracting key insights,

and provides a structured interpretation, facilitating effective exploration.

Thematic analysis can employ inductive, deductive, or a combination of both approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2008, p. 80). This research adopted both inductive and deductive approaches, deriving themes from relevant theories in the theoretical framework while also allowing themes to emerge directly from the data. This dual approach ensured a comprehensive and rigorous analysis, informed by both the data and pertinent theoretical frameworks or research questions.

Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility in identifying and exploring patterns, themes, and meanings within qualitative data. Given the focus on understanding the interactional dynamic between trolls and Disney adults on Reddit, thematic analysis allows for the systematic examination of comments to uncover trolling strategies, stigmas, responses strategies and the formation of in outgroups.

The analysis followed Braun & Clarke's (2008, p. 86) multi-stage process of coding and categorizing, which includes becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, identifying themes, and reviewing and defining those themes. During the stage of identifying themes, pre-existing themes from the theoretical framework are incorporated into the analysis process. This iterative approach enhances the rigor, depth, and richness of the thematic analysis, facilitating the exploration of the interactional dynamic between trolls and Disney Adults on Reddit in the final interpretation and presentation of findings.

The data analysis began with identifying the trolling strategies used in both the original posts (OPs) and the comments. Next, the study examined which stigmas about Disney adults were propagated through these comments. This was followed by an analysis of the reactions from Disney adults and other Reddit community members to these stigmas. Finally, the influence of trolling on the group dynamics within the Reddit threads was assessed. Throughout this analysis, the stages of progression in a verbal trolling incident as defined by Hopkinson (2013, p. 12) were applied: Stage 1 (baiting) corresponds to trolling behavior, Stage 2 (biting) involves responses, and Stage 3 (flaming) pertains to responses and group dynamics.

## 4 Results

This research aims to answer the main research question: What is the nature of the interactional dynamic between trolls and Disney adults in online community Reddit? by the means of a case study of online community Reddit using a thematic content analysis. The thematic content analysis comprises nine Reddit threads, in which the original posts and the first ten top and controversial comments have been examined. This chapter will present the results of both the posts and comment analysis structured by four main themes and various sub-themes. The four main themes are ‘trolling behaviour directed at Disney adults’, ‘stigmas about Disney adults’, ‘troll response strategies’ and ‘group dynamics.’ Accompanied by comments from the dataset, this chapter will draw upon the found themes and explain them by the means of the in the theoretical framework discussed literature on the progress of a verbal trolling incident.

The first themes discovered in the analysis focus on the types of trolling behaviour and the stigmas that trolls spread about Disney adults on Reddit. Next, the theme of troll response strategies is discussed, highlighting how Disney adults and other Reddit community members respond to these stigmas and trolling behaviour. Finally, the analysis examines the formation of ingroup and outgroup dynamics within Reddit threads, identifying patterns that are linked to specific themes. Various tools from the methodology section were employed to conduct this thematic analysis and derive the results.

Main Theme	Sub Theme
<i>Trolling behavior</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Covert &amp; overt trolling behaviour in original posts Reddit</li><li>• Covert trolling behaviour in comments</li><li>• Overt trolling behaviour in comments</li><li>• Difference in trolling behaviour because of OP</li></ul>
Stigmas about Disney adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The socially awkward Disney adult</li><li>• The immature Disney adult</li><li>• The obsessive Disney adult</li></ul>
Troll response strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Critiquing the troll</li><li>• Challenging the troll</li></ul>
Group dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In group formation</li><li>• Out group formation</li></ul>

Table 1 overview of themes discovered from the analysis.

## 4.1 Trolling behaviour

The first main theme found in the dataset was ‘trolling behaviour directed at Disney adults’ as the dataset encompassed various instances of users trolling Disney adults. To identify which trolling behaviours were employed, Hardaker’s (2013, p. 80) six trolling strategies were used in the analysis. The sub question guiding this analysis was: What specific trolling behaviours are observed in discussions about Disney adults on Reddit? The sub-themes identified included both covert and overt troll behaviours found in the original posts and comments made by trolls within the Reddit threads. All these sub-themes form the main theme ‘trolling behaviour directed at Disney adults’ and contain elements of the theoretical framework regarding trolling behaviours strategies and the first stage of the progression of a verbal trolling incident.

### 4.1.1 *Covert & overt trolling behaviour in original posts Reddit*

Before delving into the sub-themes of the main theme ‘trolling behaviours directed at Disney adults,’ the original posts (OPs) of the threads were first analysed to determine whether the OP influenced the subsequent comments. Out of the nine selected threads, four threads exhibited trolling behaviour in their OP. These four OPs displayed a negative stance towards Disney adults. In the OPs of the other selected threads, there is either a positive tone towards Disney adults or no explicit stance is taken towards Disney adults, although they are mentioned. You can find a total overview of the OPs in Appendix A.

OPs with negative tone

- (1) I just think full grown adults obsessed with Disney are just weird. I get that they make good movies but having your house full of Disney stuff, having Disney clothes and accessories? idk it's just weird to me.
- (2) I just don't get the appeal... sure I watch a Disney or Pixar movie every once in a while, after my daughter goes to bed. But people who make it their entire personality I fucking hate them. Like as soon as you start talking about Disney or I notice a Disney tattoo on your body, I immediately lose all respect for you... Just toxic trash.
- (3) Disney adults. I mean the adults without kids who go several times a year, are constantly posting about it on social media (“I need to go back!” Or “only 280 days until paradise!”) and whose houses are decorated with Disney stuff. It genuinely frightens me how obsessed people get.
- (4) Being a Disney adult is weird and should be discouraged. Whenever I meet a childless adult who still likes kids' shows or movies as an adult, I have to assume there's some kind of maturity problem, especially if they're mostly watching kids' shit by themselves. If they're still watching content meant for kids for the humour or the themes, they've either never seen things intended for

adults, or they've seen some of it and found they can't handle it. I feel like a lot of these people are only ever a few steps away from becoming like the worst examples of the adult. It's weird, it's creepy, and we should start treating people who are well into adulthood who still want to see every Disney/Pixar/Illumination/animated Dreamworks movie as they come out as social pariahs; Really, the only reasonable explanation I can come up with is that some of these people have taken the nostalgia pills a bit too hard.

The OPs above exhibit trolling behaviour due to their provocative language, derogatory remarks, and their intent to provoke strong, negative, and emotional reactions from readers. According to Hopkinson (2013, p. 13), these OPs serve as the baiting stage, the first stage of the progression of a verbal trolling incident, as they signify the start of a trolling attack, where the troll posts a provocative message to elicit reactions from other participants.

The first OP demonstrates antipathizing trolling behaviour towards adults who are passionate about Disney. Phrases like "obsessed with Disney" and "just weird" reflect a judgmental tone and use negative language to disapprove of adults who enjoy Disney content. The statement criticizes their behaviour, dismisses their interests, and aims to provoke a reaction from Disney enthusiasts.

Looking at the second OP, it expresses disdain towards individuals who prioritize Disney in their lives, even going so far as to claim a loss of respect for those who show such interests. The OP employs strong language and derogatory terms to belittle and provoke individuals passionate about Disney. Phrases like "but people who make it their entire personality, I fucking hate them" and "every person I've met who is a Disney adult turns out to be awful human beings, just toxic trash" reflect an antipathetic trolling behaviour designed to elicit strong reactions and controversy within the thread (Hardaker, 2013, p. 73).

The third OP targets "Disney adults" who are childless but deeply engaged with Disney culture, portraying their behaviour as frightening and obsessive. The OP aims to provoke a reaction by stigmatizing and ridiculing individuals who exhibit a strong affinity for Disney, creating a sense of division and controversy. This behaviour aligns with Hardaker's (2013, p. 71) strategy of criticism trolling. The troll criticizes adults who frequently visit Disney, often post about it on social media, and decorate their homes with Disney items, implying they have an excessive obsession with Disney.

The final OP employs various trolling strategies identified by Hardaker (2013, 71) to criticize and ridicule adults who enjoy children's movies and shows. First, it criticizes adults' behaviour as "weird" and "immature". Then, its antipathies by suggesting they should be treated as "social pariahs". It implies that they are on the brink of extreme fandom, using shocking statements like "these people have taken the

nostalgia pill a bit too hard." Additionally, it employs an aggressive strategy by challenging the preferences of Disney adults.

Based on the analysis, it can be said that in these negative OPs, the trolls used 'bait' phrases like "just weird," "immature," and "fucking hate them" to start the trolling attack. According to Hopkinson (2013, p. 13), this baiting tactic aims to challenge the prevailing beliefs or values of the community, provoking emotional responses from in-group members (Disney adults). Both Hardaker's (2013, p. 80) covert and overt trolling strategies were observed in these OPs. The first three OPs employed only covert strategies: antipathize and criticize, while the fourth OP used a combination of covert and overt trolling strategies. Covert strategies are categorized as tactics where the troll uses deceptive methods to create a facade of innocence or sincerity while engaging in behaviours intended to provoke reactions from others. According to Hardaker (2013, p. 61), trolls do this to conceal or disguise their true intentions and manipulate online interactions without being easily identified as the instigator of conflict or disruption. However, in the first three OPs, it's clear that they are not trying to maintain a facade, as their words "I immediately lose all respect for you...," "frightens me," and "weird" plainly express their opinions about Disney adults. However, what makes these OPs fall more into the category of cover styles is that they do not directly attack a specific Disney adult.

In the other selected Reddit threads with a positive and inquisitive tone about Disney adults, trolling did not occur from the OP. Instead, the trolls' opening moves took place in the comments on the OP of the thread. Later in the results section, we will discuss whether there is a difference in trolling behaviour based on the OP.

#### *4.1.2 Covert trolling behaviour in comments*

The study of comments in nine Reddit threads about Disney adults reveals that trolling occurs not only in threads with a negative OP but also in threads with a positive or questionable OP. The analysis aims to answer which strategy is most used in the comments. The analysis reveals that the most common trolling strategies are antipathize, hypo criticize, and criticize. These are all covert strategies, which in the context of trolling, refer to indirect and subtle approaches used by individuals to disrupt online discussions without overtly appearing as a troll (Hardaker, 2013, p. 62; Jenks, 2019, p. 56; Lee et al., 2022, p. 3531). The difference between these three covert trolling strategies lies in their underlying intentions and approaches to provoking reactions within online interactions (Hardaker, 2013, p. 62).

Within the subtheme of covert trolling strategies found in the comments, it was also revealed that the antipathize covert strategy from Hardaker (2013, p. 73) is most prevalent. The most common trolling strategy in the comments is antipathize. This trolling strategy involves creating discussions that provoke

emotional, often negative, reactions by expressing disapproval or criticism towards a topic, individual, or group (Lee et al., 2022, p. 3531). The troller proactively and covertly creates a sensitive or antagonistic context by being deliberately controversial or provocative (Hardaker, 2013, p. 73)

Characteristic of this strategy is thus that the comment creates a sensitive discussion by taking a provocative stance on a given topic or situation that elicits an emotional response. The dataset reveals that trolls frequently posted comments (bait) to initiate discussions about someone's affection for Disney and their obsessive behaviour. These comments were often used by trolls to adopt a provocative stance, aiming to elicit an emotional response. Consider this comment: "If Disneyland is the 'only place you can be happy,' then you have clinical depression and should seek professional help." Here, the troll employs a judgmental and critical tone to disapprove of someone's affection for Disney, suggesting it as a symptom of clinical depression. This is both provocative and can trigger an emotional response. Another troll says this about someone's affection for Disney: "I question someone's mental health if they need to go to Disneyland weekly. I had a teacher who used to do it, and it turned out she was going through a crippling divorce and was using it as a way to cope." In this sentence, "question someone's mental health" implies passing judgment on an individual's psychological state due to their affection for Disney. This can be viewed as provocative and potentially offensive, aiming to evoke an emotional reaction. Both comments employ a judgmental and critical tone, suggesting that affection for Disney may indicate underlying psychological issues, such as clinical depression or coping mechanism for traumatic event like divorce. This provocative stance aims to trigger an emotional response from Disney adults and demonstrates a pattern observed during the analysis, where trolls exploit discussions about Disney affection to incite emotional reactions.

Another observed pattern within the antipathize trolling strategy involved trolls frequently commenting on the obsessive behaviour of Disney adults to incite an emotional response. For instance, in comments related to this topic, phrases such as "cult-like obsessive behaviour" and "I don't think collecting art, clothes, or sports memorabilia is comparable to being obsessed with Disney" are used. Additionally, there are statements like "Disney movies are for children" and "Disney-obsessed adults are so goddamn irritating." These statements are used to express criticism and disbelief towards individuals who are obsessed with Disney. The comments aim to engage Disney adults emotionally by addressing the topics of affection and obsession with Disney, with the trolls expressing their personal stances on the matter.

According to Hardaker (2013, p. 73), this trolling strategy enables trolls to use more subtle, deceptive, or indirect methods to evoke negative emotions or reactions from the targeted individuals (Disney adults). In the comments the trolls achieved this through for example via subtle insinuations,

indirect criticisms, and masking their true intentions of provocation or disruption behind a façade of seemingly harmless comments. By operating in a more subtle and deceptive manner, the troll can create discord and discomfort without immediately revealing their antagonistic motives, making it a covert form of trolling.

The second prominent code observed in the comments is the covert trolling strategy of hypo criticizing. This strategy is characterized by the poster criticizing others for minor issues while often making similar mistakes themselves. In other words, the troll criticizing someone for an offence of which they are also guilty (Hardaker, 2013, p. 71).

What stands out in the comments categorized as hypo criticizing is that they all express a dislike for extreme Disney adults while also demonstrating some level of interest in Disney themselves. Consider this comment: "I think there's a difference between 'Disney adult,' 'Disney Adult,' and 'DISNEY ADULT.' I love staying informed about updates and changes to the parks, and I watch some YouTube channels, but living outside the US means we don't go often. However, people who go into deep debt buying merch and experiences are a little off the rails." The troll discusses various levels of Disney adult fandom and criticizes them based on the merchandise they buy, labelling them as "a little bit off the rails." However, the troll also describes enjoying staying up to date on changes in the park and watching YouTube videos about it. This behaviour shows a hypocritical stance, as the troll judges and disapproves of others who buy a lot of Disney merchandise while exhibiting a similar level of engagement with Disney themselves.

This pattern of criticizing adults who like Disney while also enjoying it themselves is seen in other comments as well, not just the example above. These comments frequently express a desire to "avoid" Disney adults while also admitting to regular visits to Disney. Furthermore, one troll remarked, "I am an adult (with kids) who likes Disney, but I fully agree that Disney adults are their own breed, of which I am afraid." Another troll mentioned not understanding why an adult would visit Disney 4-5 times a year, while also admitting they visit with their own children. These comments effectively demonstrate that the trolls criticize Disney adults while also showing their own interest in Disney.

According to Jenks (2019, p. 56), this trolling strategy allows trolls to criticize others (Disney adults) without overtly appearing hostile or confrontational, making it difficult for recipients to discern the true intent behind the message. This covert nature of this trolling strategy means that the Disney adults may struggle to identify whether comments are genuine criticisms or subtle provocations. This can lead to heightened emotional response, prolonged conflicts, and increased tension within the Reddit community, as the true intent of the trolls remains obscured, making constructive dialogue more challenging.

The third prominent code in the comments is the criticize strategy. This strategy relates to hypo criticizing, as both involve criticism, but they differ in approach. In the criticizing strategy, the troll expresses disapproval by pointing out faults in a balanced and constructive manner (Jenks, 2019, p. 56). In contrast, the hypo criticizing strategy involves giving more criticism to belittle, intimidate, or create a false sense of superiority (Jenks, 2019. p. 56).

A pattern that emerges in this strategy is the criticism of Disney adults for supporting the Walt Disney Company. In the comments, the Walt Disney Company is portrayed as a realm of marketing manipulation, driven purely by profit motives, and deemed unethical. Even Walt Disney himself faces criticism in the comments, being described as: a pervert, quasi-nazi, fascist, racist and a huge scumbag. While Disney adults are not directly criticized, they serve as indirect targets within these discussions.

For example:

- (A) I know someone who went on another Disney cruise this year, and go to Disney World all the time, yet they're older and by themselves. I'm trying hard not to judge, but it seems so bizarre and juvenile/repressed to me.
- (B) Consoomerism. All of the franchises/parks are marketing hellscapes meticulously designed to keep you in an emotional state where you're comfortable spending lots of money for as long as possible, and to encourage you to come back. The marketing seems to be mostly aimed at affluent parents but it has a broad appeal - if it results in you letting your whole life revolve around their products, the corpos aren't gonna complain lol.

Person B offers a critical perspective on consumerism and the marketing strategies employed by franchises and theme parks like Disney. It highlights the commercial aspects of these establishments and how they aim to encourage consumer spending and loyalty. Person B expresses a negative view of consumerism and the influence of corporations on individuals' lives. The troll in this post may not directly criticize Disney adults, but rather indirectly critiques them based on the actions of the Walt Disney Company.

A topic that accompanies this pattern is that the Walt Disney Company is considered unethical, as evidenced by comments such as: "It's a company whose only goal is to separate them from their money" and "Also, as a company, they are definitely not my favourite. Mickey paying people nothing to work at the parks. Just seems immoral". In these types of comments, Disney adults are not directly targeted by the troll, which makes the strategy a more covert style. However, it can be inferred from these comments that the commenters suggest that individuals who support the Walt Disney Company may also be perceived as unethical by association. Since they criticize Disney for unethical practices and have a negative view of

the company, individuals who actively support or engage with Disney (such as Disney adults) may be indirectly criticized for their affiliation with the company. It can be said that by involving the company in their trolling comments, they aim to deliver criticism to Disney adults in a covert, indirect, balanced, and constructive manner.

#### *4.1.3 Overt trolling behaviour in comments*

Within the sub-theme of overt trolling strategies, the analysis identified two of Hardaker's (2013, p. 80) overt trolling strategies. It was evident from the comments that aggressive and shocking trolling tactics are employed. Hardaker's (2013, p. 75) overt strategies are more direct and aggressive tactics used by trolls, characterized by explicit and obvious actions intended to provoke, offend, or disrupt online interactions. However, these overt strategies are significantly less common than the covert trolling strategies.

The pattern observed in these overt trolling strategies involves comments that strongly attack Disney adults for their obsessive behaviour and attachment to Disney products. In these comments, trolls employ aggressive and derogatory language to attack Disney adults, labelling them as "obsessive," "cult-like," "ignorant," "racist," "disgusting trash," "creepy as shit," and "toxic." Disney adults often receive the label "toxic" because of their possession of Disney products, and they are frequently compared to cults due to their obsessive behaviour. Disney adults are also often labelled as racists. They receive this label because, according to the trolls, Walt Disney was also a racist: "Disney was a Quasi-Nazi, fascist, and hella racist... that's why it doesn't surprise me." These labels constitute the aggressive overt trolling strategy, characterized by their insulting and aggressive nature directed at Disney adults, with the aim of provoking a strong emotional response.

Trolls also attack Disney adults by making extreme comparisons, likening them to "drug addicts" or "groomers". Describing Disney adults as groomers can be specifically classified as shocking. The full comment, "Disney adults especially the ones that wear Mickey ears are groomers," makes a highly provocative and extreme statement by equating Disney adults who wear Mickey ears to groomers. This comparison is meant to be shocking and offensive, as it links Disney adults to a serious and harmful behaviour. The use of such a strong and inflammatory accusation is typical of shock trolling, aiming to provoke strong reactions and stir up controversy (Hardaker, 2013, p. 76). These aggressive and shocking trolling strategies not only aim to demean and insult Disney adults but also serve to disrupt the Reddit threads by inciting strong emotional responses and conflicts.

Based on the analysis of the comments, various troll strategies have been identified. However, while these troll strategies are supported by the study by Hardaker (2013, p. 80), it is still difficult to

determine whether they are perceived as trolling behaviour by Disney adults alone. Trolling behaviour often hinges on the subjective interpretation of the individuals involved rather than on objective criteria (Hardaker, 2015, p. 211). The perception of trolling can be influenced by factors such as tone, context, relationships between individuals, personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, and previous experience with similar behaviour in online interactions (Hardaker, 2015, p. 211; Sanflippo et al., 2017, p. 34). Therefore, what one person may perceive as trolling behaviour, another might interpret differently. This subjectivity underscores the complexity of identifying trolling behaviour within online communities and emphasizes the need for nuanced understanding when analysing online discourse.

#### 4.1.4 Differences in trolling because of OP

It's interesting to note that based on the OP that starts a Reddit thread, there does not seem to be a direct difference in the occurrence of trolling in threads with a negative, positive, or inquisitive tone towards Disney adults. Positive Reddit threads about Disney adults receive approximately the same number of trolling comments as negative ones according to the coding strategy used in this research. This indicates that trolling behaviour is not limited to Reddit threads where the OP provokes it; trolls intentionally seek to disrupt discussions even in positive environments. The number of troll strategies isn't exactly equal, as a total of 4 negative threads and 3 positive threads were analysed. However, the ratio between them can be roughly similar.

Strategy	Tone of OP		
	Negative	Positive	Questionable
Digress	5	2	5
(Hypo)criticize	22	14	11
Antipathize	23	11	3
<b>Covert total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>19</b>
Endanger	4	2	1
Shock	6	2	
Aggress	9	7	2
<b>Overt total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>3</b>

Table 2 overview number of trolling strategies

Additionally, it's noteworthy that in threads where the OP doesn't take a direct stance on Disney adults, there's an equal number of defensive and trolling comments. It's also been observed that in all three categories, most discovered troll strategies are covert, with fewer overt strategies being used. It can be concluded that trolls use covert tactics to achieve their goals while avoiding detection or direct

confrontation. These covert trolling tactics may have a longer-lasting impact on individuals or communities, as they create subtle disruptions or sow seeds of doubt without overtly aggressive behaviour. Additionally, trolling behaviour is not determined by the original post. Troll behaviour can occur in any setting, and the initial bait can be dropped either in the original post or in the comments.

## 4.2 Stigmas about Disney adults

To address the first sub-question, the analysis of the comments also considered the negativity directed towards Disney adults and the potential stigmas being spread about them on Reddit. Stigmas are assigned negative labels towards an individual or group (Yang, 2023, p. 2; Cohen et al., 2017, p. 193; Lopes, 2006, p. 387). In this research, they are specifically negative labels towards Disney adults. These labels can take various forms. The label can be related to fan behaviour, or it can revolve around judging individuals based on their chosen popular culture. Based on the analysis the following labels around Disney adults have been identified: the socially awkward Disney adult, the immature Disney adult, and the obsessive Disney adult. It is important to note that all comments made are prejudices about Disney adults to which a label is attached. These comments can unfairly stigmatize Disney adults because of their interests and hobbies.

### 4.2.1 *The socially awkward Disney adult*

This first label emerged from analysing troll comments that include words like "weird," "socially awkward," and "undatable." Disney adults are perceived as socially awkward because their fan behavior can come across as weird, strange, and abnormal. In the comments, things are said like: "I mean, I understand if you want to own a couple of trinkets or maybe a hoodie, but when they're constantly dressed head to toe in Mickey Mouse or have their room decked out in merch, that's the weird bit," and "If you sat down one day and talked about Disney, I'd be bored but okay, whatever. But when it's every day, then you're weird and it's annoying to everyone around you because you are forcing it on us." In both comments, Disney adults are called "weird" because, in the first comment, trolls think that Disney adults might potentially die for Disney, and in the second comment, Disney adults are labelled as weird because, according to the troll, they talk about Disney every day. Due to the perceived weirdness of Disney adults, such as talking about Disney every day and wearing Mickey Mouse clothes regularly, the combination of these factors can lead to them being labelled as socially awkward.

This label also encompasses Disney adults being deemed undatable. Being undatable is often linked to being perceived as socially awkward. Disney adults receive this label due to their obsession with Disney. One comment states, "Being obsessed with Disney is up there with feminism and dumb tattoos for making a woman undatable." According to the trolls, this obsessive behaviour makes Disney adults less

attractive or appealing as potential romantic partners. The trolls who spread these ideas about Disney adults being undesirable in a dating context present potentially harmful and misleading information that could negatively impact individuals who identify with these categories.

Disney adults are often seen as socially awkward due to behaviours observed in Disney parks that trolls interpret as socially inappropriate. These behaviours include instances where "Disney adults" prioritize taking pictures with characters over children, engage in extensive conversations with characters, or even cut lines for attractions by running through the park. Critics view these interactions and behaviours as examples of social awkwardness.

The label "socially awkward Disney adult" originates from these troll comments. It encompasses various criticisms, such as being labelled as weird due to their intense fan behaviour, being considered undatable because of their obsessive fandom, and displaying socially awkward behaviours within Disney parks. These criticisms all stem from the perceived social awkwardness resulting from the fan behaviour exhibited by Disney adults, as perceived by trolls.

Labelling fantasy fans, like Disney adults, as socially awkward is recognized by Cohen et al. (2015, p. 194). Their study found that this perception of social awkwardness is a key aspect of the stigma associated with fantasy fandom. According to Cohen et al. (2015, p. 194) fantasy fans may be viewed as misfitting, mentally unstable, and geeky, leading to negative interpersonal assessments in terms of social desirability and social attractiveness. It can be said from the analysis that Disney adults receive this same kind of criticisms which acknowledges the fact that fantasy fans commonly receive the label of socially awkward.

#### *4.2.2 The immature Disney adult*

The comments related to this label often assert that Disney adults are immature, childish, and lacking in personal development, perceiving their fandom as inappropriate or unusual for their age. For example, one comment states: "It's just embarrassing when you speak to a fully grown adult who have been amazed at entertainment aimed at children, and I have to agree for the most part. It is very odd to me to be so obsessed with something that is made for children." The trolls imply that such behavior is more fitting for children rather than adults, reflecting societal expectations about age-appropriate interests and activities. They suggest that adults should outgrow certain interests, particularly those associated with children's media. Words like "childish," "immature," "stunted emotionally and psychologically," and "embarrassing" underscore the trolls' disapproval.

Other comments contributing to this label suggest that Disney adults lack personal development,

as they make their fandom their entire personality. For instance, comments assert that "people who make Disney their entire personality are awful toxic humans" and "when it overtakes your whole personality to the point that you can't carry a conversation without Disney coming up, is a good sign that your attachment is unhealthy." Trolls imply that Disney adults lack personal development because they allow Disney to define their entire personality. This failure to work on personal development indirectly contributes to their perceived immaturity.

The label "immature Disney adult" stems from comments about their immaturity, childishness, and lack of personal development. Trolls believe that the fan behaviour displayed by Disney adults is not appropriate for their age and that by making their fandom their entire personality, they are unable to work on personal development, leading to them being seen as immature. It is not uncommon for adults to receive this label. Several studies in the theoretical framework support the idea that adults expressing affection for children's culture may encounter negativity or scepticism. Heljakka (2017, p. 98), Geraghty (2018, p. 170), and Harrington & Biebly (2010, p. 435) support the findings that Disney adults are labelled as immature by highlighting the broader societal trends of viewing adults' engagement with children's culture as inappropriate or childish. One of the broader societal trends includes that the society generally imposes expectations on adults to engage in activities and media that are deemed suitable for their age group. Engaging with children's culture, such as Disney fandom, is often viewed as deviating from these norms. Thus, Heljakka (2017, p. 98), Geraghty (2018, p. 170), and Harrington & Biebly (2010, p. 435) all address the criticism, scepticism, and stigmatization faced by fans of children's culture media, highlighting how enjoying Disney as an adult is frequently linked with perceptions of immaturity.

#### 4.2.3 *The obsessive Disney adult*

The third label emerged as trolls posted comments about Disney adults, often centred around the idea that they take their love for Disney to an extreme level. Disney adults appear obsessive to trolls due to their fanatical behaviour. Comments related to this extreme level include words like "obsessed," "way of life," "addicts," and "consumerism."

Trolls target this by suggesting that Disney adults, for instance, buy too many products: "People who go into deep debt buying merch and experiences are a little off the rails though." Trolls perceive Disney adults as obsessive because they purchase excessive Disney merchandise. Additionally, trolls view Disney adults as obsessive for posting Disney content every day. For example: "I know a 31-year-old who's going for the second time this year (lives across the country from Florida so it ain't cheap) and everyday posts 'countdown to Disney' or 'I need to go back!' Her house is also filled with Disney prints, collectibles, blankets, etc. I was low key shocked lol." Furthermore, trolls claim that Disney adults refuse

to accept gifts that are not related to Disney: "It's insane. There are people who will not accept gifts that are not Disney. Doing this with anything is obsessive, and they need help."

In the previous section on troll behaviour, it was noted that Disney adults often receive criticism for their obsessive behaviour, such as posting daily about Disney on social media, decorating their homes with Disney items, and being seen as overly consumeristic. Based on the theoretical framework this obsession is fuelled by nostalgia, the sense of community and belonging they find within Disney fan groups, and the opportunity to escape from reality and immerse themselves in a magical world (Williams-Turkowski, 2020, p. 78; Kiriakou, 2017, p. 106). This understanding challenges the negative perceptions that trolls spread about obsessive Disney adults and highlights the deeper motivations behind their behaviours, emphasizing the positive aspects of their fandom.

#### **4.3 Troll response strategies**

Now that the discussions about Disney adults on Reddit and the trolling strategies used are clear, this section of the results will focus on reactions. Specifically, it will examine how Disney adults and other Reddit community members respond to the troll behaviour and stigmas on the platform. This brings the analysis to the third theme: troll response strategies.

With this, also the second stage of the progression of the verbal trolling incident has been reached, known as the biting stage. The biting stage occurs when targeted individuals or participants respond to the troll's provocation (Hopkison, 2013, p. 9). To determine how the Disney adults and Reddit community members respond, the comments and comment replies were analysed to see if any of the seven response types proposed by Hardaker (2015, p. 208) were applied. The sub question guiding this analysis was: How do Disney adults and other members of the Reddit community members react to such trolling behaviour and associated stigmas? The analysis indicates that critiquing the trolls and challenging the trolls are the key modes of responses within the observed discussions.

##### *4.3.1 Critiquing the trolls*

The critiquing strategy in response to trolling involves evaluating and analysing the quality, effectiveness, and impact of the troll's behaviour (Hardaker, 2015, p. 217). This sub-theme within the main theme 'troll response strategies' was identified based on comments critiquing troll comments by either Disney adults or other Reddit community members.

The trolls were critiqued by Disney adults and Reddit community members in various ways. For example, in the analysis of the comments, it emerged how Reddit community members questioned and critiqued the original troll's negative and judgmental stance towards Disney adults, emphasizing the need

for justified criticism:

- (A) I think people are missing the point of the edit... I said that they are horrible people...
- (B) But you haven't really answered how they're shoving it in your face. Like hobbies they do on their own time or how they spend their money is none of your business. Who cares if they have a Mickey tattoo? You just kinda come off as judgmental for no good reason

In the conversation between A & B we see person B challenge the troll's perspective and behaviour by questioning their judgement and assumptions. Person B directly addresses the judgmental tone of Person A's comment and questions the validity of their criticisms about Disney adults. In another comment addressing this pattern of emphasizing the necessity for justified criticism, it was stated: "Lots of assumptions without anything to back them up but 'trust me bro'." In this pattern, Disney adults and other Reddit community members seek a certain validation regarding the negativity suggested by the trolls about Disney adults, and they do so in a critiquing manner.

The Disney adults and other Reddit community members also criticized the trolls by assessing their logic, consistency, and fairness, as well as the broader societal attitudes towards different types of fandom:

- (A) I think there are adults who like Disney and Disney adults. I see Disney adults as the more crazed fanatics who eat, sleep, and breathe Disney. Who go absolutely nuclear if you criticize Disney in any way. I'm not advocating bullying, online, or anywhere else, but I think it's the obsessive ones that fuel the fire.
- (B) Meanwhile, sports fans regularly \*riot in the streets\* over their fandom and somehow that's totally normal.

In the example above, Person B critiques the troll comment made by person A by assessing their logic, consistency, and fairness. Person B questions the tolerance of extreme sports fandom by highlighting a double standard. He/she emphasizes that while sports fans may engage in extreme behaviour such as rioting, such actions are often normalized, contrasting this with the negative perception of obsessive Disney fans. Another example within this pattern involves attempting to evaluate the trolls point by substantiating their argument with a comparison to another fandom. Person B challenges the notion that sports are "more personal" than Disney fandom by offering a comprehensive critique of the reasoning behind sports fandom.

(A) Sports are much more personal than Disney movies, if an adult would die for Disney it's a lot more weird that most people's hobby

(B) Saying "sports are much more personal" is just an empty rationalization. What exactly is personal about being a fan of, say the NFL team of the city you live in? You happen to live in that city either because you were born there or brought there as a child, or you got a job there as an adult. The NFL team there was created as a business to get revenue through ticket sales, broadcasting, and merchandising, most of the players on the team are not originally from that city, they were brought there to play for the team, many don't live in that city during the off-season, and if they get a better deal somewhere else, they leave that city. And the team itself doesn't have much more loyalty to the city. Despite making millions upon millions of dollars, the team expects the city to pay for the team's stadium. And once that stadium is a few years old and the team wants a new one, they blackmail the city into paying for a new one by threatening to leave and go to another city. Yet the citizens of a city are fans of that team because it is "their" team - ie the default team they are supposed to root for because that's where they live. Tell me again, what is so "personal" about sports.

Within this pattern, Disney adults and other Reddit community members compare sports fandom with Disney fandom to critique the logic, fairness, and consistency of troll comments. Comparing to sports is not uncommon. Cohen et al. (2015, p. 201) compared sports fans with science fiction and fantasy fans, finding that sports fans are generally more widely accepted in society. Their research suggests that sports fandom is often perceived as more mainstream and socially acceptable, leading to more positive interpersonal assessments in terms of physical attractiveness, social desirability, and task attractiveness. In contrast, science fiction and fantasy fans may face greater challenges regarding social perception and acceptance. This highlights how society tends to favour certain types of fandoms, creating a biased view that often leaves Disney fans unfairly stigmatized.

The final pattern discovered in the comments regarding the sub-theme of critiquing the trolls is that Disney adults and other Reddit community members critique the trolls' assumptions and generalizations made in the comments:

(A) Everyone except the adult Disney fans find it weird as fuck. See a movie, sure. Have a little mermaid themed 40th birthday, no. That's weird.

(B) And I highly doubt most of these people do that. Are there those that are overly obsessed? Yes, but they are in the minority and now you're judging any adult with these interests based on a

small number

The pattern of critiquing the troll's assumptions and generalizations closely relates to the stigmas being spread about Disney adults. From the analysis, it became clear that Disney adults are stigmatized based on perceptions of immaturity, obsessiveness, and social awkwardness. These stigmas arise from the assumptions and generalizations made by trolls about Disney adults on Reddit. In response, Disney adults and other Reddit community members often critique these assumptions. For instance, in the example above, Person B critiques Person A's broad generalization that adult Disney fans are weird by pointing out that the overly obsessed individuals are in the minority. In another example related to the stigma of Disney adults being immature, this occurs:

- (A) How's this any weirder than people who are into sports or hunting and have all kinds of sports stuff everywhere or antlers hanging on the wall? It's just their hobby and they like displaying stuff.
- (B) > (A) Because one is made for children
- (C) > (A) Because Disney is a kid's brand
- (D) > (C) Disney has been a family brand for all ages since its inception
- (E) > (C) I mean, when we think of it in these terms I think it's much weirder for grown adults to be super fans and wear the merch of kids half their age in the name of fandom than it is for someone to have Minnie Mouse bedding. Like a 50 year old getting very passionate about Patrick Mahomes is way fucking weirder than that same 50 year old being really into Disney stuff, but for some reason the former is much more culturally acceptable.

In the example above, person E critiques the judgmental attitude expressed in the comment made by person C toward adults who are passionate fans of certain interest, particularly those associated with children. By questioning the cultural acceptance and perceived weirdness of adult fandom for different subjects, the response by person E challenges the notion that certain interest is inherently more acceptable based on societal norms. The example below demonstrates how the pattern of critiquing the troll manifests in response to a troll comment about the obsessiveness of Disney adults:

- (A) I mean the adults without kids who go several times a year, are constantly posting about it on social media ("I need to go back!" Or "only 280 days until paradise!") and whose houses are decorated with Disney stuff. It genuinely frightens me how obsessed people get.
- (B) I definitely understand that annoyance, but I always find it a bit strange obsessing over Disney is weird, but a person who obsesses over a football team, decorates their house with team merchandise,

always pays attention to the players' stats and even personal lives, and always makes sure to stream their games or travel to different stadiums to watch them play and cheer them on is perfectly normal. Disney Adults are just literally any kind of nerd. I never heard people complain about Star Wars Adults, Pokémon Adults, Nintendo Adults, etc.

In the example above, Person B evaluates the rationale behind adults' obsession with Disney and highlights a perceived double standard in societal acceptance of different adult interests. They question why Disney fandom is singled out compared to other hobbies like football or Star Wars, demonstrating skepticism and critique toward the societal judgment of Disney adults.

Disney adults and Reddit community members respond to trolling behaviour and stigmas by critiquing the trolls. The "bite stage" of Disney adults and other Reddit community members is characterized by their critique of troll behaviour. They emphasize the need for justified criticism and assess the logic, consistency, and fairness of troll comments by comparing them to another fandom. It is evident that they also use this critique strategy to address the stigmas propagated against Disney adults. According to Hardaker (2015, p. 218) & Lee et al. (2022, p. 3532) responding in a critique way to trolls can be a strategic and effective approach to counter their behaviour, weaken their impact, and promote a more constructive and respectful online environment.

#### 4.3.2 *Challenging the trolls*

Challenging the trolls is the second sub-theme that emerged from the analysis of the comments. The challenging response strategy by Hardaker (2015, p. 217) involves confronting the troll in an assertive manner. The analysis of the comments revealed that a significant number of responses involved challenging the assertions made by trolls regarding Disney adults. These assertions refer to the stigmas—such as being obsessive, immature, and socially awkward—that trolls propagate about Disney adults on Reddit. According to Hardaker (2015, p. 217) individuals can use this strategy to challenge the troll indirectly or directly.

Analysing the comments revealed that the stigmas propagated by trolls about Disney adults are mostly challenged directly by the Disney adults and other Reddit community members.

(A) I don't think collecting art, clothes, or sports memorabilia is comparable to being obsessed with Disney. Disney movies are for children. The rest of that stuff isn't.

(B) Chocolate milk is also for children, and I love that stuff. Children aren't some other species, they're just as human as adults. The fact that things are created with a target audience in mind has nothing to do with who can enjoy using those things. What do you think something being 'for

'children' actually means? Ramps are 'for wheelchairs', but that has nothing to do with whether I can walk on them.

Above, you see an example where a troll is directly challenged on their comment about Disney adults being immature. Person B counters the troll's suggestion that Disney is childish or immature. The comment made by Person B, challenges the notion of something being "for children" is compared to examples like chocolate milk to argue that enjoyment is not limited by target demographics. It questions the validity of labelling activities based on their intended audience and emphasizes that people of all ages can find enjoyment in various pursuits.

Below, you see an example where a troll is directly challenging on their comment about Disney adults being obsessive.

- (A) I guess you have a point. I don't spend much time on Disney adults, I mostly just stare in awe and think of all the things they're missing out on in life because they chose that to invest time into.
- (B) You invest your time into judging others, they invest their time into something they love. So in a way, who's really missing out?

In this example, the Reddit community member openly confronts the troll's judgmental attitude. Person A implies that Disney adults are "missing out on life" due to the time they invest in their fandom. Person B directly challenges this judgment by pointing out that while the commenter invests time in judging others, Disney adults invest their time in something they love.

Disney adults are also portrayed by trolls as socially awkward, often because they talk a lot about Disney, which some may find weird and therefore consider them socially uncomfortable to interact with. However, this type of trolling behaviour and stigma is also directly challenged in responses.

- (A) > (B) Except the ones that don't act like it nobody else knows they are obsessed with it. So nobody is judging them. It's only when you make it known that people can judge. If you say down one day and talked about Disney I'd be bored but okay whatever. But when it's every day then you're weird and it's annoying to everyone around you because you are forcing it on us.
- (B) > (A) yeah and I bet you've never forced your shit on anyone else. Give me a break. Have you ever told these people that you are no interested or do you just jump to judgmental right away.

In the example above, Person B is challenging person A by directly addressing the judgmental attitude and hypocrisy in Person A's comment. Person B is directly challenging the idea that it's only

Disney adults who “force” their interest on others and is pushing back against the notion that being openly passionate about something inherently warrants judgment.

It was found that Disney adults and other Reddit community members respond to trolling behaviour and the stigmas being spread. This response corresponds to the "bite stage" in the progression of a verbal trolling incident, as discussed by Hopkinson (2013, p. 9) in his study. According to Hopkinson, the bite stage in online discussions serves to address and mitigate disruptive behaviour. However, the theoretical framework suggests that it might be more effective to emphasize and apply the saying "don't feed the trolls," as this denies trolls the attention and reactions they seek, potentially diminishing the impact of their disruptive behaviour (Coles & West, 2016, p. 238; Sun & Chen, 2021, p. 7; Binns, 2012, p. 548; Yang & Fichman, 2017, p. 1803; Hardaker, 2015, p. 211). Hardaker (2015, p. 211) suggests that responding to trolling behaviour may be more effective and appropriate in some situations. In the case of trolls spreading stigmas about Disney adults, which may contain falsehoods, it can be important to respond. In this study, responses were primarily characterized by critique and challenge. According to Hardaker (2015, p. 225), responding to trolling behaviour can be beneficial for setting boundaries, empowerment, community cohesion, and conflict resolution.

#### 4.4 Group dynamics

In addressing the research question of this study, it was also important to examine the impact of trolling behaviour on group dynamics. Previous research by Hopkinson (2013, p. 8) shows that trolling behaviour contributes to the formation of in groups and outgroups within online communities. In observing the formation of in-groups and out-groups, the selected comments in the Reddit threads were reviewed again. The sub-question that guides this analysis is: How does trolling contribute to the formation of in-groups and out-groups within Reddit threads around the topic of Disney adults?

##### 4.4.1 *In group formation*

The in-group in this study comprises Disney adults. Hopkinson (2013, p. 8) observed that in-group members might unite against trolls, which strengthens their cohesion and identity. The analysis of the comments also revealed that Disney adults form their group by unifying in defence against troll comments made in the Reddit thread.

(A) Personally I say let people relive their childhoods. I actually think its cute when adults embrace stuff like Disney and other family friendly stuff. I mean when it becomes their whole life then yeah I can see that being a concern but as an adult who still watches Disney movies I think its cute when adults showcase their love for Disney.

(B) > (A) Yea I agree.

(C) > (A) I agree, everyone is in such a rush to grow up they sometimes lose any sort of magic. If adults can still embrace that, more power to them.

In the example above, Person A responds to the trolls who believe that Disney adults are simply reliving their childhood and that it's inappropriate because they are entering adulthood and should only engage in mature activities. Persons B & C agree with this sentiment, with C emphasizing that society often pressures people to mature quickly, causing them to lose the joy and wonder of childhood. By embracing Disney, adults can maintain that sense of magic, which person C sees as empowering.

Within this pattern, several examples from the comments can be provided, including the one below. In this example, Disney adults unite against troll comments that criticize Walt Disney for designing the parks exclusively for children. Person B elaborates on this idea, suggesting that Walt Disney actually prioritized adults in the park's design because he was disappointed by the lack of attractions for adults in other amusement parks.

(A) Walt made the parks for both adults and kids. The whole idea that it's exclusively to take your kids is misguided.

(B) > (A) Even better, he made it more for adults, because he was bummed when he would go to amusement parks and see how all the rides for meant for just kids.

In the examples above, the commenters unify against trolls who criticize Disney adults. They all express support for adults enjoying Disney and challenge the idea that Disney is exclusively for children. By doing this, they strengthen their cohesion and identity as a group.

The unifying of Disney adults doesn't just occur in response to comments made by trolls in Reddit threads. An interesting comment emerged during the analysis:

(A) A few years ago, I was really excited to go to Disneyland and was talking about it at work probably a month before the trip. The department manager smiled, and said "I didn't realize you have kids, how old are they?" I laughed and told him he was right before, I don't have kids. His look changed to complete confusion. "Then why would you go to Disneyland?" Because my husband and I both enjoy it... He couldn't fathom it lol

(B) > (A) That, like Disney isn't just for children. Me and my bf have gone a few times since we've been together. I had a Disney pass when it was like \$200 for a So Cal pass lol I don't have

kids but idk how fun it is to go with kids? But I'm not going to wait until I have kids to go to Disney, that's bonkers! Lol

(C) > (A) I'll never understand that mindset that people like your department manager have. Walt himself specifically designed the park for children AND adults. I think some people just can't stand to see others have fun.

The department manager in the example above can be seen as a troll. While he doesn't necessarily make a provocative comment, his remark can still be perceived as derogatory towards person A. Persons B and C support person A's stance that Disney is not just for children. They share a similar opinion, with person C additionally asserting that Walt Disney specifically designed the park for both children and adults. This example illustrates that in real-life situations involving troll behavior, individuals often seek support on platforms like Reddit, forming a supportive network. This helps strengthen and build the bond among Disney adults.

Another way Disney adults form a group among themselves in Reddit threads is by sharing why they are fans of Disney, in response to troll behaviour.

(A) Nope. We were the formative generation (xennials, millennials) I suppose that got both true Disney vintage , and now enjoy the stuff now a days to a degree. Disney raised us. I just don't wear much Disney clothing unless I'm at the park. My wife and I go for our wedding anniversary every year. Always a great time

(B) > (A) Gen x here - same, wife and I are magic key holders and love just going there to walk around and enjoy the amazing smells :)

(C) > (B) also GenX here (52 yrs old) and an out of state magic key holder. i grew up only having gone to disneyland a handful of times before i was 45 (maybe 5 times, if you don't count the dozen or so times i was under 1 yr old when my mother took me while my dad was stationed in Long Beach). i've now done about 20 trips times since 2017, mostly solo trips but several with 20-40+ year old friends, and love it. i used to do a yearly Vegas trip but the cost is as much if not higher than Disneyland, where i have more fun than Vegas. some of my best trips have been just taking slow days and wandering the parks rather than my usual "fit in all the rides i can!" days. hell, last trip i spent an entire day tracking down hidden mickeys and photo-documenting them so that friends can try to find them as well. that was one of the best days i've had (i still ended up

doing half a dozen rides, of course. haha!) ...but gotta love the smell of churros, popcorn, the water in Pirates, and so many other smells.

In the example above, we observe personal anecdotes and experiences from individuals A, B, & C. They explain why they enjoy Disney such as their enjoyment of the park's scents, and their appreciation for leisurely days spent discovering hidden Mickeys. Due to the negativity directed towards Disney adults, it appears they feel compelled to articulate why they enjoy Disney. Nevertheless, this phenomenon creates a space on Reddit where Disney adults can share their beliefs and values related to their Disney(land) fandom with one another. For instance, individuals B and C in the example express their enthusiasm for Disney parks and their experiences as "magic key holders." They convey a sense of pleasure and contentment derived from frequent park visits, indicating a shared belief in Disney's value as a source of entertainment and leisure. The act of sharing by individuals caused by the troll behavior serves to strengthen the bond between them.

Analysis of the comments suggests that the Disney adult group is strengthened by trolling behavior. Trolls provoke conflict and challenge the community on various aspects, including their immaturity, obsessiveness, and social awkwardness. This provoking and challenging leads to alliances among the in-group members, the Disney adults (Hopkison, 2013, p. 8). Firstly, this formation of alliances was observed by the fact that Disney adults unite in defence against troll comments. The unity among Disney adults is influenced by Reddit's participatory nature. Based on Massanari's (2015, p. 13) study on community dynamics and participatory culture on Reddit, alliances forming among Disney adults on the platform illustrate active participation, collaborative interactions, and shared interests that characterize participatory cultures. By coming together to share their perspectives, defend against trolling, and support one another, Disney adults on Reddit demonstrate how participatory platforms can foster community building, solidarity, and mutual support among users with common interests.

Additionally, it has been noticed that they use Reddit as a supportive network in defence against trolls. Seeking a supportive network in response to troll behaviour was also found by Hopkinson (2013, p. 18). Massanari (2015, p. 15) also acknowledges the significance of Reddit as a supportive network where users can find social support, engage in acts of kindness, and participate in collective efforts to address various challenges. Massanari (2015, p. 15) argues that Reddit enables connections by offering resources that ultimately cultivate a sense of community among its users, including groups like the Disney adults. As a result, the Disney adults can strengthen and build their bonds.

Another way the Disney adults' group is strengthened is by responding to troll behaviour with explanations of why they embrace being Disney adults. This approach helps reinforce their sense of belonging and identity within the Disney fandom. Williams-Turkowski's (2020, p. 100) highlights how

fandom, characterized by deep emotional attachment and social interaction, provides fans with a profound sense of community and shared passion. By articulating their reasons for embracing their status as Disney adults in the face of criticism, these individuals are actively engaging in the community-building aspect of fandom, solidifying their connections with like-minded individuals, and strengthening their identity within the Disney fandom community (Williams-Turkowski's, 2020, p. 100)

#### 4.4.2 *Out-group formation*

The out-group in this study consists of trolls who have opinions about Disney adults. Trolling contributes to the formation of out-groups by creating and reinforcing echo chambers. When trolls post negative or provocative comments, especially in threads with a negative OP, they attract like-minded individuals who share similar negative opinions. These individuals then gather in these threads, forming a group that primarily encounters attitudes and beliefs that align with their own. These threads are also referred to as echo chambers (Oddny et al., 2023, p. 62). Massanari (2015, p. 13) highlights Reddit's toxicity, including trolling, marginalization, and problematic discourse, which foster out-groups and echo chambers, reinforcing negative attitudes and isolating individuals within the community. Her study suggests that the toxic culture present on Reddit can provide fertile ground for trolling activities to thrive (Massanari, 2015, p. 13).

Farrell et al. (2019, p. 93) study suggest that group identities on Reddit persist through diverse mechanisms. For instance, they illustrate that the utilization of distinct language, rhetoric and lexicons within Reddit communities aid in upholding groups identities by establishing a common communication approach and reinforcing collective attitudes towards a group. In analyzing troll comments, specific attention was not given to the language styles and vocabularies used that reinforce collective troll attitudes towards Disney adults. However, certain terms stood out in the trolls' language towards Disney adults. Many comments consistently used terms such as immature, childish, obsessive, crazy, weird, lacking in personal development, socially awkward, and undatable. These derogatory terms can be viewed as the language style and vocabulary employed by trolls to belittle and offend Disney adults. The consistent use of such language may strengthen the trolls' group identity and their shared stance against Disney adults. Consequently, trolls become more cohesive as an out-group, united in their opposition to Disney adults.

## 5 Conclusion

This study aimed to answer the research question: What is the nature of the interactional dynamic between trolls and Disney adults in online community Reddit? Followed by three sub questions: What specific trolling behaviours are observed in discussions about Disney adults on Reddit, and what are the potential stigmas being propagated against them? How do Disney adults and other members of the Reddit community members react to such trolling behaviour and associated stigmas? How does trolling impact the group dynamics within Reddit threads? The thematic content analysis of 249 comments on Reddit resulted in four main themes: ‘trolling behaviour directed at Disney adults’, ‘stigmas about Disney adults’, ‘responding to trolls’, and ‘group dynamics.’

The first sub-question focussed on identifying the trolling strategies that trolls use in comments regarding Disney adults. To identify these strategies, Hardaker’s (2013, p. 80) study was used. She identified six trolling strategies, spanning from overt and easily observable to covert, hidden, or less obvious styles. The findings reveal that trolling behaviours directed at Disney adults on Reddit encompass a range of strategies, with covert trolling being the most common. Specifically, the most observed trolling strategies are antipathizing, hypo criticising, and criticising.

The second sub-question focussed on identifying the stigmas that trolls spread about Disney adults on Reddit. The analysis revealed that Disney adults are often labelled as socially awkward, immature, and obsessive. They are labelled as socially awkward due to their intensely enthusiastic fan behaviour, being perceived as undatable, and exhibiting socially awkward behaviour in the parks. They are depicted as immature because, according to trolls, being a Disney fan is not age appropriate. Finally, they are labelled as obsessive because trolls believe Disney adults display obsessive fan behaviour.

The third sub-question delved into how Disney adults and other Reddit community members react to trolling behaviours and stigmas. The analysis revealed that they do so by critiquing and challenging the comments made by trolls about Disney adults. They critiqued the trolls by stressing the importance of justified criticism, evaluating the logic, consistency, and fairness of the troll comments, and scrutinizing the assumptions and generalizations made by the trolls. Additionally, they challenged the trolls’ comments and stigmas by directly questioning the assertions made by the trolls about Disney adults.

The final sub-question focused on how trolling behaviour affects the formation of in-groups and out-groups. In this study, the in-group comprises Disney adults, while the out-group consists of trolls. Trolling behaviour contributed to ingroup formation as Disney adults unified in defence against troll comments and shared reasons for their Disney fandom in response to trolls. This can strengthen the bond among Disney adults. On the other hand, trolls reinforce each other by forming echo chambers in threads

with negative original posts. In these echo chambers, they unite and openly express their opinions about Disney adults. Furthermore, trolls reinforce by using the same derogatory terms to belittle and offend Disney adults. This consistent use of such language and echo chambers strengthens the trolls' group identity.

The nature of the interactional dynamic between trolls and Disney adults on Reddit is characterized by a cycle of provocation, response, and community cohesion. Trolls initiate this dynamic by employing various trolling strategies, such as antipathizing and hypo criticising to provoke and belittle Disney adults. They propagate stigmas portraying Disney adults as socially awkward, immature, and obsessive through derogatory language and negative portrayals. In response, Disney adults and other Reddit community members critically engage with troll comments. They challenge the validity of the criticisms, question assumptions, and defend their community against stigmatization. This active response not only aims to refute negative stereotypes but also reinforces solidarity among Disney adults, enhancing their group cohesion. These interactional dynamic influences group dynamics within Reddit threads. Disney adults unify in defence against trolls, sharing their enthusiasm for Disney and fostering a sense of community resilience. Conversely, trolls reinforce their identify by creating echo chambers where negative options about Disney adults are strengthened, further solidifying their out-group status. Overall, this dynamic interaction reveals a complex interplay of conflict and solidarity within online communities, shedding light on how digital spaces like Reddit shape and reflect social attitudes and group identities.

## **5.1 Limitations and recommendations for future research**

Like most research, this study contained several limitations and implications that could be improved in the future. Firstly, the dataset was collected through purposive sampling and the chosen threads, despite the strict criteria, always selected under the influence of subjectivity. This also counts for the qualitative thematic content analysis where a different researcher could always determine different results due to the fact of interpretation. This is also because determining whether something is trolling behavior is highly subjective (Cook et al., 2017, p. 3330; Hardaker, 2015, p. 211; Brubaker et al., 2021, p. 2; Sanflipo et al., 2017).

Another limitation was the fact that only Reddit was chosen to research as an online discussion platform. Perhaps, when studying other discussion platforms, different results will arise concerning Disney adults. Additionally, incorporating interviews could enhance the quality of information by revealing what Disney adults truly perceive as trolling and how it affects them. Also, the anonymity of reddit users makes it difficult to verify the authenticity of their claims or understand their true motivations. For future research the content analysis can be supplemented with interviews of Disney adults and trolls to

gain deeper insights into their perceptions of trolling and its effect and the motivations of trolls.

Another research point that emerged from the analysis of the comments is the discussion comparing male-dominated fandoms (e.g., sports) to more gender-diverse or female-dominated ones (e.g., Disney). The comments often included debates about why being a fan of Disney is perceived as stranger than being a fan of a particular sport or team. This may be due to gender-related stereotypes and expectations, which influence how different fandoms and their members are perceived and judged. Investigating this topic further could shed light on the underlying societal attitudes and biases that shape perceptions of fandoms based on gender, ultimately contributing to a better understanding of fan culture and its intersections with gender dynamics.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A Overview of Reddit threads with the OP's

#### *Negative Reddit threads*

##### Reddit thread 1:

Subreddit name: r/unpopularopinion

Flair: Satire

Title Reddit thread: Disney Adults are weird af

Original post: I just think full grown adults obsessed with disney are just weird. I get that they make good movies but having your house full of disney stuff, having disney clothes and accessories? idk it's just weird to me. Edit: I'm not saying that adults are not allowed to like disney ! it's just when they start revolving their entire life around disney, it gets a little weird. like decorating their entire house with merch, getting shit ton of disney tattoos or getting unreasonably upset when someone says they're not a fan of disney Edit 2: weird == bad it's just odd or unusual, not bad.

Number of comments: 612 comments

Timing: started 3 years ago

##### Reddit thread 2:

Subreddit name: r/offmychest

Flair: Satire

Title Reddit thread: I HATE Disney adults

Original post: I just don't get the appeal... sure I watch a Disney or Pixar movie every once in a while after my daughter goes to bed. But people who make it their entire personality I fucking hate them. Like as soon as you start talking about Disney or I notice a Disney tattoo on your body, I immediately lose all respect for you... EDIT: since some people wanna give me shit for hating of Disney adults- here is the real reason I hate Disney adults. Every single person I've met who is a Disney adult turn out to be awful human beings. Just toxic trash. Therefore- if you're a trash human who JUST SO HAPPENS to be a Disney adult, it kinda proves my point. EDIT: I don't think every single DA is toxic. I do think that if they're not toxic, there is something definitely about them.

Number of comments: 221 comment

Timing: started 2 years ago

Reddit thread 3:

Subreddit name: r/PetPeeves

Flair: Bit annoyed

Title Reddit thread: Disney adults.

Original post: I mean the adults without kids who go several times a year, are constantly posting about it on social media (“I need to go back!” Or “only 280 days until paradise!”) and whose houses are decorated with Disney stuff. It genuinely frightens me how obsessed people get. Obligatory edit because some of y'all don't get it. I'm talking about people who make liking Disney a personality trait.

Number of comments: 430 comments

Timing: started 7 months ago

Reddit thread 4:

Subreddit name: r/The10thDentist

Flair: TV/Movies/Fiction

Title Reddit thread: Being a Disney adult is weird and should be discouraged

Original post: Let me clarify what I mean by the title first. When I say Disney adult, I'm not just referring to the childless adults who'll pay however much to go to Disney World multiple times a year or whatever. I'm speaking more broadly about the adults who, despite being childless and not working with children in any capacity, even as a babysitter, will still watch childrens' films and television of their own accord. I think it's weird and I don't get the appeal. Yes, occasionally a kids' movie will have a crude joke that the adults will interpret in a different way to their kids, but those are put in specifically to appease the adults who've been dragged along to see the movie with their kids. And yes, sometimes a kids' show or movie will deal with mature themes, but they're still done in a way that's appropriate for children. Of course that's going to happen; kids have to be introduced to these themes in some fashion or it'll be a shock to them when they have to deal with these things for real as an adult. Whenever I meet a childless adult who still likes kids' shows or movies as an adult, I have to assume there's some kind of maturity problem, especially if they're mostly watching kids' shit by themselves. If they're still watching content meant for kids for the humour or the themes, they've either never seen things intended for adults, or they've seen some of it and found they can't handle it. I feel like a lot of these people are only ever a few steps away from becoming like the worst examples of the adult My Little Pony fandom circa 2011, and this is something which really needs to be discouraged. It's weird, it's creepy, and we should start treating people who are well into adulthood who still want to see every Disney/Pixar/Illumination/animated Dreamworks movie as they come out as social pariahs; the same way the Japanese treat otakus.

Really, the only reasonable explanation I can come up with is that some of these people have taken the nostalgia pills a bit too hard. The thing is that would only explain why they watch kids' movies they grew up with. It's one thing to be 25 or 30 and watching Lilo and Stitch again as an isolated thing because you want to see how it holds up now that you're an adult; it's quite another to want to see whatever the latest movie Disney's put out at that age.

Number of comments: 35 comments

Timing: started 2 years ago

#### *Positive Reddit threads*

##### [Reddit thread 5:](#)

Subreddit name: r/Disneyland

Flair: Discussion

Title Reddit thread: Embarrassed to be a “Disney Adult”

Original post: ... I'm not, babyyyy! I love it!

I feel sorry for those that just don't get it. Disney is so much fun. I could just go and walk around the resort and have an amazing time. I am slowly converting my fiance into one. :)

#DisneyAdultsRule

Number of comments: 185 comments

Timing: started 2 months ago

##### [Reddit thread 6:](#)

Subreddit name: r/disneyparks

Flair: All Disney Parks

Title Reddit thread: How do you guys deal with people calling you “Disney adults”

Original post: Just to be clear, I have no hate for the self-identified Disney adults in this subreddit, y'all seem like awesome people :) From my understanding, the stigma around that label comes from the rotten bunch of the community, and because of how Disney is (in my opinion) a questionable company. I personally love Disney theme parks because of the amount of work the imagineers put into it, and yet it also seems controversial for an adult to like a Disney theme park. How do you guys brush all the hate off? I would like to know some ways on how to ignore the critics.

Number of comments: 200 comments

Timing: started 2 years ago

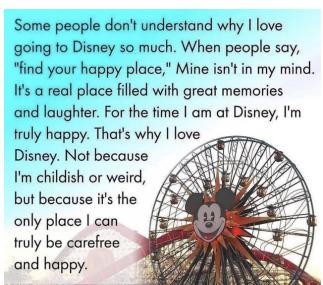
### Reddit thread 7:

Subreddit name: r/Disneyland

Flair: Discussion

Title Reddit thread: Disney Adults unite!

Original post:



Number of comments: 114

Timing: started 1 year ago

### *Questionable Reddit threads*

### Reddit thread 8:

Subreddit name: r/TooAfraidToAsk

Flair: Habits & lifestyle

Title Reddit thread: What's the deal with Disney adults

Original post: I know someone who went on another Disney cruise this year, and go to Disney World all the time, yet they're older and by themselves. I'm trying hard not to judge, but it seems so bizarre and juvenile/repressed to me. Can someone please explain why this is a thing other than saying it makes people happy? I get that and don't want to take away another person's joy, but I just don't get

Number of comments: 371 comments

Timing: started 8 months ago

### Reddit thread 9

Subreddit name: r/WaltDisneyWorld

Flair: AskWDW

Title Reddit thread: What's with the Disney Adult hate?

Original post: Ever since DLR reopened in 2021, so many tiktok teenagers have been continuously harassing people who simply likes Disney for no reason at all, why is that though?

Number of comments: 245 comments

Thread: started 1 year ago

## Appendix B Operationalization six trolling strategies

Based on Hardaker (2013), Paakki Henna et al. (2021) & Jenks (2019)

	Trolling behavior	Examples from analysis
Digress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Post, comments and comment replies that intentionally lead users away from the original topic of discussion, often into pointless, frustrating, or circular discussion that does not advance the discussion much, and to provoke reactions from participants as indicated by negative reactions from others (Paakki Henna et al., 2021; Jenks, 2019; Hardaker, 2013)</li> <li>Multiple posts that ‘spam’ the platform with nonsense, repeated content or posts that initiate or prolong cascaded (e.g., reciting numbers of the alphabet or replying to other with rhymes) (Paakki Henna et al., 2021)</li> </ul>	These people want to go somewhere safe, so they end up never taking risks. I feel they’re the kind of people that don’t take trips to Europe or Asia or even explore their own country and what it had to offer.
(Hypo)criticize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A poster criticizing others because of grammar or spelling errors in online interactions or other irrelevant details (Paakki Henna et al., 2021; Hardaker, 2013)</li> <li>Cases of the critical poster criticizing others for faults while displaying the same faults oneself (Paakki Henna et al., 2021; Hardaker, 2013)</li> </ul>	I think there’s a difference between “disney adult”, “Disney Adult” and “DISNEY ADULT” I love staying informed about updates and changes to the parks, watch some YT channels, but living outside of the US means we don’t go often. People who go into deep debt buying merch and experiences are a little off the rails though.

Antipathize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A poster proactively introducing a new sensitive or antagonistic context to provoke emotional response by being deliberately controversial or provocative in online interactions (Hardaker, 2013); Paakki Henna et al., 2021)</li> <li>• A post, comment and or comment reply building on an opportunity for triggering arguments in the earlier conversation and creating a context for further conversation that exploits people's sensitive spots (Paakki Henna et al., 2021)</li> </ul>	I think you're good unless you can't chat about other topics too! Like if you steer every conversation back to Disney it would be hard to have fun chatting with you. If you're able to be an engaged listener to your friends about their interest as well then you're good!
Endanger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A poster disseminating bad advice or offering a dangerous example for others to follow under the guise of innocence, potentially putting others at risk in online interactions (Hardaker, 2013; Paakki Henna et al., 2021)</li> <li>• Continuing to give bad advice despite others' objections and lack of acceptance (Paakki Henna et al., 2021)</li> </ul>	Being obsessed with Disney is up there with feminism and dumb tattoos for making a woman undateable.
Shock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Posts about sensitive or taboo topics, such as religion, death, human-rights abuses, animal rights, or politics to provoke strong emotional reactions (Paakki Henna et al., 2021; Hardaker, 2013)</li> <li>• Posts that are inappropriately thoughtless or hurtful in a sensitive upsetting, or emotion-fraught situation (Paakki Henna et al., 2021)</li> <li>• A poster exploiting an existing sensitive context or normative frame to trigger arguments, shock people or to offend others in online interactions (Paakki Henna et al., 2021; Hardaker, 2013; Jenks, 2019)</li> </ul>	Disney was a Quasi-Nazi, fascist and hella racist... that's why it doesn't surprise me.

Aggress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A poster openly provoking and deliberately attacking others without clear justification to provoke retaliation or create conflict (fight) in online interactions (Paakki Henna et al., 2021; Hardaker, 2013; Jenks, 2019)</li></ul>	LOL struck a nerve? Disney adults are creepy as fuck.
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## Appendix C Operationalization Response Strategies

Based on Hardaker (2015)

	Response Strategy	Example from analysis
Engaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engaging response strategy involves sincere interaction with a troll.</li> <li>Users treat the troll's intentions as genuine.</li> <li>Responses may include showing interest, expressing shock or dismay, or retaliating aggressively.</li> <li>Users respond authentically to the trolling behavior.</li> </ul>	I get it's annoying and depending on the degree I agree with you but you'd probably hate me anyway lol. Me and my mum are planning on getting matching Stitch tattoos, growing up in was our thing, the film that we watched together most often, we must have seen it a thousand times over the years, we get each other little presents with Stitch on whenever we see them. We decided to get the tattoo as kind of a symbol of our bond.
Ignoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ignoring strategy involves not engaging with the troll.</li> <li>Users may block, killfile, or simply not read the troll's posts.</li> <li>Silent ignoring leaves no trace in the data.</li> <li>Overtly ignoring the troll can involve alerting others and suggesting ways to deal with the troll.</li> <li>Users may try to starve the troll of attention to make them lose interest.</li> <li>Ignoring strategy focuses on not responding directly to the troll but addressing other group members.</li> <li>Indirect conversations may inadvertently provide an opening for the troll to respond.</li> </ul>	I have no problems there. A Disney adult is no different from the football fan cosplaying as their favorite player at a game or what the raider fans do. i'm also not going to be made to feel ashamed of the things i enjoy.

Exposing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exposing strategy involves contradicting poor or dangerous advice given by trolls.</li> <li>• Users feel obligated to counter misinformation or harmful examples presented by trolls.</li> <li>• Knowledgeable members may expose the troll's misleading information to protect less-informed group members.</li> <li>• Exposing strategy is driven by social and moral concerns for the well-being of the online community.</li> <li>• Users may engage in exposing the troll's deceptive behavior to prevent others from being misled or harmed.</li> </ul>	Walt made the parks for both adults and kids. The whole idea that it's exclusively to take your kids is misguided.
Challenging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenging strategy involves directly or indirectly confronting the troll.</li> <li>• Users openly engage with the troll in a confrontational manner.</li> <li>• Challenging responses aim to intimidate or scare the troll off.</li> <li>• Direct challenges may risk being interpreted as flaming or sincere engagement.</li> <li>• Users who challenge trolls seek to enforce group norms actively rather than passively ignoring the troll.</li> </ul>	How's this any weirder than people who are into sports or hunting and have all kinds of sports stuff everywhere or antlers hanging on the wall? It's just their hobby and they like displaying stuff.
Critiquing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critiquing strategy involves evaluating the quality of trolling behavior.</li> <li>• Users assess the effectiveness and impact of the troll's actions.</li> <li>• Trolling efforts are subject to critique based on how others respond to them.</li> </ul>	I feel sad when people think being an "adult" means you can no longer have fun at a Disney theme park. Just because you turn a certain age means you suddenly completely change and

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Users may analyze the trolling behavior for its effectiveness in achieving the troll's goals.</li> <li>• Critiquing allows for a deeper understanding of the dynamics of trolling interactions and their outcomes.</li> </ul>	now all you want to do is pay taxes and golf? It makes no sense
Mocking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mocking strategy involves ridiculing or parodying the troll's behavior.</li> <li>• Users use humor and sarcasm to mock the troll's attempts.</li> <li>• Mocking responses aim to belittle the troll and undermine their efforts.</li> <li>• Mocking can serve as a form of retaliation against the troll's provocations.</li> <li>• Users may mock the troll to diminish their influence and disrupt their intentions.</li> </ul>	People pay thousands to go lie on a sunbed on a beach for two weeks. I think they're the weird ones.
Reciprocating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reciprocating strategy involves trolling the troll in return.</li> <li>• Users adopt the role of the troll to counteract the trolling behavior.</li> <li>• Reciprocating responses aim to turn the tables on the troll and disrupt their actions.</li> <li>• Users may engage in reciprocation as a form of retaliation or defense against trolling.</li> <li>• Reciprocating can escalate conflicts but may also deter trolls by showing they can be targeted in the same way.</li> </ul>	Anyone who's "pet peeves" can be summed up with "I'm annoyed with other humans that found something that brings them joy & community" is a loser and the problem