

# Should Twitter Be Liable for Hate Speech?

[By Donald Scarinci](#)

As Twitter's popularity continues to climb, so must its social responsibility. The responsibility it must uphold plays an even larger role when well-respected public figures are looking to maintain a positive image. Fresh off his victory in the Democratic primary for U.S. Senate, Cory Booker is another individual who frequently uses Twitter. Booker's profile, which has grown to over 1.4 million followers, plays an impactful role on both his presence in a social context, as well as the image he portrays to society. As a result of this, Cory Booker, along with other public figures, should be careful as to how they deal with any type of negative feedback from users of the social media tool.

Twitter recently announced a new policy designed to combat threatening and abusive content. The change came amidst public outcry in the United Kingdom over a barrage of threatening Tweets received by two-high profile women. The first target, Caroline Criado-Perez, helped land British novelist Jane Austen on the country's currency. The activist was rewarded with rape and death threats. While she notified [Twitter](#) of the threatening messages, it did little to stop the abuse.

"I think I just feel under siege because it's been going on for five days now, and it's been so relentless," Criado-Perez told BBC. "The threats have been so explicit and so graphic that obviously ... they have sort of stuck with me in my head and have really put me in fear, I realized."

Stella Creasy, a Labour Party member of Parliament, became a target after voicing support for Criado-Perez. She wrote an op-ed in [The Observer](#) criticizing Twitter's lack of response. "To challenge, call out, parody or criticize someone is to practice freedom of speech. To threaten them with rape is not," she wrote.

The statement highlights the fine line Twitter must walk between encouraging open dialogue and standing idly by while its users turn on one another. The recent controversy in Britain certainly forced the company's hand. It has now announced a series of changes intended to beef up anti-abuse policies.

"The abuse they've received is simply not acceptable," Del Harvey, Senior Director, Trust and Safety, wrote in a [Twitter UK blog post](#). "It's not acceptable in the real world, and it's not acceptable on Twitter. There is more we can and will be doing to protect our users against abuse. That is our commitment."

Changes include updating the updated the Twitter rules to clarify that targeted abuse or harassment will not be tolerated and simplifying the process for reporting abuse. Users can report abusive behavior directly from a Tweet, rather than the prior process of using the Twitter Help Center to file an abuse report. The social media company also pledged to add additional staff to the teams that handle abuse reports and explore "new ways of using technology to improve everyone's experience on Twitter."

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