

# 'Zelda: Don't tug on Superman's cape', and other social media lessons

 By [Walter Pike](#)

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Zelda la Grange has done remarkably well in her career, but from [writing a best-selling book](#) about her job as Nelson Mandela's personal assistant, she must have thought she was Superwoman when she changed her Twitter profile name to Zelda van Riebeeck and started sounding off...



La Grange would have been far better advised to have switched on her iPod and listened to [folk rock singer Jim Croce](#) singing the words:

*"You don't tug on Superman's cape/  
You don't spit into the wind/  
You don't pull the mask off that old lone ranger/  
And you don't mess around with Jim."*

It's a very old song but I'm sure if Croce had written it today he would have advised La Grange to rather not mess around on Twitter.

## Revealed: The good and bad power of Twitter

Twitter is an amazing tool for spreading ideas. It is raw and fast and it builds momentum in an instant. It's become the place where [news breaks first](#) and for that reason it is watched by journalists and news organisations around the world.

It's also a snake pit of a space, it's a no-holds-barred cage fight, a place of mob justice - and this all happens very publicly.

**All it takes to alter your brand is a few tweets**

There is no doubt that Zelda la Grange's brand has changed over the weekend. It was built on the promise that it was possible for someone to cross over from the prejudices of the past and embrace a new democracy to many people. Now, this image is in tatters. Most commentators have labeled her outburst as [racist](#).

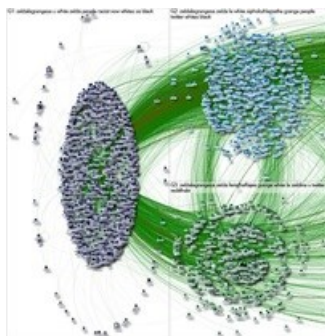


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The details of the incident have already been well documented in the media, and [this article](#) from Stuart Thomas on *Memeburn* documents one part of Saturday's events, when radio talk show presenter Redi Tlhabi tackled La Grange in what some commentators described as a twar. But this twar wasn't between Redi and Zelda - it actually played on a much larger stage.

“ The most important part of [#Zelda](#) rant is how ordinary it is: how utterly entitled many of our compatriots feel to express these thoughts.- Sisonke van Zulu (@Sisonkemsimang) [January 17, 2015](#) ”

While this was all happening, I decided to analyse the conversation network that formed around the term 'Zelda la Grange' in order to try to understand the shape of the conversation.



[click to enlarge](#)

The diagram illustrates it very clearly. In this diagram, each dot is a Twitter profile and the lines represent connections between people.

It's not what I expected.

The conversation created by Zelda la Grange is a far more unified network than you would expect from a news topic of this sort, where there would be a lot of outsiders. We usually find these types of structures only in very tight communities, when everyone connects with everyone else for information, ideas and opinions.

In this case, even the conversation was remarkably unified, everyone had an opinion, every connection was connected and everyone was talking about the same thing. There were obviously some extremes in the language used but there is unified clear message to Zelda la Grange - Twitter saw her tweets as racist.

[Click here](#) for a guide to understanding the six types of Twitter conversations.

## 7 Lessons for Zelda la Grange and every other personal or brand Tweep

Let's take this understanding and use it for brands, both personal and commercial:

### 1. Twitter is 140 characters.

You can't develop an argument in 140 characters. If you want to make a point, you need to make it in a post that you can then link to. If you don't do this, you are likely to have your meaning misunderstood.

## 2. Tweets don't stay together.

If you are making a comment longer than 140 characters, which I would suggest you seldom do, you need to find a way of linking them. You can number them, for example: (1 of 4).

## 3. What happens on Twitter can appear everywhere.

Because Twitter is used as an early warning system, everybody I know in journalism has a Twitter profile. It's not going to stay on Twitter, it will spread. If it is newsworthy, it will be reported everywhere.

## 4. It doesn't matter how many followers you have.

Twitter is always open and always public - every post can be found. Don't imagine that you are just talking to a handful of followers. If your tweets have impact, they will explode. [@SirTessa](#), who had only a few hundred followers, started the #Ilridewithyou hashtag, which then became [an international event](#).

## 5. Beware the Twitter trolls.

On many topics there are trolls hanging around waiting to pick up on a topic and disrupt it. Even trolls with small followings can influence a conversation grouped by a hashtag. Never engage with them unless you have a tight, concise and 140-character max response.

## 6. It's all about the conversation.

The way to understand conversations is to focus on the topic and then on the influencers. People are only influential in relation to the topic.

## After the storm

Every conversation leaves footprints. Even more than diamonds, digital is forever. Intelligent data analysis will reveal what those footprints are. It will provide an understanding of the conversation, how cohesive it is, and how far it has spread.

It will tell you the spread of opinions, how diverse they are, who the leaders are in each variation of opinion and what they believe.

To anyone wanting to manage opinion and to change behaviour, this information is very valuable.

“ If only closed minds came with closed mouths - So sad seeing the Zelda La Grange / Jan van Riebeeck / Zuma racist tweets! [#WeAreOneHumanRace](#)- Ulrich J v Vuuren (@UlrichJvV) [January 17, 2015](#) ”

## Starting conversations

Probably the most important thing to notice is that bands don't exist in isolation in social media. It's far more important to know the structure of the entire conversation than the structure of any individual's audience.

The key thing to understand is how the conversation grouped around any specific issue. This in turn allows us to understand how to start these conversations and how to get the idea contained in them to spread. Zelda la Grange certainly started a conversation.

If there was an organisation whose goal involved building a conversation around racism, aimed understanding and recognising the problem and facilitating a change in behaviour moving forward, this information is gold...

## ABOUT WALTER PIKE

Walter has decades long experience in advertising, PR, digital marketing and social media both as a practitioner and as an academic. As a public speaker; Speaks on the future of advertising in the post - broadcast era. As an activist; works in an intersection of feminism & racism. He has devised an intervention in unpacking whiteness for white people As an educator; upskilling programs in marketing comms, advertising & social in South, West and East Africa. Social crisis management consultant & educator. Ideaorg founder

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