

BINARY BOMBSHELLS

Twitter's tools help online harassers



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Twitter became popular for being a quick-moving social network and unfortunately, it's lived up to that reputation.

It only took about a year for the microblogging service to go from the place to get your news to a cesspool of trolls and extremists.

In 2008, social scientists hypothesized that President Barack Obama's rise was because of his dominant social media strategy, which centered around Twitter. Eight years later in 2016, masses were calling for now-President Donald Trump to be banned from the site for his violent rhetoric.

Twitter has somehow become the contested center of discussions regarding the freedoms of speech, privacy and assembly. But those are really just disguises for Twitter's real problem: harassment.

Twitter is specifically designed, whether intentionally or not, to facilitate harassment online. No doubt, some people are jerks online and some blame should fall on them, but as with all technology, the creator has some responsibility as well.

The most obvious issue with Twitter is quoting. Users can quote someone else's tweet, adding their own text on top.

It has some neat uses when you want to call back to one of your own previous tweets to add context, but ultimately, most people use it to shame or taunt people online.

If your goal is to promote someone else's tweet, you'd just do a plain retweet. If you wanted to have a discussion, you'd leave a comment.

Quotes will often take a single tweet out of context, increasing the likelihood that it'll be misinterpreted. There's just so little positive value that comes out of quoting tweets that it doesn't make sense to continue as a feature.

It's easy to decry online harassment as a non-existent problem. In 2012, artist Tyler, the Creator tweeted, "Hahahahahahaha How The Fuck Is Cyber Bullying Real Hahahaha . . . Just Walk Away From The Screen . . . Close Your Eyes Haha."

He's wrong though. Online harassment can transcend into the real world really quickly – just ask Justine Sacco. In 2013, before getting on a flight to South Africa, she posted a stupid and potentially racist tweet about AIDS, likely intended to only be seen by her 170 followers.

I remember seeing the tweet at the time and



ILLUSTRATION BY CINDY CUELLAR

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thinking, "What a dumb thing to say," but didn't give it any more thought than that. While she was on her 11-hour flight, the internet put her on blast.

Even her employer tweeted, "This is an outrageous, offensive comment. Employee in question currently unreachable on an intl flight," according to The New York Times.

Some part of

the Twitter-verse was self-aware, as #HasJustineLandedYet started trending on Twitter, to see what would happen when she realized the storm she had unintentionally started. Unsurprisingly, someone went to the airport to photograph her when she did eventually land – turning the online harassment into physical stalking.

Part of the problem is that Twitter only has two options for privacy: either your entire timeline is public, or your entire timeline is private. You can't have the luxury of posting professional-sounding updates publicly and stupid jokes for friends to just your followers – something that probably would have helped Sacco.

It doesn't have to be this way though. Lately, I've been using Mastodon, a project to create a decentralized microblogging service that addresses the problems with Twitter.

Mastodon allows users to control the visibility on each individual post, or "toot" that they make, so one toot can be seen just

by approved followers, while others can be seen by the entire world.

And Mastodon doesn't allow quoting either, among other tweaks to improve its anti-harassment record.

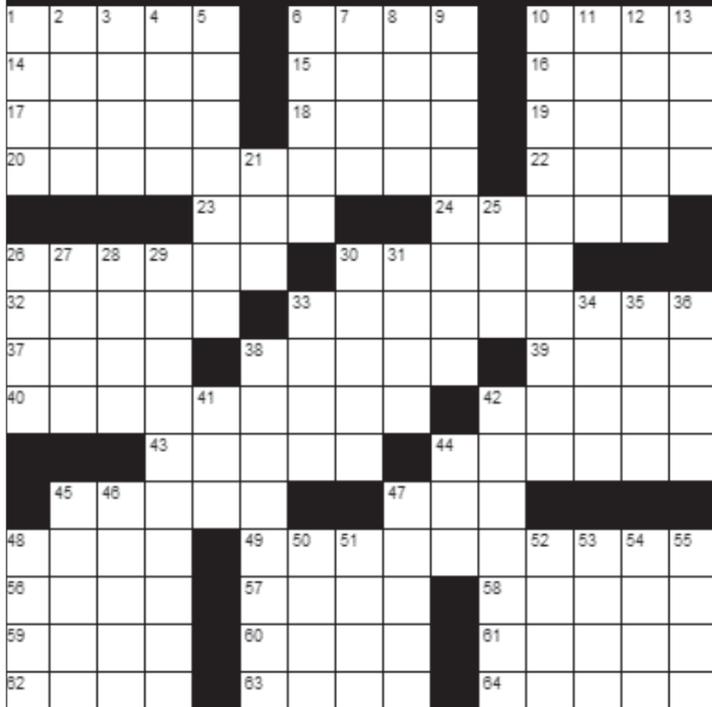
Unless Twitter starts making changes, it will continue losing users in favor of alternative social networks. If there are safer alternatives, no one really wants to continue spending time in the swamp of harassment.

Follow Kunal on Mastodon @legoktm @mastodon.technology

Binary Bombshells discusses values embedded in technologies that we use every day. It appears every other week on Thursday.

CLASSIFIEDS

CROSSWORD PUZZLE



ACROSS

1. Mix together
6. Stitches
10. Worry
14. Districts
15. Raindrop sound
16. Creative work
17. Bumbling
18. Gumbo
19. Apprehends
20. Leather shorts
22. Tall woody plant
23. Be unwell
24. Pub game
26. Walk with long steps
30. Stripes
32. Unsophisticated
33. Tearing up
37. Balm ingredient
38. Risk
39. Notion
40. Oil
42. Panache
43. Not right
44. A copy from an original
45. Mixture of rain and snow
47. Comes after Mi and Fah
48. Decorative case

49. Skilled worker
56. Chime
57. Always
58. Wild Asian dog
59. Nanny
60. Go on horseback
61. A nine-piece musical group
62. Blowgun missile
63. Killed
64. Church recesses

DOWN

1. Letters, etc.
2. Sea eagle
3. Anagram of "Deer"
4. Stare
5. A dais
6. Thread holder
7. Large N. Amer. deer (plural)
8. Be dressed in
9. Space between 2 arches
10. Refute
11. Not together
12. Yokels
13. Existence
21. Hasten
25. Favor
26. Break
27. Story
28. Violent disturbance
29. Obese
30. Gesture of indifference
31. Snip
33. Observed
34. Lazily
35. Half-moon tide
36. Way in
38. Conspirators
41. Mineral rock
42. Spiny ant eater
44. Many millennia
45. Leaf opening
46. Pertaining to the moon
47. Termagant
48. Quaint outburst
50. Wicked
51. Formally surrender
52. Hack
53. Charged particles
54. Away from the wind
55. Catches

SUDOKU PUZZLE

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9 inclusively.

6			1			2		
7		5	2	9				
9	1		4		5	7		
						1	9	
	9		7	4		3		
4	6							
	5	6		3			9	7
			8	7		3		4
7			9					5

SOLUTIONS 02/12/2020

F	E	A	S	T		L	A	B	E	L		
R	A	L	L	Y		O	P	E	R	A	T	E
T	A	R	T	A	R	S	C	R	E	A	M	E
A	I	L	B	O	U	Q	U	E	T	B	E	G
S	L	I	T		S	U	S	S		P	A	N
S	T	E	W		W	H	A	T		S	O	D
E	Y	R	A		E	E	L		A	S	S	A
						D	E	R	R	I	E	R
A	D	D	L	E		D	A	M		E	A	R
B	A	L	D		A	N	T	S		S	T	E
E	R	N	E		T	R	E	E		S	O	D
W	A	D		P	A	R	S	N	I	P		M
E	D	I	F	I	C	E	S		M	A	L	I
S	E	L	E	C	T	S			P	R	I	Z
Y	E	A	S	T		S	K	I	E	D		

7	3	4	9	8	6	5	1	2				
2	1	5	7	4	3	6	9	8				
6	9	8	2	5	1	7	3	4				
5	4	1	3	6	8	9	2	7				
8	2	9	4	7	5	3	6	1				
3	7	6	1	2	9	4	8	5				
9	8	3	5	1	4	2	7	6				
1	5	7	6	3	2	8	4	9				
4	6	2	8	9	7	1	5	3				

JOKIN' AROUND

What goes through towns, up & over hills, but doesn't move?

The road!

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