EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS TWITTER IMPERSONATION HELL

Thursday 19 June, 2014

With 255 million active users per month and over 500 million tweets sent each day, Twitter is a name known the world over. With so many tweets being sent each day it is unreasonable for users to expect each tweet to be screened or for moderation of tweets to feature across the board. Freedom of speech is something many users cling onto and anyone with any reasonable following or engagement will tell you that Twitter bliss is all but an illusion.

Kevin Healey (40) who tweets under the handle @Kevin_Healey is a leading Autism Campaigner, Author and Ambassador at the National Autistic Society with over 14 years' experience of campaigning and fighting for equality and better support and services for those living with an autistic spectrum condition. In the past year Kevin's time on Twitter has shifted from sharing tips, advice, suggestions and showcasing his work, to spending hours each day searching for cloned Twitter profiles which impersonate his own. The campaigner (who himself is Autistic) has taken to set up a petition on Change.org (bit.ly/kevintim) asking Twitter to verify his account to ensure his colleagues, supporters and often vulnerable service users can be assured they have reached the correct account and not one of the impostor accounts. Kevin has contacted the Police a number of times who have advised him there is little they can do to stop such accounts. Labour MP for Newcastle-under-Lyme, Paul Farrelly has been in touch with Twitter to urge them to verify his account.

"I can't believe it's been over a year now, I'm sick of been cloned, abused and impersonated on Twitter. 1200 people have signed my petition on change.org and still, I feel like I am being ignored. Twitter are aware that this is having a massive impact on me and my campaigning work; I have told them, those signing my petition have, the police have and now my MP has. I've been told by Twitter HQ to stop contacting them or they will delete my account."

Kevin Healey

Rob McDowall (29) who tweets from @robmcd85 is an Equality and Human Rights Advocate, Member of the Equality Council, Chairperson of the LGBT Network and Blogger at Huffington Post with over 11 years of campaigning for equality for LGBT and disabled people alike. In the past two years Rob has filed daily reports with Twitter in order to highlight abusive and impersonation accounts. The Twitter abuse ranges from vague, general threats in broken English to personal, homophobic and disablist comments, images and overt threats (example tweets available for email). With around 10 impersonation accounts appearing every week (and that's only the ones he is made aware of) completing the impersonation reporting form has become second nature. As well as reporting each account, Rob has contacted Twitter's UK CEO Bruce Daisley, the UK Head of Media and News and Twitter's Trust and Safety Team in San Francisco in order to look at a way forward; all to no avail.

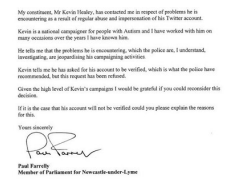
"While I enjoy the reach and immediacy that Twitter brings, I am weary from constantly having to contact Twitter to report impersonation accounts, upload Government issued ID and wait for around a week to ten days for Twitter to pull the impersonator account. I have had colleagues and acquaintances adding accounts which spring up and pretend to be my new account, only for them to be sent a message with a premium rate number to call me on, links to phishing websites or the sending of vile and obnoxious messages in my name. Twitter's verification system provides an instantly recognisable icon which confirms the account you are accessing is genuine; issued to celebrities, public figures, journalists and other activists but as with most things it appears it is simply down to how much you spend on Twitter advertising or who you know at Twitter. I contacted the Crime Prevention Minister Norman Baker, I'm still waiting for a reply. I spend too much time searching for, reporting impersonator accounts and reassuring those following me that I am in fact me. My disability aside, it's tiring and stands in the way of the work I do!"

Rob McDowall

Media:







My constituent, Mr Kevin Healey, has contacted me in respect of problems he is encountering as a result of regular abuse and impersonation of his Twitter account.

Kevin is a national campaigner for people with Autism and I have worked with him on many occasions over the years I have known him.

He tells me that the problems he is encountering, which the police are, I understand, investigating, are jeopardising his campaigning activities.

Kevin tells me he has asked for his account to be verified, which is what the police have recommended, but this request has been refused.

Given the high level of Kevin's campaigns I would be grateful if you could reconsider this decision.

If it is the case that his account will not be verified could you please explain the reasons for this.

Yours sincerely

Paul Farrelly
Member of Parliament for Newcastle-under-Lyme

Related Sectors:

Charities & non-profits :: Consumer Technology ::

Related Keywords:

Twitter :: Impersonation :: Trolling :: Abuse :: Rob Mcdowall :: Kevin Healey :: Social Media ::

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Additional Assets:
Example abusive tweets in last two weeks (sample)
Impersonator accounts reported in last two weeks

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