

My Twitter Pullback Is About More Than Elon Musk

May 1, 2022

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All journalists have complicated relationships with Twitter. For Black journalists, the relationship is particularly fraught. For Black female journalists, it's truly treacherous.

Journalists are in the business of conveying information. Some of it they find themselves. Other information they simply find interesting. As an opinion journalist, I add the extra emphasis of analysis and interpretation.

We can convey this information through our media companies, but there, we have to funnel our thoughts through the editorial architecture of whichever publication we work for.

Social media offers an additional, immediate outlet for short takes and hot takes. It's a way to keep track of what other journalists, newsmakers and news organizations are publishing.

People interested in what we have to say can follow us individually without having to subscribe to our publications. Twitter was, for me, a direct line of contact with readers and viewers. And it was useful in many ways. I could road test a thought, or crowdsource the editing process. Eagle-eyed readers would occasionally catch something — a typo or even a factual error — that I had missed.

Social media also allowed me to follow friends, to keep up with their lives in a way not previously possible. I now was reminded of more birthdays, saw more wedding pictures and could send more condolences.

For some people, including activists and members of marginalized groups, social media is where they found their communities, their tribes, and it was where they organized to fight back. It's hard to imagine the success of recent protest movements without social media there to publish videos of state violence and abuse, helping their content to proliferate and ignite warranted outrage and indignation.

There were clear positives. But the negatives were real and grinding.

Social media is full of hate speech, bots, vitriol, attack armies, screamers and people who live for the opportunity to be angry.

For people like me, that meant half my time on Twitter on any given day could be spent blocking and muting accounts. It's not because I'm fragile or averse to opposing views, but rather that much of what I was seeing clearly crossed over into hostility and sometimes harassment. I can't even count the number of racial slurs that have been directed at me, or attacks on my sexuality, or allusions to my family. And, of course, there is the occasional threat of violence.

For Black female journalists, it's even worse. A [study](#) of 778 female journalists and politicians issued a few years ago by Amnesty International found that they received "abusive" or "problematic" tweets once every 30 seconds, and that "Black women were disproportionately targeted, being 84 percent more likely than white women to be mentioned in abusive or problematic tweets."

As a journalist, you have to start to weigh the pros and cons of this much abuse. You don't want to let anyone think they are running you off a platform, but there is also a bigger idea, a grander idea: Your right to live and work in peace — or at least some approximation of peace — is precious and deserving of protection.

A couple of years ago, I pulled back from Facebook. I started to use it primarily as a place to post my columns and television appearances and to promote coming speeches or make career announcements.

I was making the decision not to produce new content for the site. It wasn't as final as deleting the app, but it was my way of letting go.

(This wasn't perfectly consistent, of course; I still use Instagram, which is owned by Mark Zuckerberg's Meta, the same company that owns Facebook.)

Lately, I have been thinking of pulling back from Twitter, as well. And I'm not the only one. Other journalists have been trying to find their own ways of pulling back from the site. In 2020, the Poynter Institute [wrote](#) that "a growing group of journalists has cut back on Twitter, or abandoned it entirely." The Institute described one of those journalists as being "motivated by a long-simmering sense that it wasn't compatible with his emotional and intellectual well-being."

In 2016, I reported a troubling tweet to Twitter's moderators. I'd interpreted it as a threat to shoot me. Twitter responded with a form letter [saying](#), "We reviewed the content and determined that it was not in violation of the Twitter Rules."

Then, early last month came guidance from management at The Times about "resetting" our approach to Twitter. In it, they acknowledged that "for too many of you, your experience of Twitter is shaped by harassment and attacks."

Now, it's "purely optional" for any Times journalist to maintain a presence on Twitter and other social media sites.

Then came word of Elon Musk's deal to buy Twitter and the possibility that the app could become even more of a cesspool. That was enough for me. I decided to put Twitter in my Facebook category: to [stop producing original content](#) for it and only use it for announcements of content I was producing elsewhere.

It's my way of pulling back. And I like it. I still record my thoughts, but what would have been tweets are now notes, notes that I can think through more thoroughly, notes that may become a column or a book or a comment on television.

This feels better to me, more settled, more considered. I no longer feel so strongly the tug of addiction that social media generates. I am slowly returning to me, the person, and away from the persona.