

## Fake Social Networking Profiles Still Big Problem- What To Do

[Online social networks](#) have rapidly increased in popularity, especially over the past couple of years. Social networking sites are popular because they easily allow you to find, connect with, and develop friendships with other internet users, often ones that share the same interests as you. There are various SNSs available which is very popular among net savvy younger generation such as Facebook , MySpace, Friendster, Orkut and Xuqa which allows users to post personal profiles, photographs, and random musings; to link to the profiles of "friends", thereby creating "networks" of people with supposedly common interests; and to establish and join groups on any and every topic visible in their mind like topics of personal interest for ex; Their Girl Friends, Their first date, Experiences of their first date and topics of political interest like Free Tibet etc. For obvious reasons these services are extremely popular for it gives the public particularly the younger generation a platform to share their view, ideas, stories, photographs etc. Among the most popular SNS in India is Orkut (belongs to Google) which operates in a similar way to other big sites such as Myspace, Friendster and Facebook. Registered users can create profiles, upload photographs, communicate with other members and join groups. Like most social networking sites, Orkut is largely self-policing and relies heavily on its users to report illegal and immoral activity.

However, despite the advantages, the SNS brings in; there is a dark side of it too. There has been a spurt in Orkut-related obscenity cases in various parts of India. Cases of misuse on Orkut have been reported widely. Most common among them are Orkut-related complaints concerning pictures of young girls that have been posted on communities with lewd allusions and a listing of the victims' mobile numbers. Let's have a look on some of these recent incidents:-

- An air-hostess residing in Delhi and working for Kingfisher Airlines filed an application in a city court to order the Delhi Police for registering a case against Orkut after a vulgar profile was posted by someone. The fake profile had a pic of her in her work uniform and her neighbors' (an official at the Lok Sabha Secretariat) telephone number listed for 'friendship'. Her neighbors were flooded with vulgar calls leading to a lot of harassment.
- The father of a South Delhi schoolgirl suffered from the fake profile of his daughter posted on Orkut that not only described the teenager as a 'sex teacher', but also contained obscene photographs and her contact details. He lodged a complaint with the Cyber Cell of the Delhi Police's Economic Offences after his family started receiving calls following the appearance of the fake profile.
- A student of Bachelor of Management Studies was arrested some months ago for creating a classmates profile and uploading her picture with offensive messages on an online community site without her permission. The Cyber Cell of Thane Police swing into action as soon as they got complaint from the victim girl about being abused Orkut.com they contacted all the way to Sweden (Orkut servers are located at Sweden) and got the IP of the Profile creator and tracked him down to his house.
- A 20 year old economics student at Mumbai University received hundreds of vulgar phone calls after someone posted a fake profile of hers on Orkut. She later complained to Cyber Crime Cell in Mumbai.

The investigation of cases of posting of fake obscene profiles in another names particularly innocent girls/ladies have revealed that they are usually created by the people who know the personal details of a user and create a profile to impersonate him or her and there by causing all sorts of problems for the victim. These so called 'pranksters' are not unknown strangers living in a far off country but some of the people most closest to the victim or their families. They usually include classmates, college friends, ex boyfriends, neighbors, colleagues, relatives, family or business rivals who are jealous to victim due to variety of reasons. Like a frustrated lover who has been turned down by a girl who is her classmate, an employee who has been yelled at by her female boss, a student who has been punished by her female teacher etc. However, there are some psychos do it simply as a 'prank' or joke as they seek kind of pleasure and adventurism in it.

If suppose you or any of your relative/friend is a victim of such obscene profile on Orkut or other SNS, the question, then, is what – if anything – to do about it. You must always remember that Cyberspace is not a separate, law-free jurisdiction. There are few steps you can take:-

Guess who the 'prankster' is. It will usually be someone you know like your classmate or your colleague or your old boyfriend or your immediate neighbor. Watch their reactions and the language used to describe you in the site and you may be able to guess who the prankster is. Tell that person to stop and threaten him/her with legal action/media publicity. However, if that person seems like a psycho then don't contact them.

Report to SNS or Orkut:- You may make a formal complaint giving the detail of the url of your profile and the bogus profile, then report them as bogus to the administrator of social networking website like Orkut with a request to remove the objectionable content.

Legal Action under the Information Technology Act, 2000:- If the fake profile is not withdrawn and the obscene phone calls continue, don't panic because there is a legal recourse available to you. [Section 67 of the Information Technology Act of 2000](#) provides that publishing of information that is obscene in the electronic media is amenable for imprisonment for a term or extended to five years and with fine which may extend to Rs 1 lakh. The offence is cognizable and non-bailable. Thus, it is considered a very serious offence. So serious is the offence, that as per the provision of IT Act, every offence under the IT Act is to be investigated by an officer not below the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police. It is advisable that you make a written complaint clearly disclosing the commission of cognizable offence (i.e. fact of posting of fake obscene profile in your name) to the dedicated Cyber Cell of the State Police which is well equipped and specially created to handle this type of complaints. Before making complaint ensure that the copy of the objectionable content & concerned URL Link is saved by you as the same would be required for the investigation, more so it is also necessary due to the fact that the prankster may remove the objectionable content to escape the criminal liability. Insist on the registration of the FIR as the Criminal Procedure Code clearly mandates that the FIR has to be registered on the complaint if it discloses the commission of cognizable offence (a cognizable offence is one where a police officer may arrest a person without a warrant). If the cyber cops refuse for some reason to register your FIR, then it is open to you to send the complaint in writing and by post to the concerned Superintendent of [Police under Section 154 \(3\) of Cr.P.C.](#) It is also open to the informant to directly approach the Court of Magistrate of the concerned Police Station with [the information under Section 200 of Cr.P.C.](#) with a prayer to direct the police to investigate the offence.

There is a need to sensitize the public particularly the younger generation to sensibly use the cyberspace. Awareness must be created that they are not anonymous on the cyberspace and there is always a trail of their misdeeds on the cyber space.

[Neeraj Aarora](#)  
[\(Advocate\)](#)