

How Dangerous is this seemingly new trend of Twitter Mining?

Twitter mining is the act of searching through anyone's old posts on Twitter to be used as you see fit. There are even websites that where you can simply type in the Twitter user name and the year, and gain access to those tweets. Twitter mining appears to be used to create various scandals on social media, resulting in damaged reputations and even lost job opportunities.

What recently brought this to my attention is the rain of fire that was brought down upon Twitter Star Kelvin Pena, aka, Brother Nature. He was forced to make a public apology after old racist and misogynistic tweets resurfaced...from when he was 12 years old. The idea that a scandal was attempting to be made from his prepubescent thoughts from almost 8 years ago, looks extremely desperate. "When I grow up I wanna be like Chris Brown. So if my girlfriend tried to look through my phone while driving I can choke and punch her :D," he wrote in one tweet. It's unlikely that his career is even going to remotely hurt by this, and rightfully so. After a quick apology on Twitter, his fan based vocally supported him numbers by stating the obvious. People's views change a lot in 8 years, and impressionable children say the wildest of things due to their ignorance, especially when they adopt a role model who's action they wish to emulate.

The previous case was quite simple to comprehend and shows how harmless and even stupid Twitter Mining can be. On the other hand, a scenario that resonates with me personally is the unfortunate debacle concerning DJ Logan Sama. He was a DJ on 1 Xtra, and a racist and misogynistic tweet that he had posted was dug up by Twin B, a fellow DJ on 1 Xtra.

After a tweet and an email with a bit of fanboy-ing involved, Logan Sama agreed to answer a few questions on what he thinks of the issue, in hindsight of the situation he found himself in.

In general, why do you think people are motivated to dig out old social media posts in such a way?

With flippant and errant thoughts being documented and captured for all time on the internet now, it is easy to pull isolated sentences, in order to show people in a certain light by editing their thoughts down in to a version which aligns with the image you want to portray. This is no different to how media has been for a long time. The positive of this is that it should hopefully make people consider their thoughts and actions towards others more. Especially when they have the ability to affect positive change. As to why people dig? It is not anything new, but now is something open to all and not just investigative journalists. We can all strive to be and do better. I hope my experience has brought that to light in some way for others.

This actually shows there is a positive aspect to Twitter mining, it can be used to hold public figures to account, which is important as even political figures would not be immune to this form of scrutiny. It encourages self-improvement in how articulate ourselves, but to what extent is it beneficial and when does it just become a matter of asserting opinions held by the vocal majority, making it impossible to say anything even remotely controversial.

Why do you think this phenomenon more common on twitter than any other social media platform?

Twitter as a platform is just truncated snapshots of thoughts or opinions. It is perfect for taking quotes to prove, or disprove, any point you wish to make.

This answer from Logan actually brings us some interesting insight, in most of these cases where old tweets are dug up, obvious pretext can be seen to purposely left unexplained. Even the articles published at the time on this issue did not necessarily include the full tweets, just the offensive language that was used. In the case of Logan, the use of the phrase “militant black females” was used as such:

“I’ve had these international militant black females who’ve never listened to grime @ing me lol”.

This was said in 2015, a time where grime as a genre had a problem with band-waggonists, essentially making demands from veteran grime DJs and making assertions about a genre of music they know very little about. Whilst the language used is unacceptable, this context which is conveniently left out from all previous articles on this issue shows that it was used to create a narrative that suited them. This when the “Stormzy Effect” was in full force, result in everyone all of sudden becoming a grime expert, in a previously underground genre which was previously put on the back burner by the UK industry, however that is a whole different article. I highly encourage you (the reader) to look into the context that a quote is taken from in future when it is being used to discredit them, as you will find it may not neatly fit the narratively as nicely as they would wish you to believe.

Do you think being on a more mainstream radio station (Radio 1) contributed to the outcome of the situation?

The BBC is held to a standard by those who fund it, and as such so are the people who work as the face and voice of their broadcasting platforms. There are clearly things which are taken more seriously, whether said in jest or not, when you work for such an organisation and enjoy the benefits thereof.

Why do you think people are taking the implications of these old tweets so seriously?

I'm not sure. I don't think you can generalise and say that is true of everyone. Some people don't care, some people are highly offended. That doesn't mean the people who are offended are wrong. There is certainly a culture on social media of highlighting issues and then moving on quickly to the next. But this should not undermine the importance of basic goodness like respect and kindness to those. Especially those who suffer prejudices and injustice already in their life.

As we saw with the case of Brother Nature, the scandal was so ridiculous, it did not seem to create any lasting damage, as the context being ignored was obvious, and exercising a little common sense would lead you to the conclusion that the situation was being blown out of proportion. However, the same cannot necessarily be said when you are a part of a corporate enterprise with a image to

uphold, as well as someone who represents the black community via the music genre he is a large part of. Antagonizing that same community is not the smartest decision to make, and Logan's apology acknowledges this.

Do you think twitter mining will always be as damaging as it was to you?

'Damaging' only refers to the response in terms of my ability to earn a living for myself. In my instance it was hugely damaging and cost me a lot of money in the short and long term. I lost out on many opportunities on top of the BBC show. However since the incident with me, other public figures have been 'dragged' online and not suffered nearly as many lost opportunities. In the end it is a corporate reaction to public opinion. If corporations don't feel the need as much to take action then the damage will be less. This could be attributed to the level of outrage decreasing as this sort of thing becomes more and more frequent. I do feel, however, that we should always be accountable for our actions and open to genuine criticism and challenging our thoughts and opinions.

A conclusion can be drawn here, Twitter Mining can be simply ineffective in forcing public figures into the position someone would want. But that is the constant here, Twitter Mining is predominantly as weapon to discredit others, rather than its more productive function which to scrutinize public figures where it is relevant. It is almost like a classic fantasy story where the Hero is questioned if he should use his powers from the good of all or personal gain. Well, that question I leave to anyone reading this who has a twitter account, because everyone is capable of doing this which makes it overall a dangerous tool at your disposal. With great power comes great responsibility, tweet wisely.