Twitter Thread by Paul Bernal



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A short thread on one aspect of trolling on here, from my recent experience. I've got a fair number of followers. I tweet about controversial topics - and yet I don't get trolled that much. A bit, but not thatmuch. There are times, though, that I *do* get trolled a lot. 1/n

The pattern is pretty clear, and has been played out a few times over the last few days. I get into a conversation about a topic that could be considered race-related. Empire. Immigration. Something like that. And that conversation includes a highish profile BAME person. 2/n

More often than not, a BAME woman. In those cases, it takes very little time for the trolls to come steaming in. Most of them seemingly rational, taking issue with some technical point, but quickly descending into something much worse. 3/n

When I look at the profiles of the trolls, they're often relatively innocuous. Not saying 'Hey, I'm a racist troll, a white supremacist' at all. Not likely to be caught by any kind of anti-troll measures. Instead, they look relatively normal. 4/n

But what happens is very much about racism, and often misogyny. Attacks that are - or appear to be - not that dramatic on their own. Not rape threats or death threats, or 'go home' or things like that, but designed to undermine, to disturb, to annoy - but with an undercurrent 5/n

Nothing that something like the Online Harms White Paper as it stands will address - and this, for me, is an occasional annoyance. For the BAME women, it looks to me as though this is what happens all the time. That matters, and matters a lot. 6/n

Amongst other things, it means that people (like me) who don't get to experience this need to be *very* careful not to image that their own experience is in any real way representative. We shouldn't pretend that we know what it's like. We don't. 7/n

We can have clues, and insights - as now - but that doesn't mean we understand in any meaningful way. We need to understand at least that. And it means that we need to think differently about trolling, and not imagine there are easy solutions. 8/n

None of this is easy, and there aren’t technical or legal solutions that will deal with the underlying societal problems either. We need to be aware of that too. /ends