

## POLITICS AS USUAL: Atwitter

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

Social media has been an important part of the political landscape for arguably a decade or more; not just for getting your message out, but for how that message is shaped, how it is viewed, even by whom it is viewed.

Media presence in all its forms is an integral part of the get- out-the-vote process. But being important to a campaign is one thing, having a critical impact on how democracy functions? Well. That's another.

And we seemed to have arrived at that place today.

Last week, the global media was all aflutter that President Trump's twitter account went dark for 11 minutes. For a whopping 11 minutes, the world was not subjected to the inane or profane ? depending on the topic ? from the tweeter-in-Chief. This made global news. And I mean global ? everyone was covering this ?story.? Breathlessly, and ad nauseum.

Think about that. Arguably the most powerful leader in the world uses a ?free? media tool (and we'll talk about whether it's ?free? in a minute) to get his message out to his millions of followers. And his ability to do so was stopped by a low level staffer who decided to shut down the account on his way out of his job.

Talk about an exit interview.

Policy by tweet is definitely something we have not seen previously, by leaders of any nation, but it is definitely the case now. Other leaders have used other media effectively so it isn't anything new to manipulate messaging through media in its various forms.

What is new is the medium itself. And how much control of that message the President, our PM, your local Councillor really has over it.

Leaving aside the fact that it is ridiculous to think that complex policy on immigration, or health care or taxation can be communicated in 140 characters (because it can't!), it is being used for just that function. So, the fact that it was effectively stopped, silenced really, is cause for significant alarm.

Those folks laughing about ?shutting? up Trump should step back for a minute and think about what really happened.

The ability of the President of the United States to speak to his community was cut off by a temp. Love him or hate him, you have to agree that that's a pretty shocking state of affairs.

Which gets back to my point about control of the message. Yes, Facebook and twitter are fantastic vehicles for communication.

They are accessible communication tools that afford anyone the ability to reach thousands upon thousands of people quickly and easily.

But they are not free.

Just like anything, there is definitely a cost. You don't own your Twitter or Facebook account. By that I mean you don't really control it. There is a third party that has access to it and can shut it down at any time. Your content, your contacts, all of it ? even the Presidents ? can disappear with the press of a button. That is truly frightening.

And even if you decide to shut it down yourself, it doesn't mean it disappears. The content is archived. Just like anything else on the internet. It doesn't disappear. So those tweets and posts that are deleted are always there, lurking about. There is no reset.

So my point here is that while it may have been funny to laugh about ?shutting up? Trump, albeit temporarily, remember what you're actually laughing about ? that a private corporation can silence a President?Personally, I don't think that's funny at all.