

Black twitter: New court of public opinion

By  [Rebone Masemola](#)

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South Africa's #blacktwitter movement has become the court of public opinion that sways consensus on trends followers are interested in, and that includes a lot of topical issues that the local twitterverse often jumps onto, hence the #Iamstellenbosch campaign that trended a few weeks ago brought to the fore our country's brewing concerns around racial prejudice and cultural indifference.



It was a poorly executed social media campaign that clearly didn't go as well as the institution predicted, and the digital distribution channels ensured that online users can actively participate in the conversations via sharing their 2cents worth on the matter. #Iamstellenbosch raised many eyebrows and attracted some unwanted attention because people across barriers felt that it was patronising. But over and above that, the twitter movement is one of the reasons why there has been a rise in a collective spirit that has inspired a new age of social activism.

2015 has seen many ordinary people take on the torch to stand up against inequality, bullying and or for victims of violence. It's become trendy to be seen to be an active participant who cares about global issues, for instance a lot more people used their personal pages to campaign for better treatment of refugees escaping to Europe from the Middle-East, and the world stood-up for victims of xenophobia who were attacked by ignorant people in South Africa earlier this year.

Some people may argue that [it's not enough to merely tweet about other people's plight](#) vs doing something for them, but a lot of noise can sway decision makers to take action. Those who have followed the #witsfeesmustfall sit in campaign would know how much valuable difference social media solidarity behind the matter made to the institution's decision to reverse fee increases (and this is without taking away anything from all the work the students continue to do).

A little bit of pressure via trending hashtags like #witsfeeswillfall has changed the way things work and how people think about the power of social media, even big institutions like Wits and Investec seem to care about the kind of perception social media users have of their brands. I personally wouldn't want to be slated on twitter because whether one admits it or not, it matters.

But what happens when #blacktwitter turns on one of its own? Havoc! The movement has no loyalty and bears no allegiance to any of the users who imagine themselves members of its inner cycle. Despite how far in the 'ranking' twelebs have climbed, the movement is no man's land because their influencers are also held accountable if they conduct themselves questionably. Like the entertainment industry to which it thrives, #blacktwitter can build a tweleb to the top of the hierarchy, but just as quickly pull the rug underneath them in honour of bringing you back to reality. Fundamentally, the movement has the kind of reach and influence that can gather masses for the purpose of persecuting those under the magnifying glass.



Image source: <http://bit.ly/1R84VG>

In recent days black twitter campaigned to get one of their own fired at Investec after making the company aware of his 'uncharacteristic behaviour and extracurricular activities' outside work. The tweleb in question's ex-girlfriend took her allegations of abuse to social media to make his +20K followers aware of the kind of person she saw him as, to gather support. She alleged that the person they thought they knew was merely performing on social, in one of the backlash tweets @ZedNoorgat wrote "@siyanyezi remember that time you said Islam oppresses woman!?! LOLs" to point out the irony of the situation. In essence I guess the movement has become an accountability squad team.



Image source: <http://bit.ly/1Mk0piH>

There is an interesting dynamic where the longer people are on social media, especially twitter, the less they understand its power and influence. I often strongly advise that there is now a growing need for institutions to start offering people training that could enforce better use of social platforms, thus to prevent potential infringements that could reflect poorly on a brand based on posting behaviour displayed by an employee due to bad judgment. Maybe such could have prevented the recent controversial posting of an image of a theatrical rape scene on instagram by Hilton college boys in the past week.

A lot has been said about the Hilton college image that was posted on Instagram in the past week, and over and above the insensitivity of the act displayed by the clear act of immaturity, I think the boys were just careless. It may be cliché but I really think it would save a lot of people potential fallouts if they took just a second to think over their tweets before posting, hence if we learned responsible posting behaviour then a lot of things can be avoided, i.e:

Let me spell it out if you don't see any issues with the image: I may be wrong since I only graduated from Wits in 2014, but the last time I checked education was a right not a privilege.

As a Wits graduate of class 1999 I'm horrified at the behavior of these so called educated people. Tertiary education is a privilege not a right everywhere in the world. Well done to the management for this stance
11 minutes ago · Edited · Like · 1 · Re

#blacktwitter exists because clearly there will continue to be a need for it if users are careless about the kind of things they choose to share on the web. I've already indicated in '[the role of black twitter](#)' that our online history has longevity and a blueprint that will outlive us, so with that in mind, users have now adopted the tendency to rehash people's old tweets in an effort to justify something and make a point about their 'unsuspecting victim' in the present.



Remember how people used Trevor Noah's old tweets to argue why he wasn't the best man for the Late Night show? Even more recently when the tweleb, Siya Nyezi was exposed for alleged abuse on twitter by his ex girlfriend, some of her supporters utilised his tweet history to bore holes into his character. Anyone who showed signs of even remotely defending him or questioning how the whole saga was handled, got a backlash on twitter because they

were seen to be condoning women abuse.

In a nutshell just remember that #blacktwitter is always watching like a hawk despite how innocent you think your remarks might be, ask Maps because twitterville wasn't happy with him this week.

ABOUT REBONE MASEMOLA

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