

On Twitter, @TheNiceBot fights bullying with cheerful messages

By Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff on 12.17.15

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@TheNiceBot on Twitter sends out upbeat tweets to battle bullying online. Photo: Courtesy of Champions Against Bullying

The Internet can be full of hateful comments and put-downs. To spread positive thoughts instead, a little blue robot is sharing happiness and compliments.

On Twitter, "@TheNiceBot" is a cheerful online robot that sends happy, kind tweets. A computer chooses compliments to tweet. Then the NiceBot tweets compliments to Twitter users.

The NiceBot was created by a group that works against bullying, called Champions Against Bullying. The creators learned that mean comments and put-downs are posted to Twitter every 60 seconds. They wanted to make the Internet a nicer place, so they built the NiceBot. Every 36 seconds, the NiceBot sends out cheesy, happy messages, like these:

"@AmazingCinta I have a robot cavity, because you are so sweet. #TheNiceBot"

"@OURHONEYFROOT Supernovas wish they were as bright as your smile. #TheNiceBot"

Tweets "Make The World A Nicer Place"

The NiceBot started tweeting on Oct. 1 with the mission to "make the world a nicer place, one tweet at a time." So far, it has sent 52,000 tweets and attracted about 4,200 followers. It's programmed to eventually reach all 300 million Twitter users, a task that would take more than three hundred years to finish.

Alexandra Penn started Champions Against Bullying. Her group works with kids to stop bullying. She also works with parents and teachers and wanted to do something new to draw attention to bullying.

Penn said that last year, they tried to bring attention to teen suffering caused by bullying. This year, they wanted to fight against bullying with positive messages.

Messages Might Not Seem Sincere

NiceBot might help get people talking about cyberbullying. The worst it can do is to seem insincere, says Sameer Hinduja of the Cyberbullying Research Center. He doubts that the NiceBot will help to get rid of hateful behavior online.

Hinduja said that at least Champions Against Bullying is trying to spread positivity and kindness on the Internet. It can be a hateful place, and it could use more good will.

Cyberbullying is hurtful, especially for kids and teens. Often, it feels like the person who said it really means it, he said. A put-down or a compliment doesn't mean as much if it seems like it could be about anyone. Some people are not sure if the NiceBot will feel sincere.

Hinduja explained that when somebody says something kind, it feels sincere, and not like spam, because it's personal. A person can smile and be warm, making kind words more meaningful.

Many Appreciate Kind Thoughts

A tweet that comes from someone with a "bot" username does not feel personal, he said. People who get these tweets might not feel like they are sincere or meaningful.

David Weinberger writes about how technology affects ideas, and he got a tweet from the NiceBot. He tweeted, "Thank you, (@TheNiceBot)! That means so little coming from a bot!"

Plenty of other people seem to appreciate the NiceBot. One pleased Twitter user said it's "a nice way to start the day."

Even if the NiceBot cannot make the Internet a kinder place, Hinduja thinks it can still lead to good. He called the NiceBot a step in the right direction. Champions Against Bullying has a good idea, he thinks. It could lead to more ideas. Champions Against Bullying is using technology to reach people online and spread a kind message. Even if the NiceBot cannot fix bullying on the Internet, at least they are trying.

Quiz

1 Read the section "Many Appreciate Kind Thoughts." Which statement BEST describes what David Weinberger thinks about NiceBot?

- (A) He thinks the robot needs more work before it is able to help people with kind words.
- (B) He thinks that the robot is a great way to start the day in a positive mood.
- (C) He thinks it is silly to get positive messages from a robot that is not human.
- (D) He thinks the compliments are not actually kind words but actually insults.

2 What is the main reason why the NiceBot was invented?

- (A) to teach kids how to create Twitter robots
- (B) to fight back against cyberbullying
- (C) to explain to parents why bullying is bad
- (D) to show kids that Twitter is a helpful tool

3 Read the sentences from the section "Messages Might Not Seem Sincere."

NiceBot might help get people talking about cyberbullying. The worst it can do is to seem insincere, says Sameer Hinduja of the Cyberbullying Research Center.

What does the word "insincere" mean above?

- (A) not useful
- (B) not meaningful
- (C) not insulting
- (D) not needed

4 Read the sentence from the section "Tweets Make The World A Nicer Place."

The NiceBot started tweeting on Oct. 1 with the mission to "make the world a nicer place, one tweet at a time."

Which word has the SAME meaning as "mission" in the sentence above?

- (A) emotion
- (B) tools
- (C) goal
- (D) need

Answer Key

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