

## POLITICS AS USUAL: Happy birthday, Twitter?

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

Twitter had a birthday recently.

This communication platform is now 11 years old ? well, yippee. From what I can see, Twitter seems to encourage everyone who uses it to act like a bratty 11-year-old, quite frankly.

There is just something about that particular medium that brings out the inner troll in folks.

Maybe because it's largely anonymous. Or maybe because it gives voice to folks with limited vocabularies, allowing them to ?express? themselves in ways they would not otherwise be able.

Nasty comments, shot off in rapid fire, are commonplace.

Let me rephrase that: vicious comments are commonplace. And users feel perfectly free to say whatever, to whomever they like secure in the knowledge that even if, in those rare occasions that twitter takes action and shuts them down, they can simply pop back up with another anonymous handle ? or two or twenty ? the same day and start all over again.

There is much that is right about this media platform. It allows you to get out your message, quickly, succinctly and to many, many people. But that too is the problem with twitter ? it allows any message to get out there, quickly, and from anyone to everyone, regardless of the content of that message.

Twitter will not police content as it states on its information page, ?(we) do not screen content or remove potentially offensive content.?

Truer words have never been spoken!

Look at what happened to African-American comedic actress Leslie Jones.

She had the audacity to star in a Ghostbusters reboot. How dare she! The racist ?haters? had a field day saying all manner of truly horrible things about her ? some which were pretty violent. It was so awful that she had to actually shut down her twitter account.

Score one for the bullies.

Leaving Trump aside ? who is the epitome of the quick and nasty tweeter ? trolls in the twittersphere are not limited to the rich and famous.

Even everyday people are subjected to savage comments made about them on Twitter every day. There are some very angry, little people out there, who embittered by their own circumstances ? who knows, maybe they didn't get a pony for their birthday when they were five ? who want to try to hurt people, usually out of jealousy and spite.

It's not just the nasty stuff that people put out there, that's the problem: It's the lies.

People make statements on Twitter that are not just categorically false, they are flat out lies. Safe and secure in the knowledge that until tweets rise to the level of outright abuse, folks can say literally anything and get away with it. Gleefully making wild accusations that have no basis in fact for the purposes of character assassination.

Lest I be accused of favouring censorship, let me be clear: In the words of Evelyn Beatrice Hall, ?I may disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.?

I believe in the right to state one's opinion, even if done in a pretty snarky way. What I don't believe in is lying with impunity.

It may be titillating to read the latest outrageous tweet put out there but think about the target of that tweet. What if it was you? Still think it's funny?