The dark side of social media

Editorial

Social media has definitely changed the Internet, marketing, news gathering. Many people feel more in touch with long lost friends because of social networks. In short, there is lots to praise and like about social media. But, because it is social, and mostly free, social media has increased the reach of hate groups, racists and other people who previously relied on getting their message out only to a small circle of similar miscreants.

Take for example a group on Facebook that is dedicated to "praying" for President Obama's death. I won't link to it here but this hateful group has already amassed almost one million followers (or likers in the new Facebook parlance). As you know, social media works as an amplifier. So if someone sees one of their friends likes organic yogurt, then he or she can also like said product. Same thing happens with these hate groups. And then it becomes a numbers game. Sadly, many people join these groups because they think its "funny" or as a joke. But what they are doing is lending weight, via numbers, to a hateful cause.

Remember the Holocaust Museum shooter? Well he had several rantings on the Web. And the guy who killed a bunch of women at a gym in Pittsburgh, and then killed himself? He had an entire blog devoted to his hatred of women. Social media is easy to access and has little or no cost. Anyone can set up a blog or a website, a Facebook page or a Twitter stream.

There is a lot of hate and plenty of malcontents out there. It's unfortunate that social media, which generally serves to build community and share interesting ideas, can also be used to share the hate and spread the ignorance. I am not sure what, if anything, we can do about this.

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