

# Afraid of scrutiny: ABC journalists' problem with Twitter

By Belinda Jones

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**In an embarrassing gaffe leaked after last Sunday's [Insiders](#), host [David Speers](#) was caught on a "hot mic" calling social media "a horrible, horrible place".**

Speers told his panel and guests that it was only "about 15 people" who were criticising his work. One panellist added they were "all anonymous accounts"; both of these statements are quite delusional and demonstrably untrue.

Speers added they must remember that "hundreds of thousands" are "loving our work". Ratings show that since Speers joined *Insiders*, hundreds of thousands of viewers have [deserted](#) the show. Last Sunday's *Insiders* attracted 246,000 viewers.

When [Barrie Cassidy](#) left *Insiders* in June 2019, the *Insiders*' audience had grown to [600,000](#). In contrast to Speers' denigration of the *Insiders*' audience, Cassidy's final words as host were a heartfelt thank you to his loyal audience. Despite not having a regular show on television, Barrie Cassidy remains

enormously popular and has 244,200 followers on Twitter. David Speers currently has 164,500 Twitter followers.

Speers appears to use his Twitter account to mainly promote *Insiders*, his own articles and podcasts he's involved in. Using the social media platform as a free advertising service, he does not engage with Twitter users at all and does not appear to grasp the concept of the two-way conversation platform.

There has been a thinly veiled contempt for Twitter users from a small number of the ABC's higher profile journalists for some time now. [Lisa Millar](#) and [Leigh Sales](#) both deleted their Twitter accounts due to the criticism they received, yet they continue to use other social media platforms.

Then there were the '*Lobotomized Shitheads*' and '*Labor Trolls/Thugs*' [lists](#) that ABC's Weekend Breakfast host [Fauziah Ibrahim](#) created on her Twitter profile but forgot to make private.

The ABC received many complaints and apologised profusely for Ibrahim's behaviour, [stating in an email](#) in response to a complaint '*in this case, the social media activity was unacceptable, and the ABC sincerely apologises for the offence that was caused*'.

Ibrahim never apologised to ABC viewers or social media users and resumed her hosting position after a short period of suspension. Her Twitter account has since been deleted.

Chris Uhlmann, the former ABC journalist, has had a long-running issue with Twitter users originally referring to them as a "[vigilante mob](#)" and later infamously called Twitter users "[sewer rats](#)". His Twitter account has since been deleted.

The vast majority of ABC journalists on Twitter don't seem to have a problem with the platform. ABC's [Patricia Karvelas](#) has a following of 153,100 and interacts and engages daily with her followers while promoting her work, often directly addressing both positive and negative comments.

It begs the question why do a select few of the highest profile journalists at the ABC have so much difficulty dealing with Twitter when so many others can manage it successfully?

Is it the fact that Twitter is fast and usually, if not always, breaks stories long before the mainstream legacy media services can?

Or is it the fact that Twitter, unlike Facebook, does not allow journalists to delete comments they don't like?

Perhaps it's the fact journalists' work is critiqued accurately and in real-time?

Or it could even be that some Twitter users are doing political journalism better than many mainstream journalists are, without fear or favour?

Journalists, by virtue of their chosen profession, fundamentally believe in the power of free speech and literally stake their professional reputations on it. That's why it's so incongruent that those defenders of free speech are often the most sensitive when the public exercises its right to free speech.

So, they delete their accounts to prevent being exposed to or interacting with the free speech and thoughts of their audience. Or, as David Speers does, just slander entire platforms and

everyone who uses them, while continuing to use Twitter himself for self-promotion.

*'Free speech is the bedrock of a functioning democracy, and Twitter is the digital town square where matters vital to the future of humanity are debated,' [said](#) Twitter's largest shareholder [Elon Musk](#) during his proposed acquisition of the social media giant.*

Australian journalist based in the U.S., [Jonathan Swan](#), commands a Twitter following of 885,600 and is listed at [number 28](#) on "[the most influential journalists of Twitter](#)".

Why can't David Speers and other ABC journalists handle Twitter when so many other journalists around Australia and the world can and do very successfully?

Why do David Speers and other ABC journalists need to denigrate and slur the entire cohort of social media users who form part of their viewing audience? The two groups are not mutually exclusive. When David Speers slurs social media users, he is also slurring his dwindling viewing audience, the taxpayers who own the ABC and pay his healthy salary.

Australians are often accused of being apathetic when it comes to politics, and apathy is the enemy of democracy, yet the #auspol hashtag has rated consistently as the top Australian hashtag and is one of most popular political hashtags in the world. Twitter's public policy director Kara Hinesley [said](#) earlier this year *'more than one-third of young Australians will get the majority of their political information from social media during the election campaign'*.

It beggars belief why any political journalist would deliberately sever ties with the social media platform that exposes their work to such a large demographic of politically engaged people, especially a journalist and host whose television ratings are in freefall.

There is no dispute from any Twitter user that there is a certain small element of unsavoury characters and trolls on the platform, as there is in real life. And yes, sometimes the language is colourful, and pseudonyms are used. However, within the cohort of Twitter users, there is also a huge number of politically engaged Australian taxpayers who do not deserve to be denigrated by anyone who works for the taxpayer-funded ABC.

Say cheese for the hot mic, Speersy!!

Back to you, twitter [\[?\]](#) [#auspol](#)  
[#insiders](#) [pic.twitter.com/q6TLjnuNm0](https://pic.twitter.com/q6TLjnuNm0)

— Squizz (@SquizzSTK) [September 25, 2022](#)

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