

# Effects of Social Movements and Politics Created by Young Adult Minorities Through Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram In America.

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## ABSTRACT

Social movements created on social media networks like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have created imprints on mainstream media. These platforms have created an environment that allows people to quickly find others that are interested in similar topics, politics, or come with similar backgrounds. This has given people hope that their voices will be heard and broadcasted to a mass audience. This literature review examines the research of social movements impact on mainstream media, concentrating on the movement “Black Lives Matter”. The research discovers that African Americans are the lead number of users for the social media platform Twitter, and that they use social media as a stage to let their voices be heard. I will conclude that African Americans choose to use social media to protest and create social movements, because of the sense of community with other users. Hopefully this review will inspire future research on how mainstream media will continue to use content from social media and minorities.

## CCS CONCEPTS

Networks~Social media networks • Networks~Mobile networks • Social and professional topics~Race and ethnicity • Social and professional topics~Men

## KEYWORDS

Black, Politics, Economics, Police Brutality, Education

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## 1. Introduction

Social Movements and trends created on social media have had a large impact on American culture. Social media users often discuss politics, news, racial injustices, and fun new trends. Social media users today have the power to start movements and let their voices be heard by thousands of people in real time. Well known hashtags

are used by a variety of people from different ethnic groups and economic backgrounds. Hashtags like #BlackGirlMagic, #BlackLivesMatter, and #OscarsSoWhite are changing the way people think, and are telling their own narrative with and without mainstream news. People are using slang that they were introduced to on social media like “Clout”, “Slayed”, and “Hot Girl Summer”. These well versed hashtags have mainstream popularity but were mostly created by minority social media users from Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.

This literature review will examine the participation of African Americans and other minority groups in America on social media, specifically Twitter and how these communities use social media to create social trends and movements. I will discuss participation in popular culture, politics, and social trends by African Americans, while examining the influence minorities have on American culture. It reviews how successful these communities have been telling their own narratives through social media contributing to news and American culture. In addition to discussing narratives, examining the progress African Americans have made regarding social and economic status originating from participation of the social networks: Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. All these topics will be discussed to understand that mainstream media content is largely impacting and inspired by African Americans social media presence.

## 2. Twitter & Communities

Social media have changed the ways of communication dramatically. People use social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter to connect with far away friends and family. Users share happy moments in their lives by uploading photos and videos to their accounts. Social media allows people to stay in engaged with others in many ways. Also, on social media people can join groups, like on Facebook, which are similar to communities people can voluntarily decide to be a part of because of their own interest and/or background. These interactions have been the producers of social movements.

To understand the dynamics of social media better, particularly Twitter, it means to understand the demographics of social media

and the users that make up the population. Murthy, Gross, and Pensavalle, (2015) studied these Twitter dynamics. They reported that African Americans were the highest Twitter users in America. They also found that the highest twitter users were likely to be teenagers and people in their 20s and 30s. The highest percentage of users within that group were in their 20s, which tweeted an average of every 12 hours. Regarding demographics, they reported the population of African Americans users within urban cities like Detroit and Atlanta, were high, compared to predominantly white populated areas. There are many other scholars who have found similar research including Olteanu, Weber, & Gatica-Perez, (2016) who conducted a experiment and in result found a high percentage of African American use on Twitter. Therefore, young adult African American residents in large urban cities participate the most in social media platforms.

Murthy, (2018) also examines how social media activist use Twitter to coordinate, protest, and facilitate movements. Twitter produces a sense of community, which makes Twitter more valuable and useful to its users. Murthy begins the research by expounding the power and dominance Twitter has in making communication between people, who might be far in distance, possible. Hence, making it even more possible for the creations of social movements. Another one of Murthy findings was that women used social media more than men. Women were more involved in social media movements than men and had large roles in social movements. Murthy found that many activists gave Twitter credit for giving them a chance to let their voices be heard. Activist appreciate how Twitter helps them manages relationships and events.

People are drawn to social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook for a variety of reasons. Lee-Won, White, & Potocki, (2018), aimed to understand why people use social media and what exactly keeps them using it for years and years. They stated that people who deal with stress usually deal with in two ways. The first way is that they deal with it as emotion focused, meaning that the actions are reduce by behavior changes. Secondly, they might deal with stress by problem focused coping, meaning that they use actions to solve the problem. Lee-Won et al., (2018) found that African Americans used social media to deal with the stress given to them in America, including discrimination. They hypothesized that African Americans used social media to deal with their stress by expressing and coping their discriminatory experience in America. Lee-Won et al., (2018), surveyed 323 African Americans Twitter users, in addition to their other research, and resulted in a conclusion that African Americans identify with one another through Twitter to make essential development to their lives for themselves and their communities.

Various communities can be drawn to social media like individuals. Many different communities have different issues that they hold dearly along with different cultural priorities for themselves and their families. Minorities specifically, have clearly expressed what issues are most important to them. Lei (2018), examines the views of social media and other minority groups in America. In this article, Lei inspects slacktivism towards social media, and all the negative and positive effects social media has on minorities. Lei, (2018), finds that African Americans use social media more than Whites and Latinos and proposes that minorities like social media

because it allows them to be politically engaged with other people, who might have similar political views as themselves. This is the reason why so many African Americans join social movements, through social media including the movements like “Black Lives Matter”, which was used as a hashtag more than 500,000 times on Twitter.

### 3. Social Protest & Black Lives Matter

Social media is powerful. Social media has been used to organize movements. Social media has produced protest that flooded thousands of people on the streets of various cities in America. Movements started on social media have made themselves so large that mainstream media outlets have picked them as news headlines. Hashtags have made their way to every home in America through television, radio, and print. Minorities who might have felt like their voices were silent, now can use social media to communicate to thousands of people. Minority communities use the power of social media to promote their social, educational, political, and economic wellbeing.

Bonilla and Rosa, (2015), discuss how vital and powerful social media plays in documenting protest, and violent breakouts of police brutality within minority neighborhoods. The study closely examines the Michael Brown case, which happened Saturday, August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014. At 12:03pm, the unarmed 18-year-old teenager was fatally shot by a police officer in front of a convenience store. According to the authors of the study, someone around the crime scene tweeted a comment stating, “I just saw someone die”, and right after the tweet followed with a photograph of Brown’s dead body lying on the concrete. After the tweets, news quickly spread across Twitter and other social media platforms like Facebook. Shortly, thousands of protestors traveled to Ferguson to protest. News outlets quickly joined the streets to get coverage of the participation in demonstrations from the protestors.

Yarimar and Bonilla (2015), found that more than 3.6 million tweets concerning the death of the African American teenager, Michael Brown were commented on Twitter, the same week of the initial protest. They found hashtags concerning the shooting like #Ferguson, #HandsUpDontShoot, #NoAngel, and #IfTheyGunnedMeDown, which were used more than a million times across the internet to discuss and call attention to the unfair systematic treatment of African Americans. The authors stated that although traditional mainstream media like television, radio, and emails allowed users to participate in social movements many people would rather use Twitter because of the sense of temporality and immediate participation.

Barnard (2018), examines the role of social media from a journalistic standpoint and how new age journalism effect mainstream news. One of the main research that Barnard wanted to find out was the differences of how professional journalist and activist on social media report news. Barnard used a tweet analysis as a main method of research. Barnard analyzed tweets using #Ferguson. Barnard found that journalist tweets were considered more informative while activist tweets were more conversational with other users. Social media platforms like Twitter allow activists

to communicate with groups of people while maintaining a conversation that promotes their issues.

Along with the creation of social movements on social media like Black Lives Matter, there also came to be counterarguments like the movement All Lives Matter. Carney (2016) examined the counter-movement All Lives Matter and found that most people who were against the movement #BlackLivesMatter were actively involved with #AllLivesMatter. Carney (2016) found reported that half of the users and participants of #AllLivesMatter were middle aged white women. Carney also found that a high percentage of the movement #BlackLivesMatter were African American women. This connection ties into the findings of the report Murthy (2018), that women used social media more than men. Carney (2016), also found that African American youth are extremely involved in social movements. Although many participants do not argue back and forth with #AllLivesMatter but instead make it a mission to focus all the spotlight on their issues, what their mission is, and taking control of the narrative and discourse.

Plenty of scholars have done research on social movements hashtags most reports looked closely into the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag, because of its huge success making it on to mainstream media from social media. Ince, Rojas, & Davis, (2017) suggested that the first Black Lives Matter hashtag appeared after the death of Travon Martin, a young teenage boy, killed by George Zimmerman. According to the report, the movement "Black Lives Matter" was created to bring awareness to police brutality and address racial equality for America.

Ince, Rojas, and Davis, (2017), argued that hashtags allow the tracking of conversations and also filter out other unrelated content. Their method was to study 66,159 sampled tweets over a time period of 11 months from the date of Michael Brown's death. They found that the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag was mentioned in 660,000 of the tweets. They also found that before the arrest of the police officer that killed Michael Brown the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter appeared in 13 percent of tweets that regarded Ferguson. During the indictment of the police officer the hashtag was seen in 22 percent of the tweets recorded. The authors concluded that the hashtag was credited to the development of the social movement.

Ray, Brown, Fraistat, & Summers, (2017) examined the importance of hashtags, like Leach & Allen, (2017). Ray, Brown, Fraistat, & Summers, (2017) found that the two top hashtags used during the time frame when #BlackLivesMatter and #TCOT or Top Conservatives on Twitter. In the report they stated that both hashtags are a representation of collective identities. This characterized the theme of #BLM as justice, police brutality, and activism. The themes they used for #TCOT were justification of police brutality and patriotism.

Stewart, Arif, Nied, Spiro, & Starbird (2017) also examines the use of hashtags used by online communities, specially the "Black Lives Matter" Movement and how hashtags help protect information and continue the conversation going on Twitter and other digital medias. Stewart et al. (2017) believed that shared audiences on

Twitter played a large factor in whether people participated in online communities. Like Wilkins, Livingstone, and Levine (2019) argued that social movement activist use hashtags to promote the movements goal and defining issues. According to the text (Wilkins et al., 2019), by using these hashtags they are defending their control of the movement and continuing to voice their narrative. Yang (2016), states that the hashtag itself expresses protesting along with the encouragement to become more engaged in the movement by reading and retweeting content. Lastly, Yang (2016), found that the #BLM hashtag got intertwined with other hashtags with similar ideas, agendas, audiences, and #BlackTwitter.

Behind the tweets and hashtags, many scholars found it important to study the social psychology of the Black Lives Matter meme movement. In the report (Leach & Allen, 2017), the authors found that African Americans were more driven to become active in the "Black Lives Matter Movement" than other races, because they as a community had a connected experience with police brutality and racial profiling. With other minorities like the Latinos, they also have found themselves identifying with the BLM movement and have participated in protest because of their connected experience, according to the research article (Rickford, 2016).

There are many benefits of using social media. Mundt, Ross, & Burnett, (2018) believe that one of the greatest rewards of the use of social media for social movements is the access that users had to produce new activist and communities to grow. They concluded that the three main benefits of social movement being held on social media specifically Twitter, was that users received easier and quicker mobilization internally and externally. Users had more power because of the control they had of the narrative, and because of internal building within the movement and promoted organization, along with the relationships with other similar interest group.

So how has the Black Lives Matter movement and hashtag changed since it was created to today? Simon (2018) reviews how the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter changed America even five years after its peak of the movement. He reviews some Pew reports which have announced that more than half of African American social media users agree that social media is a great to start a movement and how social media allows people voices to be heard more effectively. Simon also acknowledges that African American and other minorities are extremely engaged in politics through social media. This might be a reason to why there is such a huge political presence on social media.

#### **4. Social Media Impact and Power**

Social media has allowed many people to communicate with others from far distances, promote their ideas, and advertise their small business. There has been so many recorded examples of how social media has changed people's lives and the norms for mainstream media. Carter Olson, (2016), states that social media conversations and movements led by activists through hashtag usage can promote news networks and mainstream media to cover news internationally although conversation usually last longer on social media.

Images are constantly shared on social media. People can upload, comment, and share pictures on their profiles, change their profile picture, and send funny videos that they found online to their friends. Casas & Williams (2019) reviewed the use of imagery in the movement #BlackLivesMatter. They argued that images provoke emotion from people on social media. When it comes to a movement or protest most people are encouraged to participate based on their emotions of the topic and regarding BLM it would be based on the movement of police brutality. Casas and Williams hypothesized that pictures of killings of African American used in the BLM movement might have created the emotion of fear for the African American community, which might have stirred up more participation in the movement calls for social justice.

Social media has left a presence on the politics culture in America. Freelon, McIlwain, & Clark, (2018) examined multiple hashtags concerning the BLM movement. They found evidence that BLM presence on social media resulted in the amount of coverage they received in the news. When compared to other social media movements BLM was clearly had more active participation. Park (2013) opinion leaders, persuasive people who could more and likely persuade others in real life (not digitally) have strong influence in persuading other twitter users to engage in political engagement as well. But with strong influence there is responsibility. Cisneros & Nakayama, (2015) argue in their research that Twitter created a space for racist and discriminatory ideas to be presented to a large mass audience in their analysis of social media, particularly Twitter media presence after the 2014 Miss America victory by Davuluris, a young Arab woman.

The phenomenon "Black Twitter" is important because it has drawn a community of people to it and created a network of cultural ideas, traditions, and business together. Lee, (2017) believes that "Black Twitter" gave African Americans a safe place to express their voice concerning the African American experience. She also explains how mainstream media affects a large impact on how African Americans are portrayed and believed to act. Sharma, (2013) the author also admits that Black Twitter produces a massive amount of what they call racialized hashtags. Some examples of hashtags the report includes is #ifsantawasblack, and #onlyinthegetto.

Williams, (2015) another scholar discusses how Black Twitter has created topics and trends that mainstream media has picked up including broadcast news and late-night talk shows. Williams speaks about how some black slogans or slangs created on social media are used as strategic advertising tools by different corporations. Williams uses the example of IHOP using the hashtags like "on fleek". According to Williams some companies are looking to add more African Americans to their companies advertising teams in order to gain more sales.

Williams (2015) also reviews some popular hashtags that started some controversy in America including the hashtag #OscarSoWhite, which highlighted the lack of representation in the 2015 Academy Awards. This issue was also highlighted in mainstream media. Williams argues that black content is being used and represented to create more ratings and sells but aren't as well represented in corporations.

Social media hasn't just offered a platform to activist and social movements, but to the sharing of traditions and urban culture. Many popular styles of slang are introduced on social media and are often picked up and used on mainstream media platforms. Images and videos have helped create an imagery to hashtags and memes and have proven to spark the emotions of many social media users. "Black Twitter" has given people a place to speak freely and share experiences with cultural similarities and allowed have a voice and speak up against racial inequality.

## 5. Conclusion

This literature review framed the research on social movements, focusing on the Black Lives Matter movement impact on mainstream media. I discussed many sources of research on the analysis of hashtags on Twitter. I reviewed how social movements and trends are created. The evidence suggests that African Americans choose to use social media to protest and create social movements for several reasons. One, on social media they feel like they have a voice that will be heard by their community and other people. Second, African Americans spend much time on social media, and because of that African Americans find that they feel a sense of community on social media including the #BlackTwitter. I predict that African American involvement in politics originating from social media will increase especially during the time of elections. Further research on how mainstream media will continue to use content from social media and minorities and the negative impacts they might have to research focusing on cultural appropriation, police brutality, political engagement.

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