
Social Media's Rhetorical Prowess, the Black Lives Matter Movement, and How Millennials Experience It

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Does social media correlate with how young people perceive the Black Lives Matter Movement as part of the broader civil rights movement? This paper analyzes how youth think about and experience the aforementioned based on 33 individual survey responses. Respondents believe social media has made them more aware of what constitutes anti-Black bigotry. Nearly all individuals concluded that mainstream news takes cues from what goes viral on social media, with one respondent even claiming that "social media is basically news at this point." Social media provides an alternative space to cultivate ideas and spread awareness, but how much of it actually sinks and facilitates social change?

"More compelling (if not necessarily sufficient) frameworks for understanding political change take into account how multiple forces, such as histories of political contestation, geo-politics, demographics, and ethno-religious fissures, combine to effect political change."

—Alex Fattal, Harvard University (2012)

"Relegating Twitter to a space where 'nothing happens' not only ignores the fact that the interactions we have on Twitter are a product of larger social, political, and economic process, but it also smacks of elitism."

—Dhiraj Murthy, University of Texas (2012)

"There is a violent subculture in the African-American community that should be exposed and confronted. Enter the Black Lives Matter crew which roams around the country promoting a false narrative that American police officers are actively hunting down and killing blacks."

—Bill O'Reilly, Fox News (2016)

Introduction

Current Events and Awareness Efforts Stemming from Social Media

With Philando Castille's gunman charged with manslaughter during the month of this writing (November 2016), I cannot help but ask: would Officer Jeronimo Yanez have been indicted had it not been for the exhaustive efforts put forth on social media to ultimately shine a light on his actions?

Social media places current affairs on an international stage that otherwise, I believe, would not garner the coverage they end up receiving. Earlier this year when the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences nominated only white actors and actresses for the second nomination season in a row, the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite quickly gained traction—eventually leading to an implementation of more P.O.C. members at the Academy—with everyday individuals standing, or rather posting, in solidarity with actors such as Jada Pinkett Smith and Angela Bassett. Pinkett Smith herself uploaded a video on Facebook, asking, “Is it time that people of color recognize how much power and influence [we] have amassed that [we] no longer need to ask to be invited anywhere?” She goes on to state, “[B]egging for acknowledgement, or even asking, diminishes dignity and diminishes power. And we are a dignified people, and we are powerful.” The video has since garnered 14 million views, has been shared more than 250,000 times, and was liked by 320,000 people and counting. Pinkett Smith's video sparked inspiration, and more importantly, tangible change.

Mizuko Ito and Daisuke Okabe give name to the phenomenon that is social media's prowess among the masses: ambient virtual co-presence, or ambient intimacy. The notion is that individuals may not be geographically connected, yet they are peripherally aware of one another. The elasticity of ambient intimacy allows for connections to be made with others regardless of how many miles stand between them, something that allowed Pinkett Smith's video to influence others and lead to the eventual success of #OscarsSoWhite. The hashtag was successful due to the fact that the Academy did indeed make changes to their membership, and, thus, who exactly gets to determine nomination handouts. Ito and Okabe observed the trend of ambient intimacy among Japanese youth as a tool to “overcome some of the adult-controlled power structures that govern their everyday lives” (127). From my perspective, this relationship can translate into a government versus citizens situation, as well as police versus individuals. Black Lives Matter, in a sense, is police versus the collective individual.

Alex Fattal builds upon the theory of ambient intimacy and beckons toward ambient militancy instead: how political actors engage with the virtual co-presence created by peer-to-peer technologies. Fattal dutifully adds that the concept has unexplored political consequences—but I disagree. In the case of Egypt, social media's ability to gather ordinary people all but overthrew the dictatorship at hand when a Facebook page became the battle cry of the Egyptian liberation movement. Not only that, but governments have reacted to e-movements enough times already to evaluate potential political consequences. To list a few instances, the state of Israel continues to generate propaganda on social media outlets such as YouTube and Facebook; London attempted to shut down Blackberry's instant messaging system when “rioters” began to use the service to coordinate amongst themselves; Egypt intermittently slows internet connectivity in times of tension and crisis to avoid mass demonstrations. Consider the United States' response to Ferguson for an example closer to home (*those countries are different, right?*). The National Guard was summoned, riot gear was heavily implemented, a state of emergency was enforced, and curfews were mandated. The aforementioned measures are expected when taking into account the

consistency with how mass protests are handled.

Currently, the United States is faced with another crisis: Standing Rock. The Standing Rock Sioux Indian Reservation has been threatened by the Dakota Access Pipeline, which would cross over into land considered sacred by the affected tribe. The initial lack of American media coverage had been alarming, and thus the hashtag #NoDAPL is now viral on Twitter and Facebook, with Hollywood actors such as Shailene Woodley taking part in protests against the pipeline in hopes of snowballing exposure. County law enforcement has used “flash grenades, high-pressure water cannons in freezing temperatures, and dog kennels for temporary human jails” according to David Archambault II, chairman of the Standing Sioux Tribe in an interview with BBC News (Northcott). Construction of the pipeline is nearly complete, yet has been halted surrounding Standing Rock. The US Army Corps of Engineers issued a statement mandating that the tribe (and protestors) be evacuated from the area by December 5, 2016 in order to proceed. The fact that construction has paused serves as partial success of the movement, or at least as some sign of progress. Protesters have taken to Twitter and Facebook, prevalently using the Facebook Live feature to showcase how conditions stand with winter descending upon the reservation. North Dakota Governor Jack Dalrymple is faced with the issue of how to handle the evolving situation.

Not unrelated, in Aleppo, Syria, a seven-year-old girl named Bana and her mother update their verified Twitter account periodically in an attempt to remind Westerners of the horrors transpiring in Syria. To not let them and their loved ones be forgotten, with videos and images ranging from Bana hiding under her bed when bombs start dropping, to a severed child's arm after the dust has settled. The page has attracted the likes of J.K. Rowling (Bana is apparently a big Harry Potter fan), but I wouldn't quite call it a “movement,” nor consider it successful when taking into account the fact that the mother and daughter are still stuck in Syria, narrowly out of death's reach on an everyday basis. The two are sent death threats and intentionally targeted by the Syrian army due to their social media standing. People may donate and retweet endlessly, but what good is it if the conditions stay the same (read: war/airstrikes continue), and the two have not been rescued?

Let's return to 2012, the year of Trayvon Martin and Andrew Zimmerman and thousands of Americans tuning in to watch the trial. When Zimmerman was found to be not guilty by a grand jury, three queer women were compelled to create and tweet #BlackLivesMatter in response to the absence of a conviction. Briefly consider that anyone can potentially start a movement so long as they 1) have access to the internet, and 2) have an email address. On the official Black Lives Matter website (<http://blacklivesmatter.com>), the movement is described as “an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise.” #BlackLivesMatter has since evolved beyond a digital hashtag, inspiring the Hands Up, Don't Shoot movement, demanding international attention, and ironically appearing in an episode of *Law & Order: SVU*, a fictitious show dedicated to exactly what the movement stands for and desires: justice. More than four years later, the movement is still alive and well. Whether that serves as a sign of lack of impact, or lasting impact, I do not attempt to answer.

Existing Criticism

Critics (qtd. in Obar, et al.) suggest that activism, which takes place on social media platforms, is little more than “slacktivism” or “clicktivism,” encouraging “weak ties” without any actual obligation or intention to take part in movements. In other words, social media may be able to collect millions of Facebook “likes,” yet fail to mobilize a thousand people in the street to actually inflict change. I could give myself as evidence for the latter: While I stand firm in my belief that black lives do matter and regularly share Black Lives Matter generated material, I do not turn out for protests, nor do I call my local representatives when given the chance.

Others argue that e-activism, in turn, harms sociopolitical movements. Morozov (qtd. in Obar, et al.) begs the question of whether the evolving online landscape instead limits democratic possibilities with too much excitement or even apathy and too little direction. Being reminded of

the fact that younger generations tend to skew more towards the Left and are laden with social media usage, it is not unreasonable to picture thousands of fourteen to seventeen-year-olds pledging their support online with no means of enacting social change (i.e., unable to vote in meaningful elections, may not have jobs with enough income to be able to donate, parental limitations on going out and protesting, social stigma among peers for being outspoken at a sensitive age). I believe such criticism stems from the idea that activism is useless if nothing changes. However, I disagree with the claim that social media is a negative factor in contemporary movements. All exposure, in my opinion, is good exposure. A grassroots movement can gain traction much easier now than it could have before the internet employing social media. It is better to have a million people who are aware of and empathize with a sociopolitical issue (who may not go out in the streets and protest) than a million individuals left unaware.

Black Lives Matter has revitalized the contemporary civil rights movement, but it still faces the issue of individuals going to extremes in the name of the movement. Five fallen officers in Dallas represent the crude reality that initial good intentions can easily become misconstrued with an individual's twisted misinterpretation of what Black Lives Matter stands for. It is important to recognize that the extreme actions of a few do not represent any body as a whole.

Furthermore, giving credit to a movement in an attempt to potentially excuse one's own violent actions does not translate into the movement authorizing such actions. Similarly, those with no tangible connection to the movement often go on looting sprees when civil unrest and protests are present in at-risk cities.

Purpose

The success of online activism has been attributed to its "leaderless, horizontal structure," of which encourages "diffused popular participation" (Penney and Dadas 76). However, focusing on

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how sociopolitical movements utilize social media does not delve deep enough. It has been done in the case of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, Michelle Obama's Bring Back Our Girls (#BringBackOurGirls) campaign, as well as the Occupy Wall Street (#OccupyWallStreet) movement. As an ongoing movement, Black Lives Matter is certainly worthy of ongoing academic examination. It remains unclear how the dialogue regarding the contemporary civil rights movement has evolved in light of the mingling of Black Lives Matter and the general public. Are people in "disparate locations" (Penney and Dadas 76) really as aware as the broader media makes it seem? Is the discourse any different than it was pre-2012?

Furthermore, would the success of e-movements be best defined in terms of effectiveness (e.g., indictments of officers who have mortally wounded unarmed black folk) or awareness?

The purpose of this study is to analyze how millennials experience the Black Lives Matter movement, and how social media itself contends as a key player in the movement. Essentially, how does it alter existing rhetoric? Are older generations disproportionately affected by the evolving rhetoric? Do younger generations experience and recognize anti-Black bigotry uniquely due to their concentrated use of social media?

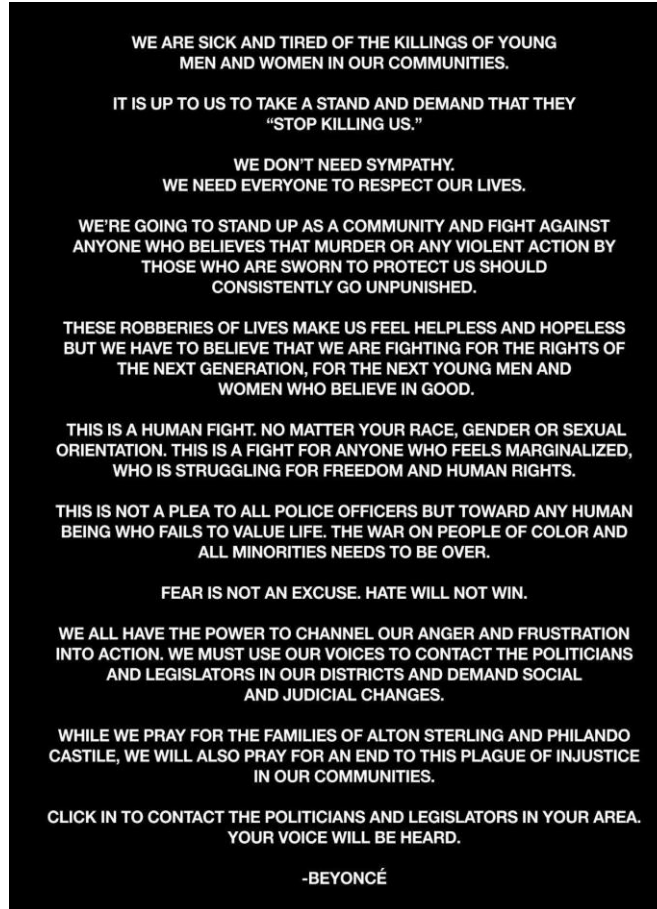


Image from <http://www.beyonce.com/freedom/>

Prior to receiving the results of my research, I assumed that people were, to put it plainly, overwhelmingly aware of the Black Lives Matter movement. Not only that, but I thought the general public was more sympathetic towards the Black experience as separate from their own. Perhaps these assumptions can be attributed to my own inundation with the e-movement as well as endorsements from major public figures such as Hillary Clinton and Beyoncé.

Method

Participants

I focused on 33 survey responses from random students at the University of Central Florida. The University of Central Florida is one of the largest public universities in the United States, attended by over 60,000 students. Its setting is suburban, located on the cusp of Orlando and Oviedo, Florida. With its large number of students, the UCF population is a diverse one. The student body breaks down into 54% Caucasian, 24% Hispanic/Latino, and 11% African American. More than half of the university's students are female. Given such variances among backgrounds, each student has a unique experience using social media, assuming that they use it at all.

I dispersed the survey hosted on Typeform.com, an online survey website, via two previous professors of mine: Dr. Jennifer Taylor in the Writing and Rhetoric department of UCF, and Dr. Jeanine Viau in the Philosophy department. Both professors sent out the link to my survey in an email as an optional task for their Fall 2016 students to complete.

The Survey

The survey was comprised of 25 questions, beginning with a consent agreement. Participants had to consent to their responses potentially being directly quoted, used for research purposes, and compiled into a catalog of data. Questions assessing the background of the individual followed. These included questions about age, ethnicity, and the type of setting in which the respondent grew up. The survey then delved into which social media platforms the respondent has an account with (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube, Tumblr, or a specified Other), and how often they use it ranging from 0 (I don't use) to 5 (at least 3-4 times per day). Participants were then asked how they would best describe their purposes for using social media.

To evaluate each participant's unique experience with Black Lives Matter, individuals were first asked if they were aware of the movement. They were then given the chance to respond to open-ended questions regarding where they first heard about the Black Lives Matter movement, how they felt about the movement, and whether or not they believed social media has any influence over major news networks and why.

The open-ended responses were evaluated through thematic analysis, while other more definitive questions were evaluated using statistical analysis. I further analyzed the catalog of data as a whole to search for correlating themes, contradictions, and meaningful insights generated by participants.

Results

All 33 participants received the same set of survey questions. The following is a quantitative analysis on 19 definitive-ended questions.

Participant Background Information

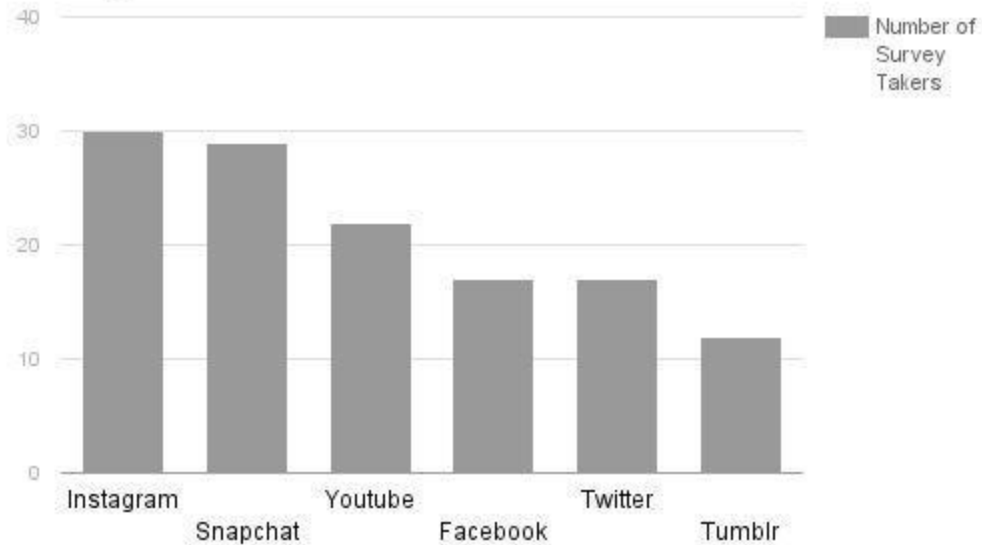
Of the 33 participants, 24 were Caucasian. This comes as no surprise considering the University of Central Florida is already 54% Caucasian. Only 1 participant identified as Hispanic/Latino, while 4 individuals were Asian or Pacific Islander. The singled out Hispanic/Latino respondent came as a surprise when considering Florida, and particularly Orlando, has a high population ratio of Hispanic/Latino individuals. A single participant identified as Native American/Indian. None of the 33 respondents counted themselves as African American, and 3 individuals chose "Other," but did not elaborate. The predominant age represented were individuals 18-20 (94% of respondents).

The question following one's ethnicity asked about which setting the individual grew up in. Four participants classified the setting of their upbringing as "Rural," while 5 considered theirs to be "City." Twenty-four respondents grew up in a "Suburban" setting.

Social Media Usage

Every single respondent had an account with at least one social media platform; 96% had accounts with at least two of the platforms.

Which of the following social media platforms do you have an account with?



Instagram was the most popular platform with 92% of participants having an account; Snapchat came in a close second at 88%. Facebook and Twitter were tied with 52% of participants having an account, while YouTube trumped the former with 67% of users having an account. Tumblr was the least popular social media platform to have an account with; only 36% of respondents admitted to having an account.

When asked how often the respondent uses Facebook on a scale of 0 (I don't use Facebook) to 5 (at least 3-4 times per day), the average came out to 1.27. Fifteen (45%) of the participants ranked their usage as 0, not using Facebook at all, despite the fact that 52% of participants said they do have an account with Facebook. Only 2 (6%) respondents claimed to use Facebook at least 3-4 times per day; in fact, only 15% of respondents even ranked their usage above a 3. While 0 (I don't use Facebook) was the most popular response, the second most popular was a 2 at 27% of respondents. It is important to note Facebook's Facebook Live feature, enabling users to live stream real life as it occurs. Not only that, but Facebook allows users to coordinate and create pages as well as communicate with other users.

When it came to Twitter, responses were on polar ends. Participants mostly ranked their usage as 0 (I don't use Twitter), or 5 (at least 3-4 times per day). Not using Twitter came in at 48%, while using Twitter at least 3-4 times per day ended up at 27%. Nine percent of users ranked their usage as a 4, putting higher usage as a whole at 36%. Fifteen percent of respondents ranked their usage at 1-3. Twitter features a "Trending" page, allowing users to keep up with what is being talked about the most around the world. Additionally, retweeting posts causes the post to show up on the timeline of every user who follows you.

Instagram, the most popular social media platform to have an account with, averaged out at 4.03, close to using it at least 3-4 times per day. Fifty-eight percent of respondents ranked themselves at a level 5 (at least 3-4 times per day); only 6% claimed 0 (I don't use Instagram). Thirty percent were either ranked as a 3 or a 4, still, on the higher end of usage. Most notably, Instagram is used to connect with family and friends as well as brands or bands, although it does feature the "Explore" tab which showcases popular content based on the images or videos that the

user has interacted with.

Considering Tumblr was the least popular social media platform to have an account with, it comes as no surprise for 64% of respondents to rank their usage as 0 (I don't use Tumblr).

The average came out to 1.06. Again, it was a bit polarized on the response spectrum: 12% used Tumblr at least 3-4 times per day, while only one or two respondents ranked themselves from 2-4. Participants either used it often, or not at all, which is understandable considering that it's not the type of platform used to connect with friends or family. Tumblr, similar to Twitter and Facebook in limited ways, also has an "Explore" tab showing posts and hashtags that have gained popularity. The platform also enables users to search hashtags or keywords and filter through which type of media they are seeking, whether it be photos, videos, posted most recently, or most popular.

YouTube usage was spread out along the 0-5 ranking system. Only 12% claimed not to use YouTube at all. The most popular answer was the happy medium, a 3, at 30%. Eighteen percent claimed to use YouTube at least 3-4 times per day. Overall, 57% of respondents used YouTube from 3-5, on the higher end of usage. YouTube follows trends with a "Trending" tab, featuring videos that have received the most views in the last 24 hours.

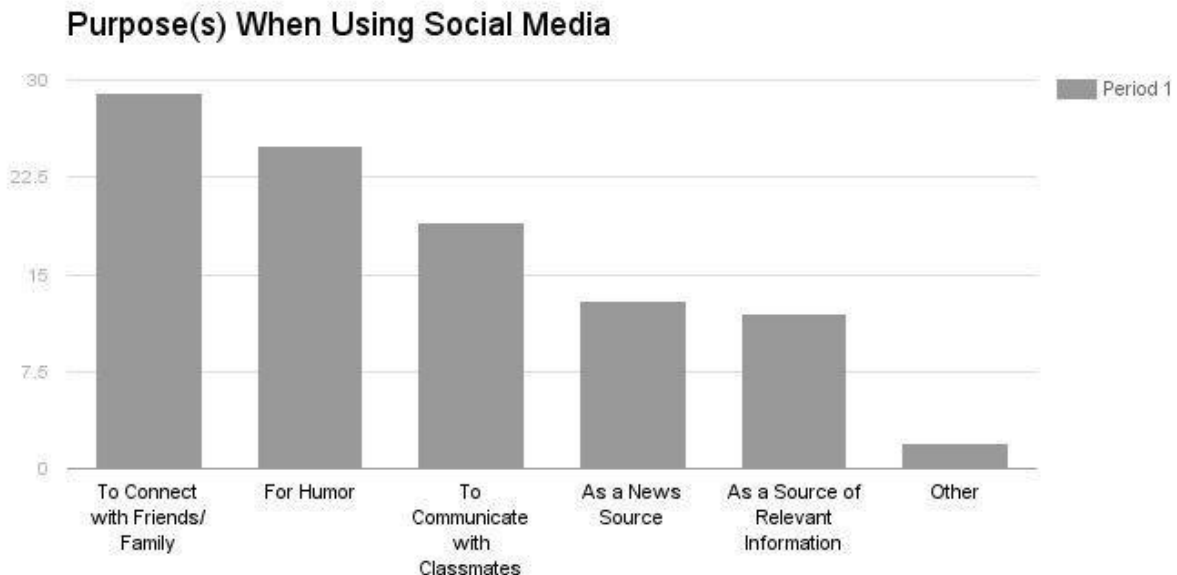
The majority (76%) of respondents who use Snapchat used it at least 3-4 times per day. Responses averaged out at 4.12. Only four respondents (12%) did not use Snapchat at all. Snapchat, as with every other social media platform, has some form of an "Explore" tab, showing live clips of different events all over the world. Most recently, Snapchat detailed the entire election process of this year. The platform also allows both smaller and major news networks and publications to compile a short number of articles everyday, some with an inherently political tone.

The question following the set of questions regarding usage asked if respondents used any other social media platform not previously listed. The answers generated included "phhphoto," "Vine, Musically," "Pinterest," "Instagram twitter," and "N/A."

Purpose(s) When Using Social Media

The question of how the respondent best describes their purpose(s) when using social media allowed the individual to choose as many answers as they deemed fitting. Connecting with friends/family was the most popular answer with 88% of users, while "As a source of relevant information (e.g., if classes are canceled)" came in last with only 36% of users; similarly, "As a news source" was only three points off from "As a source of relevant information" at 39%. Second to connecting with friends/family was using social media for humor purposes at 76%.

Communicating with classmates landed somewhere in the middle at 58%.



The “Other” option was open-ended. Respondents were still required to write in a response. The answers given were: “friends,” and “talking to others,” which I interpret to appropriately fit under the umbrella of “To communicate with classmates.”

Black Lives Matter

When asked if participants were aware of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, 94% answered “Yes.” Six percent (2 respondents) answered “No.”

The question following inquired as to how the individual had first heard of the movement. It was open ended—participants had to respond in their own words. The following is a table detailing each response as it was originally typed.

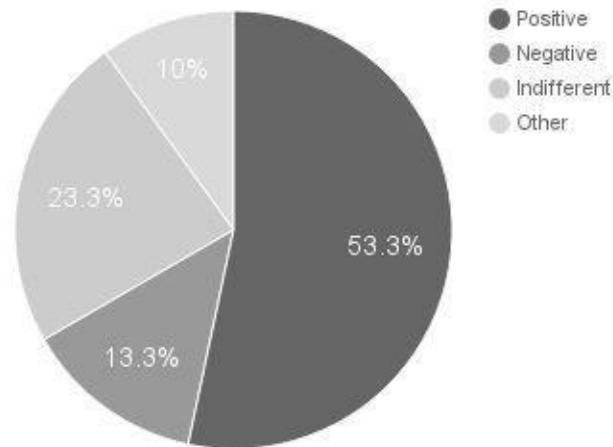
On Twitter	Social Media and my sister
Reddit	People at school
Instagram	Many celebrities and other people were using the hashtag
Instagram	Social media (Twitter/Instagram)
yesterday	The news and in headlines online.
News	news
social media	instagram
The news.	Tv news
Social media	Internet
News	The news
Twitter	Tumblr
Twitter	The news
Social media	In history class
Throughout news sources	Twitter
Instagram	Twitter

Only three persons mentioned physical human interaction: “Social Media and my sister,” “People at school,” and “In history class.” Social media was brought up in 17 of the 30 responses; the news was the core of 9 of the 30 responses.

Seventy-six percent answered “No” to the question of whether or not the participant has ever shared a #BlackLivesMatter post. Unsurprisingly, then, 91% answered in the negative when asked if they had ever participated in a civil rights protest they had heard about on social media.

When asked how the individual initially felt about the Black Lives Matter movement, the majority said “Positive,” although the second most popular answer was “Indifferent.” Only a small percentage (13.3%) viewed the Black Lives Matter movement in a negative light from the beginning.

What was your initial take on the Black Lives Matter movement?



This question also offered “Other” as an open-ended option. Only three participants chose this option, and their answers were as follows: “neutral,” “Neutral,” and “Controversial. Two sides and some not so good things coming of the protest.” The first two neutral answers could essentially assimilate into the “Indifferent” answer, but the unique “Controversial” answer deserves its own spotlight.

The question following the participant's’ initial take on the Black Lives Matter movement inquired about their current opinion. It was implied that this would require a more detailed response. See Appendix A for each respondent’s individual thoughts on the matter, presented in their original form with typos and inconsistencies.

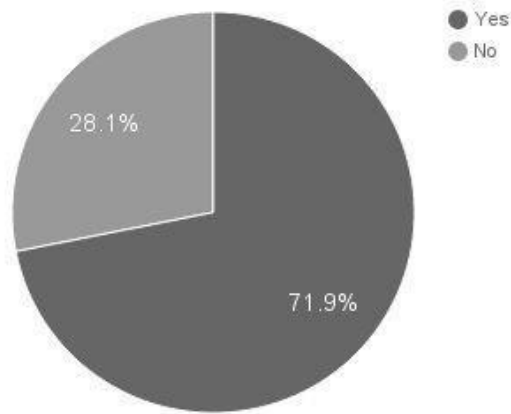
Anti-Black Bigotry and Exposure

The following set of questions touched on the topic of society and anti-Black bigotry in a broader sense, rather than specifying the Black Lives Matter movement.

On the topic of how society perceives anti-Black bigotry, 55% claimed “indifferent,” while only 39% believed society viewed anti-Black bigotry as negative or “bad”; 9% thought society viewed anti-Black bigotry positively. Again, there was an “Other” option with the following responses: “I don’t know what this means,” “Society as a whole acts as if racism is nonexistent besides those who experience it,” and “Some people are positive, others are negative.”

Next, the survey then asked if the participant felt that social media opened their eyes to what counts as anti-Black bigotry. I gave the example of recognizing what actions and/or words are generally considered unacceptable.

Do you feel that social media has opened your eyes to what counts as anti-black bigotry? For example, what actions and/or words are unacceptable.



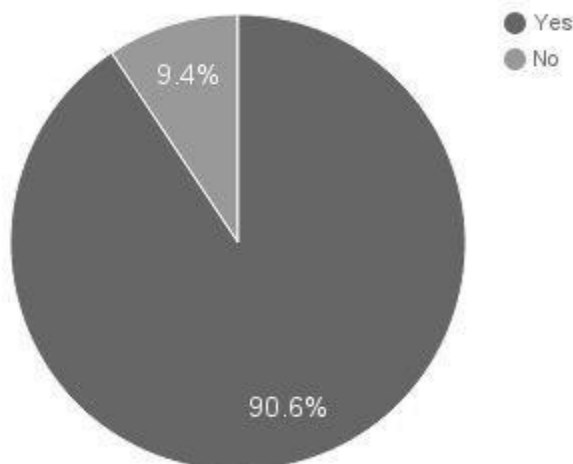
Nearly 72% of participants believed that social media has made them more attuned to what is considered anti-Black bigotry. I define this as what words/sayings/phrases are racial slurs or racist in flavor, as well as what symbols are inherently and/or historically racist.

Another question asked respondents if they agreed with the statement “this is not your parents’ civil rights movement,” taken from an article on HelloBeautiful.com and inspired by the “Not Your Momma’s Movement” slogan adopted by several Black Lives Matter supporters (Biakolo). Roughly 73% of respondents answered affirmatively—27% disagreed.

Additionally, participants were asked if they believe that social media facilitates actual social change. I provided the example of viral hashtags contributing to lawmakers putting into effect new policies. Seventy-nine percent said, “Yes,” while 21% answered “No.”

When asked if participants believed that social media has an influence over major news networks, an overwhelming number of participants (91%) agreed and felt that social media did, in fact, have an impact, while only 9% disagreed and felt otherwise.

Do you believe that social media has an influence over major news networks, especially in the case of the contemporary civil rights movement?



Following the question regarding social media and major news networks, participants were given the chance to elaborate on their answer with an open-ended text box. See Appendix B for each of the responses in no particular order, again presented in their original form with typos and inconsistencies.

Qualitative Analysis

In the following section, I will categorize the open-ended data into two sections: consistencies, or which parts of the supplied data agree with answers previously given, and inconsistencies, which could be considered contradictions when compared to other responses. I will cross-analyze the open-ended catalog of data to the definitive-ended data in order to draw conclusions and overall interpret the entire corpus.

Consistencies

The social media platforms given in response to where participants had first heard of the movement corresponded with which social media platforms received more high rankings (5, meaning the platform is used at least 3-4 times per day) on usage: Twitter and Instagram. This makes sense: the more time the individual spends on each platform, the more likely they are to be exposed to a Black Lives Matter post. Notably, no one mentioned Snapchat as how they first heard of the movement, despite the fact that the platform received the most 5 rankings in response to the usage question.

Moreover, respondents submitted “the news” as an answer to how individuals first heard of the Black Lives Matter movement in 9 of the 30 responses (the other most popular answer was social media, entailing 17 of the 30 responses). This correlates to 91% of respondents believing social media has an influence over major news networks when taking into consideration how the Black Lives Matter movement began as a grassroots movement on social media platforms. Thus, the news must follow trends and take cues from what rhetoric is evolving on social media outlets; otherwise, the 9 participants would not have heard about the movement from the news at all.

Another positive correlation made itself glaringly present in how 94% of participants were aware of Black Lives Matter, and 17 of 30 responses to the question asking how the individual had first heard of the movement mentioned social media. Again, social media has aided in spreading the Black Lives Matter message; so much so that 24% of respondents had also shared a #BlackLivesMatter post. The cycle continues: a person is aware of the movement thanks to social media, retweets or shares or posts their own content regarding the movement, and in turn the post shows up on every one of their follower’s timelines. From there, perhaps the post makes a lasting impression on one of their followers, and that follower then shares the post.

Seventy-nine percent of participants trusted that social media enacted tangible social change, an idea also present in how 72% of respondents felt that social media had opened their eyes as to what is relegated as anti-Black bigotry. From this, I gather that social media is changing what has come to be known as “common sense”: what is acceptable or unacceptable in our ever-evolving global landscape.

The word “peaceful” appeared twice in responses related to the question regarding how the participant feels about the Black Lives Matter movement: “It’s good for people to stick up for what they believe in. Just keep it peaceful,” and, “People have a right to protest what they believe in as long as the protest is peaceful.” The two separate responses essentially say the same thing: people have the right to protest, and it is generally a good thing, so long as the protests are kept peaceful. Each response leaves the aftertaste of hesitancy, somewhat nodding to the fact that some Black Lives Matter protests have turned violent due to the deplorable actions of a few who do not stand for the entire movement. Related to the elephant in the room of the Black Lives Matter movement (violence), one respondent concludes that “[they feel] it necessary [sic] but misunderstood because

of social stigmas.” Another contends that “the movement is necessary, but it can be taken into unnecessary proportions,” while someone else argues that “[they] like the idea of the movement [sic] however I think it lacks direction and a vocal minority gives it a bad rep at times.” Most alarming is the following response: “I think it’s a good cause but they have taken it too far,” which is overall confused in nature, claiming that Black Lives Matter is “good,” yet has somehow been taken too far. The respondent did not elaborate on what they meant by “taken too far.”

In conjunction with the latter, a few voiced their discontent with the Black Lives Matter movement. Two responses expressed negative feelings towards the movement: “All lives matter, spend your time doing more productive things for the world,” and “It’s dividing out [sic] country and is funded by someone who wishes negativity for us.” Neither response gave alternatives or explanations as to what might be some more productive things to take part in, much less who exactly is funding the movement and how they wish negativity for “us.”

Most participants (26 out of 30) also stuck with how they initially felt about Black Lives Matter when asked about how they currently felt about the movement. Those who were indifferent continued to be indifferent (although, to quote Desmond Tutu, “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor”), those who initially had a positive reaction continues on the path of positivity, and the few who did view the movement in a negative light stuck to their guns.

Inconsistencies

Although how social media enacts actual social change and is redefining common sense was mentioned in the previous section, the results stemming from the question of how society perceives anti-Black bigotry were not explained. Fifty-five percent of respondents considered society as indifferent towards anti-Black bigotry (i.e., turning the other way), while 9% believed society viewed it as something positive. How can it be that social change is evolving and social media is infectious with redefining common sense when society as a whole still acts indifferently towards anti-Black bigotry? One open-ended “Other” answer to the question even went on to say that “society as a whole acts as if racism is nonexistent besides those who experience it.” Going back and taking a closer look at this same participant, they did indeed feel that social media opened their eyes to what counts as anti-Black bigotry.

Discussion

There are hundreds of opportunities to interact with the Black Lives Matter movement every day, and such expansive opportunities lead one to ask: how is social media altering the rhetoric of the contemporary civil rights movement? With each passing day, it seems as though there is another posthumous name plastered on every news headline, another video gone viral of a rogue officer gunning down an unarmed Black man. Months later, the names gradually veer out of the public eye and later rekindle once an indictment (or lack thereof) trickles down.

The animation bubbling over from social media is hard to miss and the news is everywhere: one can pick up the latest copy of *The New York Times* at one’s local Starbucks, receive news alerts on any given smartphone, or simply turn on the television regardless of whether or not one subscribes to cable. Most millennials do not go a day without checking at least one of their social media accounts. So, how is the rhetoric of the contemporary civil rights movement reaching people, and what impression is it making? If Black Lives Matter is making meaningful impressions, does BLM then also segue into redefining common sense? Can Black Lives Matter be deemed successful in terms of awareness or tangible social change?

The findings of this study suggest that Black Lives Matter, for the most part, has made a positive impression. The majority of participants found the movement to be positive, and spoke of it in high regard, as this sample indicates: “I think that the movement is a very important thing for our

nation to recognize. With many African Americans being discriminated upon on the daily, society has to realize that despite what we think we aren't giving them the equal treatment that they deserve when it comes to law enforcement, etc.”

It is my judgment that the success of Black Lives Matter is best defined in terms of spreading awareness rather than delivering palpable social change (such as overturned rulings or indictments), despite how 79% of participants believed in social media's power to enact social change. The protests backed by Black Lives Matter have turnout numbers in the thousands; therefore, it is difficult not to pay attention to the movement, especially when it is commonplace for celebrities and major public figures to reference BLM. One response to how a participant had first heard of the Black Lives Matter movement even admitted that their exposure was due to “many celebrities . . . using the hashtag.”

It is also worth recognizing that 55% of participants still felt that society views anti-Black bigotry indifferently, essentially turning the other way, instead of speaking out about its prevalence in everyday life. However, it is apparent that this group of participants felt that this perhaps was changing in the 79% that did feel social media was a key player in enacting social change. In addition, 72% of participants felt that they, personally, had been exposed enough to Black Lives Matter and the message that it sends to actually have their eyes opened to what counts as anti-Black bigotry. While it may still feel that society is indifferent towards the plight of Black lives, the feeling is evolving. People are paying attention, and as mentioned, how can they not with the thousands of opportunities to come face to face with the Black Lives Matter mantra?

The success of Black Lives Matter lies in its ability to use social media as a tool to reach hundreds of thousands of people. Whether the individual's reaction to BLM sponsored content is positive or negative, it is still a reaction. It gets people to think about what is going on in the United States (and around the world) right now. Millennials, it seems, are the most affected by the movement, a trend I believe is due to the fact that they are the generation with the most skill in using social media. Regardless of whether or not they are mobilized, a lasting impression is enough to change what is thought of as common sense.

The qualitative analysis of the catalog of data also presents some concerns. For example, participants seem supportive until organized protests and supporters grow violent. Their support is contingent on the agreement that protests will remain peaceful, a side of the Black Lives Matter movement that is often overshadowed by the mainstream media's fear-mongering habits. Peaceful protests without police intervention either do not make the news, or looting with no relation to the protest is covered instead.

Additionally, some persons are simply unmotivated or fail to see how this movement affects them, or how their support could benefit the movement. This may be because 73% of participants were Caucasian, and thus it may be difficult to bridge the gap between their own experience and the experiences of those most vehement about the Black Lives Matter movement.

Recent events have placed social media under a fine microscope for its ability to influence and mobilize the general public. For example, an hour before the first draft of this article was written, the Dakota Access Pipeline was forced to find another route around Native American tribal land surrounding the area due to mass protests. Small and large-scale successes have profound

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effects on individuals who may not feel as though they have a voice by sharing a post stemming from a grassroots movement. However, with evidence that such small actions do in fact aid movements, perhaps the general public will take less of a bystander position and believe in the idea that their voice can be heard. It is my hope that this study offers some insight into how millennials experience social movements (read: particularly the Black Lives Matter movement), and how their thoughts are engaged and can evolve in light of such exposure. Change begins with small actions, a single conversation, then gradually grows larger and has a snowball effect.

In the words of this study's very own participants, the results of this study suggest that "civil rights [affect] everyone," and "when someone . . . points out the mistreatment of a certain group of people, especially if it's a celebrity, pertaining to mostly minority people, society begins to realize their flaw[s] and what needs to be fixed."

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Lauren Horde

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APPENDIX A: Survey Respondents' Current Opinion on Black Lives Matter

It's good for people to stick up for what they believe in. Just keep it peaceful.	I feel it's necessary but misunderstood because of social stigmas
I like the idea of the movement however I think it lacks direction and a vocal minority gives it a bad rep at times	Everyone is equal and it needs to be seen that way
I think we need to let go of segregation. I think with all the police shootings and all that, we need to unite as a country and move last segregation	I feel as society, government, etc is not equal between black people and white people, SO this campaign is very important to enlighten others
I think the movement is important and necessary, but it can be taken into unnecessary proportions (e.g. feminism. Some confuse the meaning and purpose of it)	I think that the movement is a very important thing for our nation to recognize. With many African Americans being discriminated upon on the daily, society has to realize that despite what we think we aren't giving them the equal treatment that they deserve when it comes to law enforcement, etc.
good	Mostly positive
I feel that ALL lives matter, however I understand the frustration coming from the black community. Racism is rampant in the United States and though this movement is meant to be positive, it is spurning a lot of resentment from people far removed from the plight of black people, especially young males.	i think that yes, black lives matter. I understand why they feel the need to rage on this matter, but i also feel that the purpose of "black lives matter" is for equality. in my opinion, all lives matter and it's not so equal if we single out only one race
i don't know much about it	Neutral
People have a right to protest what they believe in as long as the protest is peaceful.	It's dividing out country and is funded by someone who wishes negativity for us.
I think it is important to acknowledge and agree with it but I don't agree with any violence or things that have come from it (I agree with the message not the actions)	I don't have a strong opinion
I think it's a good cause but they have taken it too far	I don't partake in movements and I'm not stopping anyone for expressing their opinions or feelings
Good	Positive
I feel it is a great cause.	All lives matter, spend your time doing more productive things for the world
It's important	Neutral
It needs to be heard more	It's ok
Positive	I think it's important

APPENDIX B: Survey Respondents' Views on Social Media

people are constantly influenced by movements and trends on social media that it would be inevitable to gather supporters of change and reform using social media as a platform	I think it reaches so many people that social media will inspire some even if others ignore it
If something is starting to get people involved then some news networks will talk about it	I think civil rights affects everyone. Your parent may teach you one thing but your own person you decide what happens in the future
Social media helps to bring about information	Yes, as it is a place to voice your opinion and share information you perceive to be of value.
Woo	no
No	News outlets follow trending
we over exaggerate things	Social media definitely has an impact on what's broadcaster on video and digital media. When someone with a view that points out the mistreatment of a certain group of people, especially if it's a celebrity, pertaining to mostly minority people, society begins to realize their flaw and what needs to be fixed.
social media does have an influence	Everything is about ratings today. Social media = attention and that equals ratings.
Social media is ver persuasive	Yes, people commonly discuss these issues over social media.
Yes because we see things on social media that the news doesn't want to broadcast	Yes because whether or not the influence is positive or negative it will spread and make news on TV and important, relevant channels and spread from irrelevant places like the social media news platforms on snapchat.
Everyone uses social media and it is a way to get ideas across easily and to rally together people with a common cause.	Its a major form of communication for alot of people
Social media hypes things up	Most people depend on social media for their information and plus social media helps spread the word everywhere
Twitter helps	When something gets huge on social media, the news will typically address it in some way.

Social media has such a big impact on the way people think and how people feel.	Social media is news at this point
If enough people do something, it tends to be noticed by someone	I said no
Due to how fast news travels through social media it gets quicker to people	Everything is shared on social media for people to see weather it is good or bad
If many people share an opinion on a topic, the news tends to listen.	People on social media can get different views on something and social media can be the reason people discover this movement