

Why Twitter won't ban President Donald Trump

July 27 2017, by Barbara Ortutay



This Wednesday, April 26, 2017, photo shows the Twitter app on a smartphone in Philadelphia. Twitter Inc. reports earnings, Thursday, July 27, 2017. (AP Photo/Matt Rourke)

Twitter has made it clear that it won't ban Donald Trump from its service, whether the president follows its rules against harassment or not.

That's no surprise: The president's tweets draw attention to the struggling

service, even if tweets mocking reporters and rivals undercut Twitter's stated commitment to make the service a welcoming place.

The company has been cracking down on accounts that violate its terms, and Trump's critics say he has broken Twitter's rules multiple times.

Calls to ban Trump from Twitter, largely by liberal activists, writers and Twitter users, sounded even before he became president. They were renewed recently when the president posted a mock video of him "body slamming" a man whose face was covered by CNN logo. Groups such as the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press condemned the video as a threat against journalists (a White House aide said at the time that the [tweet](#) should not be seen as a threat).

THE CASE FOR TRUMP

Twitter does ban harassment and hateful conduct, but there is a lot of wiggle room as to what constitutes such behavior. For instance, though it may be crude to tweet that a TV host was "bleeding badly from a face-lift," they are at best in a gray area when it comes to violating Twitter terms.

When asked about Trump, Twitter says it doesn't comment on individual accounts. But CEO Jack Dorsey told NBC in May that it's "really important to hear directly from leadership" to hold people accountable and have conversations out in the open, not behind closed doors.

It also makes business sense: Trump's tweets are constantly in headlines, calling attention to Twitter and, ideally, getting more users to sign up.

For now, it doesn't appear to be helping. On Thursday, Twitter said its monthly average user base in the April-June quarter grew 5 percent from the previous year to 328 million, but it was unchanged from the previous

quarter. Twitter's stock fell more than 9 percent to \$17.75 in pre-market trading Thursday after the numbers came out.

Twitter has never turned a profit. On Thursday, the San Francisco-based company reported a second-quarter loss of \$116 million, or 16 cents per share, compared with a loss of \$107 million, or 15 cents per share, a year earlier.

Revenue declined 5 percent to \$574 million from \$602 million, inching past Wall Street's muted expectations.

IMPORTANT TWEETS

Free speech advocates agree it's better for Trump to stay.

Emma Llanso, director of the Center for Democracy & Technology's Free Expression Project, said Trump's tweets are "very clearly politically relevant speech" and are even being cited in court cases challenging the president's policies. For example, a U.S. appeals court used Trump's tweets in June to block his travel ban on people from six predominantly Muslim countries.

Llanso said it's understandable why there has been "so much pressure" on [social media](#) platforms to crack down on harassment. Long before Trump was elected, users and online safety advocates called on Twitter to do something about abuse on its service.

But when it comes to the president's outsized presence on Twitter, she'd rather have a private company avoid deciding what should and shouldn't be allowed. Rather, she said, "we should be looking to the instruments of our democracy as the appropriate place to hold the president accountable."

SURVIVING THE CRACKDOWN

Twitter appears to agree. Earlier this month, the company announced that it is now taking some action, including suspensions, on 10 times the number of abusive accounts than it did a year ago (though it did not give a number). Trump, of course, was not in trouble.

In June, the president defended his use of social media, tweeting that the mainstream media doesn't want him to get his "honest and unfiltered message out." The White House did not immediately respond to a message for comment on Thursday morning.

IT WORKS BOTH WAYS

Twitter provides a platform for the president to interact with the world directly, without intermediaries such as the news media. But if it's important for people to hear directly from Trump, [free speech](#) advocates say, it's also important for Trump to listen—and to allow people to see his messages.

His blocking of individual users on the service is the subject of a lawsuit

.

Comedian Dana Goldberg, who says she has been blocked by the president but is not part of the lawsuit, likened it to him "giving the State of the Union and blocking out the TV sets of people who voted for (Hillary) Clinton."

Her offense? Goldberg, who has about 7,680 followers compared with Trump's 34.6 million, said it was her tweet calling Trump "a sad man" after he wished Sen. John McCain well following a cancer diagnosis, despite deriding McCain's war record before.

"The fact that I was blocked by the [president](#) of the United States, it's insane," she said.

© 2017 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Why Twitter won't ban President Donald Trump (2017, July 27) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-07-twitter-wont-donald-trump.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.