



Searching for a solution to negative netizens

Sunfull Movement aims to encourage internet users to post positive comments



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By Min Byoung-chul

I. Current status of internet users and social responsibility of Web portals

According to National Internet Development Agency of Korea, by December, 2007, Korea's internet penetration rate of people above age 6 is 76.3 percent, much higher than the global average of 22.04 percent. There are 34.82 million internet users in Korea and the number continues to grow. While 95 percent of people younger than 30 use the Internet, the number of users in their 40s and 50s is also significantly increasing.

On July 2, 2007, Kim Young-sun, a member of the National Assembly, said that Korea's top three portals—Naver, Daum and Nate—attract 77 percent of online users, while the top 100 most visited sites, including media portals, averaged 3.6 percent. It is no exaggeration to say that web portals — particularly these top three — are emerging as the fifth branch of power next to the legislative, executive, and judicial bodies of the government, as well as the mainstream media. Indeed, web portals averaged 27.94 million page views per day in March, 2003. By January 2007 their daily page views had risen to 134.63 million on average.

II. Negative comments

Negative comments written by anonymous users are the "silent killer." They can be deadly, in the literal sense, to an innocent person. In particular, online negative comments are fatal to celebrities because they are vulnerable to public condemnation based on groundless allegations via the Internet.

For example, several young TV stars hung themselves in 2007 after being harassed with negative comments. Also, a teenage girl who had appeared on a TV show for successful weight loss committed suicide due to bullying remarks. In 2008, anonymous online users left negative comments on a report about a baseball player who has been in vegetative state for eight years. Even a report about child kidnapping drew negative feedback. Comments like these even froze Korea's relationship with China, thanks to a few online remarks on China's Sichuan earthquake that enraged the Chinese people, prompting some of them to temporarily boycott Korean products.

With one of the world's lowest birth rates, there are more one child families in Korea than before, and children are becoming incapable of communicating with others. The development of the gaming industry has created an addiction for these lonely

children. Most games focus on stimulating plots like violence and murder rather than on educational methods for their humanity. Therefore, teenage gamers became familiar with instant killing in these games. Some of them confuse the real world with violent games and this confusion leads to replicating violent actions and criminal behavior in the real world. In this regard, adolescents who have accessed obscenity and violence on the web easily become offensive and thoughtless rather than considerate to the people they encounter in the Internet. They are the main culprits of negative comments.

This phenomenon is in line with the rise of virtual violence, which includes mobile phone bullying and strange murders without motives.

Internet users leave negative comments freely because they (1) can remain anonymous and (2) are socially inclined to randomly and instantly target their online counterparts for attacks. Currently, the online identity verification system is available in Korea to limit the anonymity of internet users who leave bullying comments, but users can still remain unknown by using different IDs or leaving their remarks under someone else's name. Therefore, it is virtually impossible to track down the source of all negative comments.

How to deal with negative comments

A full-fledged identity verification or real name system is the best way to suppress negative comments. However, it could limit the freedom to express one's opinion, which is an essential part of democracy. Also, it could disclose personal identity, leading to another virtual crime. Identity verification by web portals and electronic commercials can produce worrisome issues like the leakage of personal information. Last February, a hacker leaked out more than 10 million subscribers' personal information from Auction, one of the biggest e-commerce sites in Korea.

Nevertheless, a legal apparatus is needed to prevent more victims of cyber-bullying. People rarely say malicious expressions they learn from TV shows when their identity is displayed. Likewise, they will not write abusive comments on the Internet when their identity is disclosed to the public. Excluding the closed, private online sites that need to be protected by freedom of speech rights, the identity of online users that make public statements should be open in the public discussion boards and news services which work as a form of public sphere.

The government should en-

force expanding the currently limited identity verification system and promote a campaign to write positive comments like the Sunfull Movement. Not long ago, Korean drivers did not buckle their seat belts. However, through the penalty system and the awareness campaign emphasizing the safety of seat belts, most drivers nowadays fasten theirs.

It is generally perceived that vicious online comments are posted by adults, but surprisingly significant portion are spread by elementary and middle school students. In order to address this foul use of the Internet, we need to strengthen the education of humanity as early as possible. Education is the long-term solution to limiting the spread of negative sentiments on the Internet.

According to the NIDA, 51 percent of children ages 3 to 5 use the Internet. We need to teach essential humanitarian values from adolescents. They should learn to speak and write comments that are positive and encouraging. It is also important to reinforce this with students in elementary and middle school.

III. The Sunfull Movement

'Sunfull' means positive comments. It also means posting encouraging comments on the vicious posts to comfort the writer of original articles. It includes good words and deeds on the Web, stemming from a good heart and soul.

The Sunfull Movement aims to increase awareness of the impact that anonymous derogatory messages have on victims, although healthy criticism is sometimes necessary. Also, it aims to increase the practice of posting positive and encouraging messages on boards to change users' approach to online communications. Positive comments include posts that are: (1) complimentary, (2) encouraging, (3) comforting, (4) thankful, (5) apologetic and (6) forgiving.

The Sunfull Movement is a social campaign to encourage people to take a harmonious approach to each other. It emphasizes that a positive comment will make the person who wrote it even happier rather than the writer of original article. People who write positive comments for others become happier than the people who receive them. It also teaches that people who bless others are blessed. In fact, it stems from the Chumsae Movement.

The word, Chumsae, is derived from an expression used by drummers to encourage singers, as well as to arouse the audience in the Korean traditional form of opera called "Pansori." It is equivalent to "There you go!" or

"Attabo!" The Chumsae Movement also stresses that people should support others rather than stand in their way. The Sunfull Movement is an online version of the Chumsae Movement which usually focuses on field-oriented activities.

Shinhan Bank, one of the major banks in Korea, the Road Traffic Safety Authority and the Hamgyeong County government have already joined the Chumsae and Sunfull Movement. Shinhan Bank employees posted 22,000 positive comments on their intranet network 2007. In 2008, around 31,000 comments were posted by May to encourage or compliment colleagues. It continues to receive about 700 comments per day. Also, the company sets different initiatives in every quarter, like building teamwork and creating a lively working environment and rewards the best-performing employees and teams.

The Hamgyeong County government in Jeonnam held a kite-flying ceremony in an ecological park in Hamgyeong to alleviate the confrontational atmosphere between the Jeolla province and the Kyongsang province. While there, the 2,007 participants each flew their own kite.

Woosung GNP, a corporate participant of the Chumsae Movement, said that its productivity has increased by 10 percent since its 70 employees joined the movement.

On June 4, 2008, the Jeju Joong-ang Middle School celebrated the opening of the nation's first Sunfull Room. There, the Jeju branch of the True Love Parents' PTA held the movement's official declaration ceremony with teachers, parents and 1,500 students. After the ceremony, students posted positive comments for parents, teachers and classmates on the school's online board and the Sunfull Movement's homepage. They also left comforting comments on articles that were riddled with malicious comments.

The Sunfull Room is a space for adolescents to learn the significance of negative comments on the Internet and how to leave encouraging and respectful remarks. It will promote the Sunfull Movement, recommending beautiful words and deeds in the Internet while contribute to humanity education. The first Sunfull rooms was formed in public schools on Jeju, the southernmost island known which is known as a "Peace Island," and further expanded nationwide to encourage school students to join.

The Sunfull Room is located in the school's computer room. A teacher assigns students to post (1) comments of gratitude to parents and teachers, (2) en-

couraging and complimenting remarks to classmates and (3) encouraging and complimenting comments to anonymous internet users who suffer from malicious statements.

Those students who completed their assignment post its content on the school's Sunfull Room or at Sunfull Movement Headquarters at www.sunfull.or.kr. Teachers assess the assignment and reward service points.

IV. The challenge of Sunfull Education

A growing number of adolescents are becoming addicted to games in internet cafes. It is likely that they will rapidly become more offensive and emotional as they expose themselves to a gaming environment where murder and violence are commonly plotted to give more intense stimulation to users. If there is a game competitive enough to attract their attention but teach them humanity, it will emerge as an essential tool for efficiently educating about positive skills in a fun way.

Also, user created content, or UCC, can be a good tool to teach them humanity. The Sunfull UCC Competition will be a good opportunity for children to have fun in creating their own content and learn the importance of positive comments.

In order to continue this movement, more and more Sunfull Rooms should be installed in public schools. To this end, the government should come up with an educational policy which enhances the amount of online humanity education.

Also, the government should create a training course for teachers to learn about the Sunfull Movement and its relation to humanity education. In addition, the government should support these trained and certified teachers so that they can help students practice the Sunfull Movement. The local board of education should implement policies to provide sufficient support for teachers, like offering incentives to educators who publicly present their way of teaching Sunfull education.

Teachers should continuously assign posting positive comments to students in order to make them familiar with the Sunfull Movement in their daily lives. Also, those students who have posted positive comments should be rewarded with incentive service points in their school records. This process will guarantee the success of the Sunfull Movement in public school.

The Sunfull Education in public school will help students

overcome fierce competition, jealousy and envy. It will even contribute to the resolution of school bullying, the biggest challenge in our educational institutions today. Then, the Korean people who used to blame first rather than encourage others will start giving compliments to others, but a cold-eyed look at bullies.

V. Conclusion

The dependence on the Internet will continue to dominate our lives in the 21st century. With the oil prices skyrocketing at an unprecedented speed, we are at the threshold of entering an era of less time at the workplace and school and spending more time working and studying at home through the Internet. The Internet will be the main communication medium between people in all aspects of life. Yet, we are far from controlling serious social problems that emerge due to open communication in cyberspace and create more victims since we do not have realistic measures to fight cyber-bullying.

Sound criticism is essential to the digital democracy on the Internet. However, malicious comments based on groundless rumors violate people's human rights and degrade their dignity, making them suffer and even kill themselves. Therefore, negative comments should not be tolerated and must be prevented. We need to take legal measures to extinguish cyber bullies that hide behind their anonymity to viciously attack innocent people. More importantly, we need to show the public, especially young children, that posting groundless negative comments is wrong and teach them the practice of positive comments.

When we revisit our recent history of overcoming difficulties as a nation, we learn that Koreans are innately born with the 'chumsae' DNA. That is, our natural inclination to encourage and support each other. During the foreign exchange crisis in the '90s, the Korean people brought out gold from their homes to help their nation. During the 2002 World Cup, we witnessed our ability come together to support our team. This is what the Sunfull Movement is about — an effort to use our DNA to compliment, encourage and support each other.

* Chumsae' is a Korean call of encouragement, used in a Korean traditional music form called Pansori (a traditional form of opera) where it is used by the drummer to express "Ulsoo", or "Cho-ta" to encourage the singer and arouse the audience.