

Twitter "kills" Malema's political career

 By [Francois Rank](#)

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It's official. Julius Malema has been expelled from the ANC Youth League. That is, he was by 3:55pm yesterday afternoon - in the twitterverse, at least.

A "stray" tweet by ZA Media ([@ZA_Media](#)) of Malema's untimely political demise set the social network alight yesterday afternoon and highlighted once again why the power of social media can be dangerous if wielded incorrectly.

Spread like wildfire

Seconds after ZA Media's [tweet](#), the news began to spread like wildfire.

“ Its official ANC Youth League leader Julius [#Malema](#) expelled! Just wanted to be 1st to say it!- ZA Media ([@ZA_Media](#)) [February 29, 2012](#) ”

It's ironic that the crux of the problem with Twitter - especially as a source for news - lies in the ZA Media tweet. "Just wanted to be first to say it." Twitter is all about being first and, as a result, being right comes a distant second.

City Press reporter, Carien Du Plessis ([@carienduplessis](#)) was the first to pour cold water on the tweet - tweeting to say that media waiting outside Luthuli House had not heard a thing from the ANC's National Disciplinary Committee (NDC) on the matter.

Then ZA Media responded that its tweet was supposedly "embargoed" - until the news broke officially.

The problem is that not everyone who follows ZA Media, or the people who retweeted its tweet, follow Du Plessis - although they should. So her debunking of the ZA Media tweet may have been ineffective.

I am not an avid twitter follower - I have a profile and I think I have tweeted six times since opening an account two years ago. I do, however, use it to follow breaking news when I don't have access to television or radio.

The nature of Twitter

The question is can I trust the news I get off Twitter? Should I apply the major test for news, namely accuracy, when I use it or must I take everything that comes off Twitter feeds with a pinch of salt until it has been confirmed by a more reputable source? Because, even if hundreds or thousands of other sources retweet - as in the incident yesterday - might only

indicate that they are spreading a rumour, correct or not.

Also illustrated yesterday was the transient nature of twitter. By 4:05pm Julius Malema had been expelled; by 4:10pm he hadn't and the tweet had been debunked (much like a myth); and by 4:15pm it was business as usual, back to the Malema watch and all quiet on the frontlines.

It was almost as if ZA Media's apparently embargoed tweet had never happened. That's another thing - how can a tweet be embargoed? Twitter is immediate and immediacy is the exact thing having an embargo on information seeks to remove.

Twitter as a source...

All this leaves me with more questions than answers when it comes to Twitter but also made me realise that the old adage of reading the news with scepticism applies exponentially to believing what you see on Twitter.

Be sceptical of unsubstantiated statements in tweets such as ZA Media's. I am more inclined for instance to believe Du Plessis when she tweets: "Source unsympathetic to #Malema has heard from inside Luthuli House that it is expulsion. Friend of #Malema says he doesn't know verdict yet" (ZA Media snarkily congratulated her on breaking the news second). Du Plessis' tweet is more measured and rings truer.

It's also just good journalism - something that is sorely lacking in most tweets.

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