



PERSPECTIVE

Twitter Trolling 2017: Where Does Women's Journalism Go From Here?

FEBRUARY 13 by NATALIE ZISA

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"Hope you don't mind me following you so I can keep tabs on your disgust."



"She's still around after Tucker humiliated her and exposed her?"



"Do you even have a job? Freelance reporting means you're unemployed right?"



These were just a few of the comments that got sent to my phone after I shared my article on Teen Vogue writer, Lauren Duca. Within only an hour, I had 277 Twitter notifications. Some were extremely encouraging comments, while others carried on the same negativity as the ones above. I went from being excited about the fact that my article had reached so many people to being insecure about my work. Even if these comments didn't have anything to do with my actual writing ability, it meant that these people didn't believe what I had to say was valuable. They discredited my opinion simply because it went against theirs. I thought if anything this would happen later in my career, but I was being exposed to trolls firsthand.



I remember reading Joel Stein's piece in TIME titled, "How Trolls Are Ruining the Internet" and it scared me to know there were people who literally got a thrill out of hurting someone else. Stein gave multiple examples in which professional journalists had to quit Twitter because of not just offensive comments, but legitimate threats to their safety. He explained that "the voices of women, ethnic and religious minorities, gays—anyone who might feel vulnerable" are usually easier targets for trolls. But often they don't always choose topics of high controversy to attack. It could be anything from video games to clothing ads to the dissatisfaction of a movie remake. (Stein recalled the incident in July when actress Leslie Jones was harassed by people who were upset that the 2016 remake of Ghostbusters included four women, instead of men.)



Often, it is women in media at the center of these attacks. Stein shares the results of an anonymous poll taken at TIME where, "Nearly half the women on staff have considered quitting journalism because of hatred they've faced online, although none of the men had."

This isn't to say that only women get harassed online, but that it is severely more common for male trolls to attack women, rather than the other way around. Lauren Duca, the author of Teen Vogue's popular, "Donald Trump Is Gaslighting America" article, faced rape and death threats after her appearance on Tucker Carlson Tonight. And later expressed that being a woman on the Internet automatically sets you up for harassment. It's clear when you consider the fact that a majority of the comments were unrelated to the context of the interview or her article, but instead about her appearance, the fact that she was a woman, or other trivial details.



In the same poll, 80% of the writers said they had avoided discussing a particular topic in order to avoid online reactions. But the same percentage considers online harassment a






regular part of their jobs. Which means trolling is something as a journalist you have to deal with, but how?

While my experience was nowhere near the scope of Leslie Jones or Lauren Duca, I could see how reading the comments on my article could become a weakness and I needed to know how to deal with it.

One strategy, Stein offers, "is to flood the victims of abuse with kindness." I reminded myself of what Lauren said in her interview in regards to how she processed the feedback. She said the support helped a lot and to ultimately not be ruled by the negativity. As I write this, I think back to one reply, "An amazing piece everyone should read. Inspiring." It's people like that that encourage me to keep writing. That remind me my voice is being heard and appreciated. They (the trolls) would win if I decided to give up. If I never wrote another article again...or at least one worth discussing, I can't control what others think about my work, but I can control how I let their opinions affect me. If I chose to listen to every negative thing that was ever said about me, or my writing, I wouldn't be where I am now, and I kind of like where that is.



TAGS: COMMENTS, ONLINE ARTICLES, TROLLS



NATALIE ZISA
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