

# How viral outrage can backfire

August 30, 2018

In a series of experiments, psychologists at Stanford showed people social media posts that could easily be seen as offensive — for instance, as racist, sexist, unpatriotic, or xenophobic. If the offensive post was shown getting 10 outraged replies, people felt more sympathy toward the author than when it generated only two outraged replies. This was true even when the offender was described as a white supremacist! Yet while third-party observers of these social media pile-ons were relatively sympathetic to the author of the original offensive post, that effect did not hold when people were asked to write their own outraged reply. In other words, when people take part in viral outrage, they fail to see that it can backfire.