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#blacklivesmatter: The Investigation Of Twitter As A Site Of Agency In Social Movements

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#BLACKLIVESMATTER: THE INVESTIGATION OF TWITTER AS A SITE

OF AGENCY IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my cohort members who became my support system and to my family who never let me forget the value of working hard.

#BLACKLIVESMATTER: THE INVESTIGATION OF TWITTER AS A SITE OF AGENCY IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

by

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ABSTRACT

As an extension of mediated communication practices, social media sites have continued to increase the complexities of understanding how they not only affect the real world, but how they continue to effect communication practices in general. Due to the fact that social media sites exist as a mass mediated platform with high amounts of interpersonal communication elements, social media has become an important object of research when understanding how they can provide voice and agency to those who exist outside of traditional media power structures. By observing events in Ferguson, Missouri and Baltimore, Maryland involving police and unarmed civilians, activists, journalists, and citizens alike took to Twitter to have their voices heard. As a result, the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter became an important topic of discussion on Twitter and eventually evolved into a social movement proper. During these important social events, the dialogue that took place on Twitter becomes an appropriate lens of study when seeking understanding on just how Twitter operates as a platform for the *other* voice, and how this manifests itself as agency.

 Keywords: Twitter, agency, voice, #BlackLivesMatter,

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Academia's Tussle with Social Media

Since the rise of social media sites across the internet, communication researchers have attempted to concretely understand how these sites affect users through the platforms that they provide. While perpetually complicating the ways in which researchers have attempted to understand the influence social media sites have on their users and to what extent, social media have increasingly become a vast area of interest in communication research. From attempting to understand how they impact identity representation (Brock, 2012; Ems, 2014; Florini, 2013; Sharma, 2013), to understanding how social media sites are used during social movements (Conover, Ferrara, Menczer & Flammini, 2013; Kessler, 2013; Frazier, 2013; Thigo, 2013; Trottier & Fuchs, 2015), and with recent endeavors in attempting to understand how race relations are played out via social media platforms (Cisneros & Nakayama, 2015; Behm-Morawitz & Ta, 2014), social media sites have had dramatic impacts on the understanding of how users not only engage with them, but how users operate and undertake certain performances through them as well. With social media sites existing as platforms that allow users to carry out functions and actions of their choosing while interacting with governmental and infrastructural tactics and control, social media have given users levels of creative control in ways that have yet to be understood. More specifically, although a current academic debate is still ongoing, it remains unclear and contested in how these platforms carry over, interact, intercept, and create influence from the internet and into the real world.

Operating across all cultural facets and through various demographics, understanding how social media sites effect the use of language, communication, and their users is important,

and must be considered through each area of communication research. This multifaceted research is important in piecing together the influence of social media because with the millions of users who engage with them on the internet, and with plenty of social media sites operating across various means of accessibility, social media sites not only extend the transmission view of communication by carrying messages from place to place (Carey, 1988), but also create research implications in understanding how they impact users individually, interpersonally, and socially. More specifically, the social media sites that operate across these platforms also create implications for understanding how the use of language effects and compounds the visual artifacts that users create while simultaneously operating as a rhetorical act through the purposeful endeavor of users posting to social media sites.

The act of using language and images created and posted with specific intent implicates the act of posting beyond a simple text through a specific context as something more than just the sharing of general information. As Ems (2014) noted, researchers who have been attempting to understand social media and social movements have viewed social media and social movements as separate entities where social media is either effective and/or useful, or where the social forces responsible for the social movement overlook the role of social media. However, as Ems argues, viewing these two modalities as separate in their discussions of social media and social change limits the kinds of questions that can be asked and ultimately effects the answers that are posited. In light of Ems' argument, it is not only important to view the technologies as artifacts that reveal motivations and actions of the people and the institutions using them, but it is also important to understand how these artifacts ultimately move beyond simple sharing to where they can operate with a purpose given in that moment, while also how inquiring about these artifacts allow for the discursive abilities and opportunities to come from the platforms to discuss

the social factors involved. In the context of a social movement, the ability and the opportunity to participate in the discussion of societal factors is important to understand the role of social media beyond pragmatic use or ineffectiveness.

Moreover, because the possibility exists for user created content and shared messages to surface out of the social media sites and into the mainstream media, messages and media content shared on these sites have far surpassed the unilateral, one-way messages that were once only extended by the traditional media outlets. The ability to share and reshare messages enables users to not only generate the message that they deem fit with a certain purpose, but also allows other users to add their own dialogue within a specific context. With social media sites operating in their own regulated ways while adhering to sanctioned censoring needs as determined by political power structures, social media and their users fluctuate between existing as a platform benefiting from the full context of free speech or operating under regulated acts of speech within the larger context of the state. Consequently, social media sites and their users create an opportunity to delve into understanding how the use of language and images within a specific act operates contingently on the user's capabilities to access their creative control. This creative control granted to users extends

an opportunity to understand how social media sites present users with the opportunity to not only create and craft their own messages, but to even juxtapose traditional media outlets in a meaningful way.

1.2 Social Media as Mass Communication

With this firm grip on communication activity, social media sites have effectively created dynamic and considerable changes on communication possibilities between users and the created communities' social media sites facilitate. Since becoming a focus of communication research

within the field, more recent research implications have discovered multi-faceted impacts on language (Eleta & Goldbeck, 2014; Kral, 2014; Novakovich & Cramer Long, 2013), identity (Jones, 1997; Brock, 2009; Evverett, 2008; Nakamura, 2008) and, more generally, media studies. Not only impacting mass-mediated communication, social media sites have created research implications that exist *through* a specific medium with the content created *because* of the existence of the medium. If considered through the lens of mass communication and media studies, as Skovsgaard & Van Dalen (2013) note, a lack of gatekeeping has potential effects on the validity of information that is created and shared as official. Conversely, however, this lack of formal gatekeeping allows users who benefit from a large virtual audience and cultural capital through the platform to create a discussion that challenges *what* gets said, by *whom*, and *how* it may or may not create contradictions to official media reports. As Ems (2014) notes, by questioning the distinctions between social forces and technological affordances, researchers can begin to "approach our inquiry of socio-technical phenomena by examining configurations of people and technologies as cultural artifacts" (p. 721). It is this opposing alternative mode of mass communication that operates as a platform for potential agency construction that facilitates the opportunity to provide a space for voice that would otherwise not exist for members of society who are traditionally left out of sociopolitical discussions through traditional media structures.

The potentiality for an alternative mode of mass communication through social media platforms is important to communication research because the platform created through social media sites exists similarly to that of channels in traditional media outlets. This avenue of communication in times of social movements is important to understand because it suggests that an avenue of social discussion now takes place online and has an effect on the traditional media

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structures. As Harlow and Harp (2011) note, the internet has had a role in the success of social movements by being a way to mobilize supporters both online and offline while having the ability of online activism to inspire offline action. However, as Arge (2002) argues, technological advances do not "create an entirely new political order" but instead push researchers to understand the role technology plays while understanding the social processes that surround the social situation being amplified by the technology (p. 315). Although simplifying the political and social processes playing out on social media sites can suggest a simplified outcome of determining a successful social movement, it is important to not only contemplate Arge's argument, but to also understand how participation in these dialogues through the creation of these messages on social media sites through creative control facilitates a chance to study a pressing issue into a larger discussion on social media.

Moreover, the users who create the cultural capital necessary through the online communities have proven to be crucial to the creation of dialogue that surrounds critical discussions from a standpoint that challenges traditional media narratives. The users who situate themselves as a channel have the potential to not only be supportive in dialogues about power structures, but in many instances, are the ones who jolt and lead conversations about the oppression produced by existing power structures. Furthermore, users' cultural capital also alludes to the power of community building while highlighting social circumstances that are important to those communities. This research attempts to extend theoretical concepts surrounding Twitter, social movements, and communicative practices that has become a hub for social and political discussions that are now covered on a daily basis but were first prominently discussed on Twitter. Furthermore, it is important to consider how the use of this social media site currently influences sociopolitical discussions while allowing the extension of the theoretical

concepts the opportunity to map out how these social media sites complicate and evolve within communication studies.

1.3 Twitter's Presence and Impact

Since the onset of Twitter, communication researchers have attempted to understand how Twitter creates research opportunities due to its rapid communication and mass information diffusion. With over 200 million users who share 140-character text messages over 400 million times each day (Tsukayama, 2013), Twitter's popularity and continual use across world events and sociocultural place takings, along with the real time propagation of information to large groups of users, has created and continually sustained an ideal environment for the dissemination of breaking news. It is this location of user generated news-like reporting, while maintaining creative control that situates communication theory and its extensions into the social media platform as the site of this study. Within the context of a social movement moving from online to offline, Twitter's popularity and news-like reporting capabilities through the architectural design provided through the site implicate the information diffusion as important through the language and images shared in a centralized location.

As noted by Ems (2014), theorists across multiple fields have either highlighted or downplayed the technological advances that are used during social movements and social displays of unrest in order to understand how Twitter changes the sociopolitical landscape at hand. However, also noted by Ems, emphasizing the social forces responsible for the unrest is important as well while attempting to understand the roles of new technologies is important because it creates the "fuzziness" between the technological and the real (p. 721). By elaborating on the fuzziness in which Ems notes, the apparatus that is Twitter becomes, as noted by Thigo (2013), a new space "available to civil society that offer[s]…new prospects for self-organization

for collective action by citizens to transform and engage power" while accounting for the social

forces that push collective activity to form (p. 257). Although the causes of social uprisings and

movements are complicated, multifaceted, and are the results of long term developments of

interactions between social forces, the language and images used and the artifacts created

through the postings made by users because of the creative control users have through this

platform produce a larger cultural artifact available for research. The resulting artifacts are

important to research because the language and images used by individuals create a way for

researchers to investigate the interactions between the social forces at play.

Twitter situated as an alternative mode of mass communication is important for this

research because it represents voice through an online mediated space in textual and visual form

that is not available to the mass population by other means. Although Twitter is comparable to

other social media sites like Facebook and tumblr, Twitter remains the point of interest in this

research because it provides the cultural validity necessary for extending mass communication

and rhetorical implications in communication theory because traditional media structures also

operate and use the platform to their advantage as well. By extracting the artifacts resulting from

Twitter, and by peering behind the pragmatic uses of Twitter during a social movement/social

unrest, it is possible to further delve into how Twitter facilitates a platform for voice for the other

and in the creation of agency. Twitter's hashtag (#) feature is important in this conceptualization

of agency and rhetorical use because it presents a centralized space for discussion within the

larger context of the technological possibilities. As Dugan and Reger (2006) note, "voice in

social movements is the consistency with which movement members collectively articulate a

unified sense of purpose and direction" and agency is "the group's sense of empowerment to

work towards achieving its goals" (p. 470). These concepts are applicable because the extraction

of certain hashtags and the creative control that come with those hashtags created by the users implicates the artifacts not only as cultural artifacts made available to understand the larger situation at hand, but also as communicative artifacts made available to understand communication theory.

With the ability to control and disseminate self-constructed messages, users of Twitter during a social movement or act, while considering the centralized location of discussion through the hashtag, members of the community who exist outside of the power structures present within the traditional media outlets have created and deployed mass media techniques of their own. Moreover, with certain Twitter users who carry enough social capital within the website with large numbers of followers, their own personal profiles become the centralized hub for discussion used by traditional media outlets as the voice of those within the community who do not exist within the official voices coming from a state recognized or an affiliated journalistic perspective. The operation of verification conducted by members of the traditional media outlets not only implicates and operationalizes Twitter as a site of platform for those in the community, but it also reinforces the notion of Twitter being a sight where cultural artifacts expose the voices of others outside of the traditional media narrative. Operating through this platform, with creative control perpetuated by users that is recognized by the traditional media outlets, Twitter not only grants perspective to people outside of the social movement, but it also creates shifts in the dialogue taking place.

1.4 #BlackLivesMatter: The Force of a Hashtag

As an online movement, the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter originated in February 2012 following the death of unarmed Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida. Martin, then 17 years old, was followed and then shot by volunteer neighborhood watch member George Zimmerman.

Zimmerman was ultimately found not guilty and acquitted of all charges in the case arguing that his actions were in self-defense. Although Zimmerman was found not guilty, individuals interested in the case argued that Zimmerman had no grounds to follow and enact any physical altercation with Martin and dialogue about the incident and ultimate verdict quickly appeared on social media sites, and ultimately traditional media outlets across the board. As noted by Aljazeera America on September 2, 2015, the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter first appeared on Facebook. In reaction to the acquittal of Zimmerman, community organizer Alicia Garza shared a post on Facebook stating, "Black people. I love you. I love us. Our Lives Matter." A friend of Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, shared Garza's post adding "#blacklivesmatter." As the first known appearance on social media, the hashtag did not gain the recognition it has now until a year later when 18 year old Michael Brown was shot and killed by Officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri. As a slogan of statement, the hashtag itself caught the attention of protestors in the streets and online and became a focal point of discussion about the events that took place.

On August 9, 2014, Michael Brown was allegedly shot by Officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri. Although judicial verdict found Officer Wilson not guilty, Ferguson, Missouri experienced demonstrators in the streets and eventual riots immediately after the shooting, during the judicial process, and after the judicial verdict, catching media attention across the United States. More recently, on the one year anniversary of the event, Ferguson experienced another wave of demonstrations, riots, and national media coverage. In part, the riots and national media coverage of the events of Ferguson, Missouri have made the city of Ferguson, and the events that took place, the poster city of the anti-police brutality movement that has gained traction in the United States. On April 12, 2015 in Baltimore, Maryland, a Black man named Freddie Gray was arrested when police believed he was carrying an illegal

switchblade. While in police custody, he was placed inside a police transport caddy wagon and fell into a coma and was taken into a trauma center. Gray eventually died on April 19, 2015 and the cause of death was ruled to be injuries to his spinal cord. Although the details of his death were initially unclear, an eyewitness video surfaced revealing that the officers involved in the arrest used unnecessary force. The subsequent medical examination found that Gray died due to the causes he sustained while being transported by police officers. Although the police officers involved were arrested and charged, the case of Freddie Gray, from the video that first surfaced to the indictment process, became part of the #BlackLivesMatter movement.

As the demonstrations in Ferguson, Missouri turned into an escalated situation involving police SWAT teams and clashes with demonstrators, the hashtag continued to evolve into a means of not only reiterating the events taking place, but also as means of highlighting new cases of police violence. Additionally, as the hashtag became increasingly apparent online and offline, the networking that grew took the name of the hashtag and evolved into chapters and what has been described as a "leaderless movement" headed by community leaders across the country ("Aljazeera," 2015). According to blacklivesmatter.com, the official #BlackLivesMatter Organization is "an online forum intended to build connections between Black people and our allies to fight anti-Black racism, to spark dialogue among Black people, and to facilitate the types of connections necessary to encourage social action and engagement" ("Blacklivesmatter," 2015). Founded by Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi, and Alicia Garza, the organization's website gives visitors the ability to find chapters closest to their area, donate to the movement's purpose, and various social media outreach links that give visitors the ability to connect to the movement's official affiliated social media websites, respectively. Furthermore, the organization's website not only allows visitors to connect, but it provides visitors with statistics

of Black experiences, and encourages visitors to participate in the cosigning of petitions for real world social changes. As a platform the organization's purpose, the organization's website, and its message, not only encompasses the notion of an organization promoted through community leaders across the country, but it provides a framework for the organization's ability to organize across physical spaces, while continuing the promotion of the organization through various social media outlets.

As instances of police violence against Black men began to make headline news across the United States, the hashtag become a rallying call for demonstrators and protestors as a means of centering attention towards the ever growing attention given to instances of police violence against Black men. As a location for dialogue revolving around the instances of police violence against Black males, the hashtag found itself not only as a statement of purpose online, but also as the evolution to an organization proper taking the same name. Through the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag, and its prevalence across social media websites, its appearance on Twitter became increasingly apparent as the court cases and judicial verdicts were handed out across the United States. Although the hashtag's use can be described as highlighting international affairs involving Black lives across geopolitical boundaries, the instances in which it was used to make specific references to the cases in the United States is the focus for this research. In 2014, through incidents of violence by police on Black men, the hashtag's visibility not only became an apparent news media headline, but received political attention in the first two presidential primary debates in 2015, while conservative broadcasting personalities petitioned to move the organization, and those affiliated with it, to be labeled as a domestic terrorist group.

1.5 Rationale

Initially, in order to properly situate a study on social media sites and the role that they

may play in the creation of agency, the cultural and social context must be highlighted and taken into consideration. Although operating as a potential case study for a much broader theoretical discussion, this research will investigate the importance of how a moment of social and cultural relevance discussed on social media highlights the language and images used to understand how it impacts the world outside the mediated communication. Within a given social moment, traditional media outlets establish ways of deciphering which tweets are regarded as having their own social significance. Furthermore, because the centralized location of dialogue taking place on Twitter is made possible through hashtags and key word searches, the ability to analyze these conversations happening in Twitter use is made much more obtainable and justifiable. It is the concentration of this language that enables researchers to comprehend how ideological criticisms of current power structures and the creation of the other voice is made possible through the platform that is Twitter.

Given that Twitter is now seamlessly intertwined with mainstream media outlets, identifying how Twitter operates within the media field has implications in academic discussions and dialogue. The discourse that operates on Twitter, and in many cases, that is used by the mainstream media to acquire other voices outside of the mainstream media's realm of broadcasting, has situated Twitter to hold social and cultural relevance as a platform for voice. Still contested however, as with most literature that focuses on computer mediated communication, are the notions of what posted content contains authenticity and validity. This proposed research aims to use the events of Ferguson, Missouri, as well as similar events to what happened after Ferguson, as the important social moments that created buzz not only in social media, but throughout traditional media outlets. As a contemporary take on social media, mediated communication, and social activism, the events that took place in Ferguson, Missouri,

Baltimore, Maryland, and like Sandra Bland's case in Texas, creates a sufficient opportunity to extend understanding in social activism, rhetorical construction, through rhetorical acts, rhetorical artifacts, and agency construction through various avenues discussed below.

As Trottier & Fuchs (2015) note, critical internet analysis does not exclude theorizing larger contexts, including power structures, the state, capitalism, gender relations, social struggles, and ideologies, which are all shaped by the digital media landscape in dialectical processes. This contextualization is important because it operationalizes the language and images being used on social media in a way that allows researchers to dissect the situation for further understanding. This gridlocking is important because it highlights Grossberg's (2010) notions of "windows of opportunity" that give researchers the opportunity to not only attempt to understand the specific moment under investigation, but also gives access to the larger social situation that may exist as part of the convoluted societal factors involved. In this study, this gridlocking is important not only because of the way Grossberg influences the cultural studies approach, but also because it allows the never ending flow of content posted onto Twitter during the unfolding of events in a way that becomes manageable in ways that mediums of the past were researched to make theoretical implications.

As suggested by Heydon (2013), "electronic media…and its content…are the creator and the occupier of the position in a given time" (p. 531). The occupation of the specific time and place is what situates and creates the importance of the language that is being used as the rhetorical artifact while attempting to understand how the same language being used attaches itself to the rhetorical act. The rhetorical act takes place due to the purposeful posting facilitated by creative control and the artifact becomes its creation through the language and images used situates the operationalization in the creation of the agency contended here through a rhetorical

lens. The cultural window of study is important because it not only creates the window

Grossberg (2010) notes, but the communication aspects being analyzed here also operate within

the mass medium diffusion social media sites offer. The language used through the hashtags and

posts to Twitter create the contradictions of narratives being discussed by users, mainly noted as

the voice of the *other*. This platform allows for the discussions not only operates as creative

tactics used by its users, but it becomes an additional resource for social movement purposes

once the creative tactics have been established. As noted by Stevenson and Greenberg (2000),

organization and people not only need resources to achieve their ultimate goal, but the potential

agency construction lies within the access to resources that allow for the potential action.

Secondly, it is important to not only deconstruct the cultural window of importance

within the context of this research, but it is also important to understand how social media sites

have changed the overall outlook of mass mediated communication. Traditionally, mass

communication has been viewed as a means of transmitting information and content over a

physical space in time, with specific intent, and with specific, authorized content. Most notably,

this transmission view of communication was best presented by James Carey (1988). Carey

extended this notion of the transmission view of communication by visualizing the delivery of

one way messages to specific places through the traditional media outlets that served as the mass

communication structure. However, as Carey (1988) notes, mass mediated communication also

operates in ritualistic ways for the viewer in part to produce a social bond between members of a

society. Based on this view of communication, Carey constructed the argument that various

forms of traditional media serve as a way for individuals to construct, and more importantly, to

confirm certain identities that are presented to them through the traditional media outlets. As

noted by Cottle (2006), mediated rituals not only function to present important ideals and

interests to a certain social group, but they also are an avenue to promote a social collectivity that legitimates the extant social order. This confirmation of identity, more specifically through Carey's visualization of the role that traditional mass media structures play, carries significant weight when discussing political and social identities, how they are presented in traditional media outlets, and how they are either confirmed or contested through the content and the dialogue that is posted and discussed on social media sites. Moreover, these notions are also an important topic of interest because it also operationalizes the power of social media sites that can be interpreted through the number of retweets that is generated by the original author of the content.

Teetering among mass mediated communicated messages, interpersonal and intrapersonal communication between the self and between other users, the ways in which users rationalize certain identifiable factors on social media sites operationalize important mass media implications in similar fashion to that of traditional media structures. As Cottle (2006) notes, when mediated rituals are conceptualized as performative media enactments that create implications for moral ideas of the social good, the ritualization of a specific social media site serves as a viable theoretical framework and perspective when discussing identity, identity construction, rhetorical acts, the created rhetorical artifact, and the role the platform plays in the creation of agency through social media sites. Illustrated by Trottier and Fuchs (2015), social media sites operate within a specific social relationship that represent objectification of society and human relations where all forms of media coming from them are thus a representative of the human knowledge that originates in tangible social relations. Thus, the postings onto social media sites, within a specific cultural context, and with a specific purpose, not only create an artifact to study that extends the cultural window noted above, but it facilitates a way to examine

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how researchers can understand the role social media sites have in the creation of agency through purposeful acts and artifacts through the use of language and images, and how both extend the ritualized communicative practices of the users participating in the dialogue via the social media site. More specifically, however, because social media sites operate with more accessibility to those outside of the traditional media outlets, the deconstruction of narratives through an "us-versus-them" worldview reinforce symbolic boundaries between the language of traditional media outlets and the language constructed by the users of social media sties with specific intent (Raunch, 2007).

Although a concrete definition of agency continues to be contested in academic literature, it is important to situate this study as a two level contention of agency. Agency is first created through the rhetorical act of posting with a specific intent to a social media site, while also being the construction of the rhetorical artifact through the use of the content in the postings. As Schieffelin (1990), Austin (1962), and Searle (1969) note, language is regarded as a form of social action, a cultural resource, all coded with a set of sociocultural practices. Though agency operates contingently on the content used by the users of the hashtags, they are separated into two distinct platforms because one does not exist without the other in this cultural and communicative context. From a linguistic perspective, language, culture, and society, both shape and is shaped by sociocultural factors and power dynamics (Urban, 1991). This perspective of language situates the two pronged distinction of agency construction contended here and the analysis that comes from the deconstruction of this two pronged analysis as important because the language within the social power dynamics surrounding it illuminates the platform of social media sites and how it creates accessibility for rhetorical analysis. As discussed below, analyzing the construction of agency through the facets of rhetorical acts and artifacts is important because

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it acts as a way to further understand social media platforms, discursive acts, and sociopolitical power structures that produce the importance behind the role social media sites can play as an extension of the voice that is mediated. In this context, Twitter challenges communication research because of how it complicates the multifaceted communicative acts through mass mediated spaces as well as reiterating and generating a real time situation of agency referring to the sociocultural mediated capacity to act. As Ahearn (2001) notes, although agency refers to the sociocultural mediated capacity to act, it is also important to consider intentionality and how it has implications for agency within the language used.

Moreover, the accessibility of Twitter is an important factor in the contention of agency here because of how Twitter's accessibility widens the breadth of discursive opportunities that exist for users across the internet. As Fortunati (2009) notes, social media's participatory features have undoubtedly changed different aspects of people's involvement in the social and political aspects of their societies. Realistically, however, it is important to maintain that Twitter and social media alike are not the end all and be all of this era of social movements. As Brancati (2013) and Eltantawy and Wiest (2011) note, social media and Twitter do have important roles in social movements, but in combination with several other factors. Furthermore, it is important to consider the role of the digital divide, the role of government surveillance practices, and the role "slacktivism" has on the effectiveness of the dissemination of information across the social media platforms. As noted by Molaei (2015), the digital divide and the lack of access to the internet and social media are serious issues challenging effective social movements, therefore, the degree of success of these movements is influenced by factors that exist outside of the social media platform.

As the academic debate persists among researchers, it is important to not only continue to

devise ways in which the field of communication can investigate social media, but also that the field attempt to construct effective ways in operationalizing social media platforms and extrapolating theoretical contingencies that may exist within them. The academic discourse that persists regarding social media sites not only accentuates the different obstacles and focal points of social media research, but also implies that researchers must make incremental steps through various research methods and research questions in tackling the vastness that is social media research. The following research questions will push and contextualize this research endeavor within the current academic discussion:

R1 – How does Twitter's platform provide a space for dialogue for #BlackLivesMatter?

R2 – How does #BlackLivesMatter on Twitter become agentic for users?

R3 – What role does Twitter play in constructing social purposes through the use of a concentrated place of mediated communication?

To illustrate the continual need of social media research, the following review of literature will provide a contemporary background of literature surrounding social media research themes, agentic and logistical properties that social media provides movement organizations while using Twitter, and a theoretical grounding surrounding the corresponding arguments made in this research endeavor. The previous research noted will contextualize this study within the contemporary academic discussion. The analysis section will highlight and discuss linguistic themes found through the research process and will discuss how the themes operate in creating agentic properties advantageous to the users of Twitter discussing #BlackLivesMatter. The conclusion chapter will provide concluding remarks regarding this research and its contributions to the field as well as its limitations.

CHAPER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 A History of Social Media in Research

The ability to research social media sites has been a contested topic as well as subjective in terms of the effectiveness of the results found. In their historical review of social media sites, Boyd and Ellison (2008), defined social network sites as: "web based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by other within the system" (p. 211). According to boyd and Ellison (2008), the first social media site was launched in 1997 with a site called SixDegrees.com. Beginning in 2003, most sites took form with the profile-centric sites, and were aimed to either continue the success of the profile-centric sites that came before them, or were targeting specific demographics. In terms of how users identified and presented the self on social media sites, academic and communication research on social media sites has been traced to begin with boyd (2004) and Donath and boyd (2004) who were interested in how users presented the "self" via the profile-centric websites. Marwick (2005) found that users on multiple social media sites had complex strategies for negotiating the rigidity of authenticity on social media sites. Fono and Raynes-Goldie (2006) investigated social drama regarding public displays of connections on social media sites, while boyd (2006) found that the "friends" a user has on a social media site are not the same "friends" in the everyday sense.

Twitter, mostly considered a micro-blogging site (Joseph, 2012), gives users the ability to tweet text-based content up to 140 characters to (potentially) a global audience. Users are able to share information in 140 characters and can post links to articles, photos, videos, and audio

streams along with their text. When a user tweets, their sharing is immediately available to their followers and any tweet can then be retweeted allowing the original content posted to be shared to the followers of users who chose to retweet a post. Perhaps the most notable function of Twitter is the prevalent use of the hashtag (#). As Zappavigna (2015) notes, hashtags operate in posts "both as part of the linguistic structure and discourse semantics and also as metadata" (p. 276). The hashtags posted by users are important here because the hashtags are created by the users in a specific context, used to recognize, highlight and become a form of descriptive annotation produced by users (Zappavigna, 2015). Furthermore, hashtags are useful for research because they are what make social media websites searchable. For Zappavigna (2011), hashtags "can be used to search for information and resources in a particular domain and can be used to track or coordinate conversations around that domain" (p. 792).

As Posch, Wagner, Singer, and Strohmaier (2013) highlight, a hashtag is "a string of characters preceded by the hash (#) and is used as a descriptive label or to build communities around particular topics" (p. 1). Furthermore, Tsur and Rappoport (2012) contend that a hashtag on Twitter can be viewed, in many cases, as topical markers of conversation and as an indication to the context of the tweet or as the core idea expressed in the tweet, which are adopted by other users that contribute similar content or express a related idea. Consequently, the hashtags, users' creativity, the concentrated location of language, and all the images that are posted within the context of the hashtag, become the concentrated area for communication research. The aim of this research is to focus on how the contributions of Twitter add to the ways in which the opportunity for discursive action via a mediated platform through the voice of participation adds to the dialogue of social movements. This dialogue furthers the investigative process of social media because it allows for researchers to understand how the hashtag and its use create a space

for the voice of the other. For the purpose of this study, the use of the hashtag not only facilitates in the construction of agency, but simultaneously, helps in understanding how hashtags unite, divide, operate in abstraction, and present contemporary ideological touchstones.

Currently, most research that surrounds the impact of social media sites have focused on specific demographics and specific social events in an attempt to understand how social media sites are pragmatically used during certain social situations. Research endeavors such as Brock (2012), Florini (2014) and Sharma (2013) have attempted to further understand how users of specific demographics create and enact cultural identifiers "online" similar to the ways cultural identifiers are used "offline." Similarly, research such as Thigo's (2013) and Erstad's (2013) has attempted to understand how user-generated creative control on social media sites operate to create a distinct space for users through a platform that is virtually constructed. Moreover, Ems (2014) and Turner (2013) developed case studies that investigated how social media sites like Twitter played a significant role in certain social movements in an attempt to understand how Twitter was pragmatically used by demonstrators during the social movements. Specifically, through these case studies, Ems (2014) and Turner (2013) concentrated on uncovering the ability Twitter gave demonstrators to organize and discuss the events among demonstrators through Twitter in real time. Although these examinations of social media sites are case studies, they are useful in the discussion of how social media sites effect communication because they imply that the users have the ability to create and sustain a pragmatic use of a social media through a virtual and digital platform for real world effects, in real time. However, a much more in depth review of current literature implies emerging themes and frameworks that researchers are developing in order to understand the theoretical implications at work with social media use during social movements.

2.2 Social media vs Social Networking: The Difference Matters

In order to properly examine how social media sites facilitate the construction of agency, it is important to situate this research project within previous social media research, and secondly, to understand the contingency of agency in social protest and movements. Furthermore, a historical look at the previous research on social media sites helps further situate this study in discussing the intersectionality of social media, social movements, agency, and rhetorical artifacts and rhetorical acts. The placement of this study adds to this growing literature on the contested debate of the effects social media have on its users across multiple facets of communication research and in other fields. Although social media research continues across multiple fields, a continuous debate on whether the terms social networking and social media are similar, different, and/or interchangeable. According to boyd and Ellison (2007), social media sites are defined as, "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (p. 211). However, as Carr and Hayes (2015) note, social media sites are defined as, "internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others" (p. 8).

Although the definitions posited by these authors are similar, the difference between the terms social networking and social media must be noted in order to properly situate this research in a contemporary and updated place within the current research. My project chooses the phrase social media over social networking sites because of the ways in which the definition of social media allude to the a) time convenient access that is important in social movements and

dialogues about social and cultural events, and b) the capability for the user to generate the content deemed worthy. Furthermore, Carr and Hayes note that although their definition does acknowledge that social media operates via the broader Internet, social media does not need to be completely Web-based (2015). It highlights the importance of applications that operate and stand alone outside of access to the Web while being fully functional. For research focusing on Twitter (which is both Web based and a stand alone application), this definition of social media properly indicates the technical differences of the platform while noting the technical functions of the platform that play a significant role during social movements. The stand alone operation of Twitter noted in the definition offers users the capability to use the platform away from Web based only access granting mobility and allow for the opportunistic interactions noted in the definition.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Carr and Hayes' definition is the user generated value that comes from social media. According to the Pew Research Center (January 2015), Twitter users were composed of 23% of all internet users, with most of the users being men who either identified as Black and Hispanic. The majority of Twitter users ranged between the ages of 18-29, and most notably, the Pew Research poll noted that the majority of Twitter users were from urban areas and who were enrolled in college. These statistics also indicate that Twitter saw a dramatic increase of active users between 2013 and 2014, with the user percentage jumping from 18% in 2013 to 23% in 2014 (Pew Research, 2015). However, within the context of this research, the Pew Research in July 2015 notes that 63% of Twitter users use the platform as a source of news about events and issues outside of their interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, the Pew Research Center notes an increase in gathering general news from Twitter in 2013 (47%), while the proportion of users who say they follow breaking news on Twitter is about

twice as high as those who say they do so on Facebook (59% vs. 31%). As stated by the Pew Research Center, "perhaps…Twitter's great strength is providing as-it-happens coverage and commentary on live events" (Pew Research, 2015).

Within the context of this research, it is this news sharing and gathering information that highlights and indicates the arguments of agency. As Gans (2004, p. 79) profiled, there are five theories that have commonly been used to explain the routines newsgatherers follow to collect and present news:

"1. Journalist-centered, in which news is shaped by professionals in the news production field. This is commonly referred to as ''journalistic bias.'' 2. Organization-centered, where news organizational structures or corporate ownership and profit margins drive the story selection. 3. Medium-centered, where the mass medium presenting the news determines what news will be presented. For example, television news would select more visual stories to present routinely. 4. Event-centered news, or the mirror theory, in which journalists merely reflect events and images as they occur. 5. Source-centered news, in which the sources on which journalists rely determine what news is presented."

My research focuses heavily on Gans' ideas of *medium-centered influence* and *event-centered news* which situates Twitter as an appropriate site for both cultural relevance and as a social news gathering hub. More specifically, my research will focus on how Twitter becomes the center of the medium centered influence within the social events being investigated here, as well as the way the event becomes the topic of discussion through the medium. Since my research intends on understanding how the technical factors that make Twitter, as well as how the social media factors that Twitters' usefulness is contingent upon, the subject of agency, the emphasis on Twitter's usefulness in both the social media realm of research and the ways in

which it circumvents the traditional media power structures that have been historically put in place is crucial for mass media research as well. As Murthy (2012) notes, "Twitter users are individual consumers who make reflective decisions on what information they want coming up on their Twitter feeds" (p. 1070). This conscious decision makes Twitter's research important within the context of social media and social movements and reinforces the importance of operationalizing and investigating how the dialogue on social and cultural struggles are carried out on the platform.

2.3 Twitter's Role in Social Movements

The investigation of Twitter and its role in social movements is not new to academic research. In fact, there has been plenty of opportunities presented to researchers in order to extend understanding into how Twitter promotes itself, logistically and otherwise, as a source of usefulness. Although my research will attempt to understand the theoretical communicative implications at work as a site of agency construction, previous case studies have highlighted Twitter and how it was used in other social and cultural situations. The first real opportunity to understand Twitter and social movements came from what is commonly referred to as the Arab Spring in 2010. Beginning in the winter of 2010 in Tunisia, the Arab Spring quickly became a center of communication and sociological research and academic literature. As Howard and Parks (2012) state, "There is little doubt that digital media played a fundamental role in the wave of protest across North Africa and the Middle East, beginning with political upheavals in Tunisia and Egypt, and spreading to other parts of the region including Libya, Yemen, and Syria" (p. 360). Although Howard and Parks (2012) remind the reader that the line between technological advances like Twitter and political change is "complex and contingent," the Arab Spring suffices as the starting point for contemporary social media and social movement research. Though most

studies noted here will be case studies, they are important because they lay the path to what research has already been done (even as the literature review extends into other events that took advantage of Twitter), and what has yet to be done in order to understand Twitter and its place in social movements outside of the logistical advantages it presents.

As the events in the Middle East and North Africa unfolded, scholars and researchers quickly jumped on the opportunity to understand Twitter's role (and in many cases Facebook) in the case of these events. As researchers contemplated and attempted to understand how to go about deciphering that role, Alterman (2011) was quick to note that social media were not the only cause of social unrest. Alterman contends that although Twitter was an important factor in the spread of the information regarding the unfolding events, the role of the traditional media structure was what disseminated to a much larger regional audience, arguing that the ubiquity of the television is still powerful. However, Alterman stated that, regarding the importance of the social media for the ways in which it allows for the creation of content, "… while there has been considerable concentration on the role social media played in allowing people to receive content, analysts have not placed enough emphasis on the importance of social media's enabling people to send content transforming them from observers of activism to activists themselves with a greater stake as leaders, not just followers, of unfolding events" (p. 104).

However, as the research results continue to pour in regarding the effectiveness of social media and social activism, the constraints of social media must be recognized and considered. As Youmans and York (2012) note, the architecture of social media shape their uses and limits at both the application's programming code that sets the range of visibility, and secondly, how the users' actions are enabled and constrained by "company policies and user terms governing intellectual property, community policing provisions, anonymity, and offensive and violent

content" (p. 316). Furthermore, Youmans and York contend, "changes in platform architecture may introduce new or expand previous constraints for activist users, thus effecting the risks and effectiveness of their efforts" (2012, p. 317). These changes are important to consider because the researcher must account for the architectural changes of the website just as much as the dialogue and discursive tendencies change between activists during the social movement. Although the lack of gatekeeping is one of Twitter's prime conduits of voice, noting the architectural constraints within the platform provides meaningful contextualization to how users operate and utilize the platform to their advantage within the constraints placed on the platform that exist outside of their control.

Additionally, while some of the academic literature that is available to discuss the blurry line between social movements and the role social media play, it is important to consider how exactly social media affixes itself to a movement within the existing constraints on the platform. Moreover, it is over simplistic to suggest that social media and its logistical advantages are an all-encompassing feature that gives and provides wholesome technological advances that do not require methodological approaches to reap the benefits it provides. For example, as Rennick (2013) note, social media's role should be broken down into two distinct phases: "a pre-mobilisation*[sic]* phase and a collective action phase" (p.163). Rennick's theoretical two phase usage notes that research must understand social media and its advantages only provides a way to link the changes in practice/consciousness with actual instances of mobilization to avoid many of the gaps that may come from research results that view the role of Twitter and social media as being ruled as simplistic or exaggerated. Most importantly, Rennick's contribution of the two phase plan of mobilization contributes a sufficient way to analyze the accessibility of social media towards its tendencies to be used for social movements.

As Ems (2014) encourages the understanding of how Twitter changes the landscape at hand, Ems also points out that, "protesters now have a visible channel through which to coordinate mobilization efforts and strategies, express dissent and attract empathetic compatriots in their fight against centralized governmental power" (p. 729). Although the situations across these uprisings and social events each have their own contingencies and complicated circumstances, Ems diligently notes that the functionality of Twitter in these situations cannot be undermined. While examining 2009 political protests in Iran, Moldova, and the G-20 Summit in Pittsburgh, Ems makes it clear that the advantage of Twitter being used during social movements lies where "the negotiations of power and the positions/motivations of conflicting parties are more public now more than ever before" allowing for a more discursive infrastructure for people involved within the social movement (p.721). This multi-faceted, computer mediated interpersonal dialogue that takes place between protestors physically at the protest and with those who are virtually apart of it via Twitters allows for a different experience of social movements today than previously experienced. This new experience not only allows more people to participate from afar and from their own vantage point, but it is also facilitates the creative control through lack of gatekeeping that is observed and operationalized here.

2.4 Twitter's Creative Advantage

Beyond logistical advantages that coincide with social media and social movements, the interpersonal implications that surface from social media sites during social movements are crucial to the investigation because of how it facilitates communication between users. For example, while studying youth behavior during a protest in Chile, Valenzuela, Arriagada, and Scherman (2012) note that social media sites have several advantages for promoting participation through a large number of potential contacts which enable social movements to reach those

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outside of the social media site alone. Through the allowance of "interpersonal feedback, peer acceptance, and reinforcement of group norms," social media sites promote the construction of personal and group identities that are key antecedents of protest behavior (Dalton et al., 2009). The ability to create and manage these interpersonal relationships negotiates the individual and collective identities that are crucial to the emergence of how a social movement. Bakardjieva (2011) uses the term "subactivism" to describe and analyze the relationship between individuals' agency and their everyday political behavior in nontraditional political contexts. As defined by Bakardjieva (2011), "subactivism" remains subjective and submerged in the mundane course of individual life, but with intersecting new media and traditional media bridging the everyday life of the subject, the previously remote deliberative spheres can create favorable conditions for subactivism to transform into activism proper.

The process of using Twitter as a site for voice is an important concept to this research and how the agentic opportunities that they present are facilitated. As Coddington and Holton (2013) note, "the rise of distributed communication technologies…have challenged one-way models of communication and influence" where "the gatekeeping model has assumed a media environment characterized by scarcity and unidirectional communication" (p. 238). In an attempt to understand how this lack of gatekeeping effects the communication model in new media technologies, Goode (2009) argues that structures through which gatekeeping has traditionally been conducted in traditional media outlets remain largely intact online, therefore arguing that gatekeeping is still a valuable influence on what news is released in new media spaces. In the case of Twitter however, the gatekeeping is contingent upon the verification and levels of measured authenticity that is subject to accounts and testimonies present (Goode, 2009). Furthermore, the gatekeeping process also relies on the effects of the architecture behind the

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website or application (Granka, 2010).

The previously cited work by Grossberg (2010) is an important aspect when considering the notion of agency and its contention on the role that social media plays in social movements. Since the dissemination of possible information that can be observed from postings operate within a contextual and temporal place, the language and images of social and political events that happen offline then discussed online is what serves as meaningful for study. This contextualization, as Grossberg (2010) argues, creates the specific object needed in order to pursue any further inquiry into a cultural artifact. As Grossberg argues, inquiries into cultural events must be contextual in the sense that the object of study does not become the end all and be all of a specific research project. For this project, it is important to choose a sufficient enough object of study in order to understand and contextualize the influence of social media in creating agency and voice that exists with the social media platform.

However, in the contestation of agency construction within the social media platform, it is important to consider the ways in which the platform, through a lack of a formal, widespread gatekeeping process, asserts the creative control possibilities. As Castor and Cooren (2006) note, agency implies "the capacity to make a difference", and Hardy (2004) observes that agency is often located in various relationships between the self and structure, through technological, face to face, or textual formats. Moreover, as Hull and Katz (2006) contend, creating content gives individuals that opportunity to "craft an agentive self" where the individual actively takes part in a social construction of their own identity. Furthermore, as Livingstone (2005) argues, digital media and content creation have become important ways that people engage in agentive practice in public spheres. Erstad (2013) further explains, "understanding agency in content creation provides us with opportunities for exploring new ways of engagement and networking where

digital media play a key role" (p. 70). In turn, this view of content creation through social media sites allows agency to be defined from a perspective of how it effects and influences social issues like that of Occupy Wall Street (Loader & Mercea, 2012).

More theoretically, the concept of agency is still a contested topic of discussion. As Emirbayer and Mische (1998) explain:

The agentic dimension of social action can only be captured in its full complexity, we argue, if it is analytically situated within the flow of time. More radically, we also argue that the structural contexts of action are themselves temporal as well as relational fields - multiple, overlapping ways of ordering time toward which social actors can assume different simultaneous agentic orientations. We claim that, in examining changes in agentic orientation, we can gain crucial analytical leverage for charting varying degrees of maneuverability, inventiveness, and reflective choice shown by social actors in relation to the constraining and enabling contexts of action.

Through this observation, agency construction via Twitter becomes an observable property because of how the user not only has the ability to create the content in which suits a need developed through a self reflective observation, but also through the inventiveness and the ability to explore the degree to which a message is effective.

Trottier and Fuchs (2012) attempt to understand how media can be defined as structures that enable and constrain human information processes of cognition, communication and cooperation, which are practices that produce and reproduce informational structures. Moreover, Dalton and Kittilson (2012) observe, "even if social media sites cannot completely substitute for in-person social interactions, virtual civil society appears to have many of the same individual benefits for citizen norms and political involvement as traditional civil society activity" (p. 27).

These definitions of agency illustrate the pragmatic use behind social media use during social movements, but when also considering that studying the internet critically do not "exclude studying empirically the cornerstones of digital media use, but always situate such analyses in theorising and analyzing larger contexts, such as power structures, the state, capitalism, gender relations, social struggles, and ideologies, which shape and are shaped by the digital media landscape in dialectical processes" (Fuchs, 2014). This interaction between the users and the structures that exist offline but are discussed online situate social media use during social movements as an important realm of agency research.

In understanding agency through social media, the use of language and images not only creates the cultural content within the cultural context, but also Twitter's platform creates the space that disseminates the information into other media outlets. The use of Twitter to disseminate this information is critical because it serves as a cultural window (Grossberg, 2010) through hashtags. This critical use of online space becomes agentic and critical of the traditional media structure. As Foss (2004) notes, an ideological critic discovers and makes visible dominant ideologies embedded in an artifact, while surfacing ideologies that are being muted. Users of Twitter who not only engage the entities reporting on the hashtags in question here, but who were also self-reporting via Twitter, create an artifact that creates an object of study for researchers to engage and explore the ideographs of the cultural moment and context through the content posted to the site.

As McGee (1979) suggests, ideology must be studied by analyzing the messages that aim to persuade individuals to accept the reality of life as it is pictured in the products of the culture, industry, film, magazines, illustrated newspapers, radio, television, and literature. Furthermore, McGee argues that because human beings are conditioned to a vocabulary that functions as

"guides" for behavior and belief, words that are entrenched in a society are fundamental in

becoming the building blocks of a societal ideology (1980). With this in mind, McGee suggested

that because ideographs are full of meaning, there must be a two-part analysis to unpack the

meanings in the language, diachronically and synchronically. Furthermore, Cloud (1998)

reiterates that slogans provide an analytical link between rhetoric and ideology while maintaining

that the analysis of ideographs is, "less of a critique of how immediately successful a rhetor's

strategies are, than an account of the ways in which political rhetors dip into, add to, and reshape

the shared cultural shock of ideographs" (p. 389). For McGee, the critic should question the

interests motivating ideographic choices, as well as assess potential consequences of public

adherence to a particular vocabulary of motives (Cloud, 1998).

McGee noted that ideographs function as abstract notions that have a specific meaning

that can change over time that bring groups and individuals together. As Stassen & Bates (2010)

discovered, the ability of an ideograph (such as the term marriage) to functions through social

structures, abstraction, unity, and division. Thus, the use of hashtags via Twitter become

functioning modern ideographs because the hashtags are entrenched within cultural roles and

norms, and have the ability to both unite and divide. The implications of these hashtags become

the loci of structured tensions due to their representation of public contestation over society's

social commitments (Condit & Lucaites, 1993). Furthermore, as Twitter becomes a site for both

textual and image related ideographs, Birdsell and Groarke (1996) note that visual arguments are

possible when the images being observed draw heavily on three important contexts to

communicate their arguments: the immediate visual context, the immediate verbal context, and

the visual culture.

Although agency has often been contested in the context of social media, the realm of

agency contended here is contingent on the opportunity to provide both voice and political and social participation. More specifically, it is important to consider both the opportunities for message framing and discourse that exist within the use of social media by activists. Amenta, Olasky, and Caren (2004) explored how and under what circumstances activists are able to bring about change, concluding that a variety of factors (including the mobilization of people, access to resources, and specific lines of action for direct purpose) must be considered in order for activists achieve their goals at hand. Burnstein and Linton (2002) and Soule and Olzak (2004) concluded that the degree of mobilization, a favorable political climate, and positive public opinion all play key roles in the level of success experienced by a movement. However, Amenta, Olasky, and Caren (2005), noted that the effectiveness of movements must not overlook the role of message framing in the level of success. Andrews (2001) and Soule and Olzak (2004) also contend that the ability to effectively frame the movement's message is a key factor in the success of a movement. Furthermore, Snow and Benford (1988) and Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford (1986) show that movement framing takes places when collective actors articulate their interpretations of the social or political problem at hand, its solution, and reasons as to why others should support the movement.

Furthermore, as McCammon, Muse, and Newman (2007) argue, movement frames must account for the political and cultural environment in which they are expressed to produce the desired political outcome. More specifically, Koopmans and Statham (1999) note that if a movement's discourse is able to frame itself in a way that taps into a hegemonic discourse, the movement and its activists are more likely to be politically and social effective in expressing the issues and situation at hand. As Molaei (2015) explains, new technologies have enabled movement organizations to communicate with local and global networks, exchange and share

ideas, produce and distribute news and information about their activities in cheaper and more affordable ways than traditional modes of communication. Harlow and Harp (2011) observe that the effective roles of the internet in the success of social movements include "mobilizing supporters both online and offline" (p. 196). Nielson (2011) notes that the expression of collective identity is an important factor in the effectiveness of social movements in the technological age, while Wall (2007) contends that the internet has a key role in "getting people involved in politics," suggesting that the effectiveness of information dissemination facilitates important and crucial discussion about the movement (p. 258).

However, as Molaei (2015) argues, discursive opportunity structures, through access to social media, ultimately leads to the success of movements. Koopmans and Olzak (2004) introduce the concept of discursive opportunity structures to differentiate political from cultural opportunities, while Molaei expands on Koopmans and Olzak by providing discursive opportunity structures as a means of explaining how social media can become an opportunity to disseminate movement information to the general public. Foundationally, Koopmans and Olzak (2004) define discursive opportunities as "the aspects of the public discourse that determine a message's chances of diffusion in the public sphere" (p. 202). Discursive opportunity structures interact with social media to influence public opinion as well as to raise awareness of an issue that may put pressure on politicians to change policies. They use discursive opportunity structures as a means to bridge the gap that is left between political disenfranchisement and framing theories. Furthermore, Cammaerts (2012) uses the term "mediation opportunity structure" in order to describe "the extent to which movements are able to get their message across in the mainstream media… [and] their degree of cultural influence in the public sphere, which invokes issues of access to the media" (p. 119).

By situating my research project through the defined term social media, this project is contextualizes Twitter and its users as a platform through which they are granted creative control as a means of agency construction. By granting users the ability to openly discuss social events on its platform, Twitter situates itself as the platform through which the discussing of an event is shared to an audience by way of the centralizing nature of the hashtag. It is through this centralized use of language situated around the hashtag that creates agentic properties available to the users outside of the logistical advantages that previous academic literature has already uncovered. Furthermore, because social media sites operate as structures that produce and reproduce information, constructions of agency are extracted from the use of the platform because of the nature in which social media users interact with the structures outside of the site. In the ability to participate in a dialogue through a platform that provides discursive opportunities, contextualizing Twitter and its users in this way create ways to research social media through ways that have yet to be explored.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Twitter and social media sites have been studied to understand the impacts that they have on their users across multiple facets of research. In order to contextualize my research, the previous chapter situates this study in a way that allows for theoretical extractions to be made that positively contribute to the fields of communication studies, new media technologies, agency construction, and social movement literature that moves this research into an academic realm not yet fully investigated. More importantly, it is crucial to further situate this research in a way that lends itself so that a rhetorical criticism can be made which contributes to the understanding of these concepts through a communicative lens. Secondly, in the previous chapter, a brief history of social media research was provided then analyzed for various themes found within the published literature on Twitter that encompass research endeavors on identity, previous social movements, mass media studies, and critical internet analysis. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the methodology and theoretical frameworks that will be used in this research on Twitter and its ability to ultimately construct agency and voice through various means noted by previously published work. The main methodological tool that will be employed for this research is rhetorical criticism, more specifically an ideological criticism and critical rhetorical analysis.

3.1 Methodological Framework

Rhetorical criticism is a methodology that is often used within communication research. This study attempts to extend on the notions of agency construction through the rhetorical artifacts constructed by the use of language and images that occurred during recent social movements. In a broader sense, this study aims to understand how the social media site Twitter

allows users who exist outside of the traditional media power structures a platform to participate

in the dialogue that is important to social movements. Through the use of images and of

language, the rhetorical artifacts constructed can be examined to comprehend any important

theoretical implications that exist within them. A rhetorical criticism, more specifically, an

ideological criticism, will be used within this study because the rhetorical criticism situates itself

as a way to deconstruct the meanings and interpretations behind what is being posted to Twitter.

The ideological criticism suffices as a methodological approach for this study because it

considers Twitter as a provider for the content that exhibits the tendencies and architectural

structure needed for the content to exist, making the theoretical implications behind them

important. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) duly note this point by arguing that, "texts, objects, and

spaces do have a lot to 'say' when we read them alongside the living voices of informants and

other social actors" (p. 217).

　　Within the realm of rhetorical criticism is the ideological criticism. As contended by Foss

(1996), "when rhetorical critics are interested in rhetoric primarily for what is suggests about

beliefs and values, their focus on ideology manifests in an artifact" (p. 291). Furthermore, Foss

(1996) notes that an ideology is a pattern or set of ideas, assumptions, beliefs, values, or

interpretations of the world by which a culture or group operates. One of the main influences on

ideological criticism comes from deconstructionism, often times referred to as poststructuralism.

As Derrida influenced the ideological criticism, he illustrated that the process of

deconstructionism is to deconstruct the self-evidence of central concepts in a way that subjects

the basic structures and assumptions governing the texts and how knowledge develops to critical

analyses. Methodologically, deconstruction is directed to the questions of texts by taking them

apart and exposing their underlying meanings, biases, and preconceptions while then

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transforming or reconceptualizing the conceptual fields of those texts (Foss, 1996). As Pippin

(1996) notes, ideological criticism points out the political nature of texts and interpreters,

therefore, attempting to deconstruct and understand the ideological criticisms mentioned by the

users of Twitter to participate in the dialogue goes hand in hand with the postings being made.

This critical theory approach is necessary because the "process of rhetorical criticism

mimics the process of agency…both processes select something on which to focus on engages a

perceived structure of some kinds…then interprets that structure in particular ways" (Foss, 2006,

p. 376). The proposed study builds on a previous study that examined tweets from specific users

who have not only developed the cultural capital on Twitter to be a voice of influence, but also

with users who participated in the dialogue happening through the hashtags created because of

the event. Furthermore, because this research will focus on tweets during a specific time frame,

the tweets themselves become the rhetorical object because it, momentarily, stops the extreme

fluidity of social media. This pause in fluidity is important because it allows the language and the

content being used to develop context that lends itself to being coded. The process of open

coding (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011) is important because it allows the researcher to interpret the

information from the tweets in a way that establishes themes in order to articulate and extend

relationships between the use of Twitter, the content and rhetorical objects that derive

from Twitter, and the way it impacts agency construction into categorical themes to extend a

meaningful argument. Furthermore, as Lindlof and Taylor (2011) note, a material object is

looked upon not as the entity that communicates but as an element that operates as a resource, a

referent or a nonverbal sign in the process of communication.

3.2 An Approach to Researching Twitter

In order to conduct this study, the research will be contingent on the ability to search and

find the users of Twitter who participated in the dialogue while using the aforementioned hashtag. However, because Twitter operates with millions of users, deciphering which postings are more important than others is overwhelming to the study. Contingent upon a random sample using Twitter's ability to advance search within its own website, managing the flow of information becomes more manageable to the research. Twitter's advanced search feature allows a user (and a researcher) to manage and search information on certain trending topics of discussions by tracking postings by hashtags or keywords, by specific users, through specific dates, and even with specific keywords in mind. Twitter's advanced search ability manages the flow of information will give the research the opportunity to view the use of hashtags not only as a continuous discussion that has become crucial to the overall current social movement, but it will create a way in which the content being posted operates as the artifact that can be critiqued and analyzed.

More specifically, my research uses the cases of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and Freddie Gray in Baltimore, Maryland as the two instances indicative to the movement's purpose. I used Twitter's advanced search feature in order to gather tweets that used the #BlackLivesMatter during the time in which these two cases were heavily discussed on Twitter. Furthermore, I used Twitter's advanced search feature on Twitter's website to look at postings on the day of the two noted events (August 9, 2014 and April 12, 2015) and 21 days after each event. The limit was concrete to the time frame because it allows the researcher to view discussions through the hashtag around these two events for a specific amount of time minimizing the overwhelming amount of information present through the platform. Furthermore, the limit of 21 days was established by looking at Twitter analytics provided by Twitter and by gauging the amount of tweets consistent enough over a period time. For both events, 21 days is a

sufficient amount of time to delve into the dialogue taking place on Twitter. The tweets collected were printed out, reviewed for thematic language within the context of the event and open coded into categories through the open coding process. Overall, more than 800 tweets were collected, reviewed and categorized in order to present the current argument.

As mentioned, the process of open coding will be used in this research. As Strauss (1987) notes, open coding is the initial, unrestricted coding of data where the analyst goes through texts line by line and categorizes data on the basis of its coherent meaning. As Lindlof and Taylor (2011) note, the process of open coding is where the categories of data are built, named, and given ascribed attributes to them. In open coding, the goal is to open up the inquiry where every interpretation point is tentative where whatever is wrong in interpreting those lines and words will eventually be cancelled out through later steps of the inquiry (Strauss, 1987). In order to process the information being gathered in this research, it is intended that through the process of constant-comparative that Lindlof and Taylor (2011) note. Through the process of constant-comparative method, the definition of each category and properties noted within them are organized to a point where the properties of each category are defined with greater precision, and the analyst begins to see how the categories are differentiated from each other, how the interrelate, and how full (or empty) of compelling evidence they are (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). More importantly, as Glaser and Strauss (1967) note, after the definition of categories begins to even out, the analyst "starts thinking in terms of the full range of types or continua of the category, its dimensions, the conditions under which it is pronounced or minimized, its major consequences, its relations to other categories, and its other properties" (p. 107).

As previously noted, attempting to research and understand the use of social media within social movements is a difficult and overwhelming task considering the amount of information

that is constantly being shared. Although the hashtags and the central location of postings can be narrowed down to help the research create a concise, accurate argument, combating the amount of discussion taking place is the largest hurdle to this study. Through an understanding of the historical social issues at hand that this study is contingent upon, it is important to note that the deconstruction of the texts and languages used by individuals on Twitter to participate in the dialogue through the hashtags, the interpretation of the research content is recognized to be that the interpretations disseminated within this study after triangulation, disjuncture, and crystallization (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

In order to properly expand on the theoretical implications that may exist, it is important that the study research and examine certain hashtags that have come out of the movement to raise awareness of the police violence that certain communities have historically dealt with. More specifically, this study will use of the #BlackLivesMatter affixed to the time frame of these particular events. Studying these hashtags to an affixed period of time is important to this study because it suggests that the social moment of importance has become fluid in response to other incidents of police violence. Although the hashtags are in response to multiple incidents noted by activists, they highlight how the content posted on Twitter suffices as the lens of study to investigate whether voice, agency construction, and purposeful language can be implicated and theoretically analyzed under the framework provided.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

Presented in the following analysis chapter, the evaluated language that meets the methodological timeframe noted will be presented in order to deconstruct the ways in which hashtag usage constructs agentic properties that are possible via the use of Twitter. The coded language highlights how language use via the platform exhibits characteristics crucial to the overall dialogue surrounding the events. Moreover, the analysis of the language used aides in extracting implications for the understanding of how Twitter can be used in social movements outside of logistical applications and for an opportunity to understand how the language use aides in the discursive opportunities crucial to the hashtag's purpose. The categories presented below include umbrella themes that are comprised of subcategories in order to highlight that the language use was not unilateral, but instead that the language being used by members of the community used their channels and their platform as an opportunity to participate in the construction of the noted themes. The presentation of this analysis chapter argues that the use of Twitter during a social movement is important to members of a community who are otherwise unable to participate in a dialogue surrounding their own standpoint.

In the following analysis chapter, there are three major themes that will be discussed, each with their own subsections in order to illuminate the overarching major theme. First, the analysis will provide a lens through which Twitter can be understood as a means of creating an online mediated community that has offline effects. The community theme exists as a means to understand how the platform and the use of the hashtag facilitates the construction of interpersonal relationships through the dialogue surrounding an event of social importance. Secondly, the analysis will examine how the online mediate community uses Twitter and the

hashtag #BlackLivesMatter as a means of depicting and sharing personal references in order to extend personal standpoints that are otherwise inaccessible to individuals who do not share the same existence. This theme distinguishes how the police violence being discussed is an experience contingent upon personal identifiable factors while users share how these experiences impact their own day to day life. Finally, the last major theme that will be discussed delves into how the platform that is Twitter gives users the ability to critique the status quo and how users can go about inflicting change to it. This theme highlights the ways in which users use Twitter as a platform, through the community, as a means to engage the societal structures at play.

4.1 Community Construction Through Twitter and the Hashtag

With protests spurring in the streets, and activists taking to the internet inciting debates and discussions about the purpose and messages that were important to the movement surrounding #BlackLivesMatter, the hashtag's movement not only appeared as taglines via 140 character constructions on Twitter, but its phrasing also made its way to the protest actions. Through the two events researched and categorized, Community, within the contexts discussed below, was an evident theme that focused on creating opportunities for people through the use of the hashtag to not only congregate and protest the actions that had transpired, but also as an opportunity to create forms of action, communal messages of support, solidarity and coalitional community building from those outside of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, and on the ground reporting that allowed for protestors to share their own experiences and viewpoints while at protests sites. While using Twitter as a site for logistical and practical reasons during protests is not new to the academic literature, the consistency of language used on Twitter during these two separate events which encouraged and supported communal participation was apparent enough to become an integral theme to this section of the analysis chapter. The overarching theme of

Community was labeled as such not only because of the hashtag itself on and offline, but because of how users perpetuated the hashtag as a means of centering the discussion for these communal properties while the experiences of the two noted events were not all the same nor were they happening at the same time. Through the act of posting these tweets within the specific context, the tweets not only become important because of how they create and establish the communal aspect, but by how they relate to the constructions of agency through an online act for offline purposes through language that represent and benefit the communal properties they adhere to.

In order to properly examine the communal aspects of postings to Twitter during the events studied, the tweets that were categorized into this overarching theme were further broken down to understand the different ways in which different communal aspects materialized through the language. As noted by Nielsen (2009), the use of social media has been crucial in facilitating collective action for social movement purposes. Furthermore, Koopmans and Olzak (2004) argue that in addition to the visibility of the messages that traditional media structures perpetuate into the public sphere, movements are required to achieve resonance, i.e. by "provoking reactions from other actors in the public sphere" (p. 205). However, in the argument constructed here, communal messages are crucial because they exist as a viable factor in the creation of this offline action by negotiating the space between online and offline rhetorical acts. The theoretical extensions of agency construction applied here manufactures the ability to produce the purposeful language within the space while creating the necessary location for the communal aspects noticed.

The importance of community within this study is a noted theme because it implicates that the space provided through Twitter not only supplied a platform of voice for the activists and

protestors involved, but it also extends that the highlighted online community becomes an agentic structure offline that uses the central location of discursive space for the activities on and offline. As highlighted below, the subsections of this overall theme are important because each aspect operates separately to each individual user while maintaining the language necessary to become an important contributor to the communal themes involved. Ultimately, within this particular theme, communal aspects function in order to perpetuate the notion that Twitter's platform assists people on the ground to create actions and coalitions to form a community outside and within the centralized hashtag on Twitter.

4.1.1 Tweeting to frame support and purpose.

Through the two events, communal messages were noticed and separated in order to further examine how the online community either supported or contributed to the offline discussions via their online platform. This subcategory was defined as the use of language that offered messages to the community of the hashtag in order to support the movement through a dialogue while maintaining the use of the hashtag. Furthermore, this subsection also draws attention to messages that reinforce the purpose of the movement as an act of support for the movement. The communal factor of each post is important because it alludes to the notion that the online community contributed, whether on or off site, to the dialogue benefiting the overall purpose of the hashtag's relevance. Although each individual post operates its own individual space through the platform, the timeframe and hashtag furthers the understanding of how the language uses itself to promote a specific kind of awareness not only to the members of the community participating in the dialogue, but also to the overall public outside of the context of the movement. To situate itself within the category, the language of the tweet becomes agentic through the use of furthering the message of the #BlackLivesMatter movement or as a means of

framing the message as a purposeful contribution to the participating members of the community. The language of each tweet creates a space for the online community to have its own manifestations of dialogue to the messages and their frames already taking place. The overall subcategory manifests through the existing platform with a purpose larger than just a contribution to the centralized location of the hashtag, but as a means of furthering the purpose of the hashtag.

Since the communal messages exist over the time of the events, contextualization of these tweets as something consistent within the use of the hashtag is key in order to situate them with purpose to the research as opposed to an outlier of the general use of the platform. This contextualization is important because it puts purpose behind the language used in a way that pushes it to surface out of the muddled and overwhelming amount of information available. In general, little mutual exclusivity exists in the overarching theme of general community and communal messages. However, the functions of the communal messages noted here are significant because they are expressive in terms of messages crucial to the existence of the hashtag through a discursive opportunity that exists through Twitter. For example, @PrettiiRickii tweeted "We had to create a hashtag to tell the world that our lives matter! This is incredibly sad. #BlackLivesMatter" (2015, April 26). Here, the language of the tweet not only extends the purpose of the hashtag's existence, but uses the hashtag as a means of solidifying the purpose of the communal aspects. As further emphasized in this example, user @LawsonMulvihill tweets, "Black Lives Matter. Not just a hashtag. #BlackLivesMatter (2014, August, 30). Through this tweet, the hashtag's use not only exists as a reaffirmation of the movement's purpose, but the language in the post further operates as a way to negotiate how the hashtag's use extends the concepts essential to the movement's purpose while creating an online discursive space to

ascertain its own existential needs.

Through the dialogue collected, emphasis on the hashtag's use to centralize the language reinforces the language coming out of the platform. The tweets and postings are examples of how the online community created, participated, discussed and shared their notions of voice through their own lens via the platform that benefits the communal purposes important to both the online and offline community. As the following two examples illustrate, user @miriamkp tweets, "Black Lives Matter. Everywhere. #BlackLivesMatter #Ferguson" (2014, August 29) and user @genefoxjr tweets, "No justice 4 Reika. No justice 4 Eric. No justice 4 Tamir. No justice for Trayvon. #NoJustice #BlackLivesMatter" (2015, April 20). The messages through this use of language establish a means of utilizing the hashtag to embody the necessity for a communal space online and offline through a reinforcement of the community and its necessity. Furthermore, this particular language use highlights how the community is centralized to the movement's purpose.

By affirming that the community exists not just in one event or that it is static to one physical space, the language that emerges notes that the community in a larger cultural context is crucially embedded in the language around the hashtag for a greater reason. Secondly, in the tweet posted by user "@genefoxjr," the language used surrounding the hashtag not only emphasizes the larger cultural and social experiences of a community, but also how the tweet itself exemplifies the purpose of the hashtag. The other events highlighted by this user not only implicate that the community exhibits a need for a responsive measure, but that the communal messages through the platform exists as a continual sentiment behind the purpose of the movement. Additionally, the language used by this user reinforces the context of the movement's

purpose while simultaneously providing a message that situates itself to the larger social and

cultural purpose of the movement.

These communal messages are indicative to the hashtag's purpose when emphasizing the

interpersonal aspects of Twitter and how these messages are consumed and distributed through

the hashtag and platform. Since the hashtag itself operates within the mediated space, the hashtag

and the messages around it frame communal identity and communal support in a way that moves

the tweets into operating as a location for language that reinforces the importance of the hashtag

and the experiences of why the hashtag exists. The social aspect of Twitter contribute to the

argument of community support because it is through the hashtag that allows for the messages to

be distributed while indicating purpose to the discursive space. The existence of Twitter is

crucial in the ability to distribute these messages of communal identity and support because it

mimics identity support found and negotiated in social movements proper that can influence the

success of the movement. Although community support online is met with opposition through

the hashtag as well, the communal support vocalized through tweets surface out of the platform

in a way that contributes to the message and direction of the movement.

4.1.2 Solidarity and coalition building through a hashtag.

Although the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag situates importance on the overwhelming

number of Black individuals who experience institutionalized violence, it does not remove the

opportunities for the expression of solidarity and coalition building that exist. From the

standpoint of other individuals, the hashtag itself presents users with outsider perspectives to

express their own take on how the hashtag creates dialogue necessary in times of highly

publicized institutional violence and social unrest as a result of events taking place. Though

opposition of the hashtag is evident within the research, solidarity and coalition building is an

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important feature to the hashtag's dialogical structure because it becomes a platform for various users to acknowledge and recognize how institutionalized violence effects Black citizens. As the events researched here move across time, the notions of solidarity and opportunities for coalition building remained evident within the language and discourse. In this tweet by user @MomsRising, solidarity exists through tweeting, "We support #BlackLivesMatter 'There is no thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives' – Audre Lorde #WeMatter (2014, August 26). From multiple angles, language of coalition and solidarity move through the events and amount of time while encompassing how statements of solidarity materialize to build bridges not just within the platform, but also through the offline course of action.

The placement of solidarity and coalitional building within the overarching theme of Community is important to the argument because it suggests that the hashtag extends itself from not only being a place to build community online, but to also be centralized enough to extend statements of purpose that effect the overall outlook of the movement. The ability to extend a statement of solidarity in a centralized location reemphasizes the negotiation of space between a user, the hashtag, and the ways in which the hashtag becomes operationalized for the building of coalitions and community through it. In the argument for having the hashtag build agency through Twitter, the hashtag itself operationalizes here as a means of being a centered location for the community building affairs that takes place across real world spaces while working through an online space. For example, user @tanyadomi tweets, "Why @GetEQUAL a #LGBT civil rights org in solidarity with #Ferguson #BlackLivesMatter" (2014, August 17). Through the hashtag, the centralized location maximizes its presence to those who are not direct experiencers of the institutionalized violence focalized and suggested by the name of the hashtag itself.

In the attempt to build online coalitions through messages of solidarity, Twitter's architecture allows users to not only express statements, but share messages of dialogue with other users. Moreover, as the architecture of the platform provides this critical element for coalition and solidarity, it also allows users to express solidarity to specific groups, users, and entities that are visible via the online platform. Additionally, the use of the hashtag implicates that the coalition and solidarity building taking place online is focused around a specific topic and through language situated for the purpose of these functions. For example, user @TheJennyLam tweets, "Statement by @NCAPAtweets // #AsianAmerican solidarity with #Ferguson #BlackLivesMatter" (2014, August 20). As the functions of the hashtag extend the notions of posting with a purpose, the language surrounding the hashtag exists to promote functions crucial to the movement's ability to conduct critical, long term necessary tasks for the overall growth of the movement. Solidarity and coalitions exist through the platform to reinforce the notions of community arising out of the platform, across social and economic demographics and propose the language of the hashtag as contributions to its functions.

Moreover, as the posts that expressed solidarity and coalitional building became apparent, the theme becomes an area that operates under conditions operable to benefit the overall scope of the movement's involvement across physical spaces. User @POWER415 tweets, "Chinaka Hodge honoring the #BlackLivesMatter struggle form the Bay to Florida #equalvoicenow" (2015, April 21). Likewise, by focusing on the movement's primary language that expresses the importance of one faction of societal members, members of other identity groups propagate and expand the ways in which the language used through the hashtag umbrellas the overall injustice of state institutionalized violence, incorporating multi-issue identity struggles imperative to the critique of the societal systems expressed across minority groups. In

order to exemplify this, user @monikaoum tweets, "Why Ferguson matters to me as a Cambodian American #BlackLivesMatter #Baltimore" (2015, April 28). The ability to use the hashtag as an expression of critique through multiple identities functions not only as a statement of solidarity and coalitional building, but also as a means of locating a specific mediated space for the multi identity issues to be expressed under the importance of the hashtag and its group function.

Contrary to the expressions of opposition encountered by the hashtag, the ability to build and form online coalitions and express statements of solidarity extend theoretical arguments of agency construction through the use of conjoining different groups of identities into a centralized location moving through language to push an agenda through different channels and across demographics. This is important to the offline maneuvering of real life societal changes because it expresses the notion of multi issued problems highlighted through an umbrella of events experienced through one standpoint. The fluidity of the language expressed through this subcategory emphasizes the importance of the language within the hashtag because the act of posting becomes a statement within the language already at use. The use of this language through the hashtag creates and applies this online space as a place to contend the value of a movement while being inclusive to an overall critique of the societal factors at play. Although this inclusivity is foundational to the movement's success, the hashtag exists and operates through one experience while allowing statements of solidarity and coalition to add to the movement's dialogue.

4.1.3 The use of a hashtag to promote action.

Through Twitter, users communicating not only used the platform to participate in the dialogue revolving around the events taking place, but they were granted with opportunities to

influence offline actions. As previously discussed, the ability to use Twitter as a platform to organize offline actions is not new to the academic literature. However, what makes the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag significantly different to other hashtags previously studied is how the hashtag was used as a means of organizing action in communities in and out of those directly affected by the events. Crucial to the communal identities argued, this action on and offline promote change while simultaneously further promoting the critique of the state. Furthermore, the use of the hashtag within the action subsection lends itself to understanding that the language in this category promotes not just information regarding offline actions, but also agentic measures used to promote a change on a larger societal level. For example, user @rousseau_ist tweets, "Stop #policebrutality March in DC, 7pm EDT Tonight [event posting] @NBUF @ColorofChange #BlackLivesMatter #DCFerguson #Ferguson" (2014, August 30). This specific language is a crucial element to the action subsection because it uses the hashtag as a means to promote offline actions imperative to the end goal of the movement.

Similarly, the action subsection is important because users attempting to create or extend an offline community use the hashtag as a means of making important connections in physical spaces for the promotion of the hashtag's movement. For example, user @_BiggerThanYou tweets, "Will you be here today? #Atlanta #Ferguson #MikeBrown #BlackLivesMatter #NAN #ITSBIGGERTHANYOU COME TO THE MEETING" (2015, April 21). The multi level approach to communal action (promotion and connection) in this subjection offers a critical lens at understanding the multiple functions available to the users who not only participate in online discussions, but who are using it to promote a change offline. This use of language implicates the hashtag and the platform as more than expressions of the community building noted above, but it also extends the language used as a way to express motivated language with specific intentions.

Through the hashtag, organizing and creating physical community activities to promote a demonstration or critique of the status quo is to refer to the agentic measures of using a mediated centralized location for discussion. Because users are actively engaging the societal structures outside of the online architecture, users are negotiating their own capabilities to act in a means, online or offline, to engage in a possibility for change. These organized events, shared through the hashtag, engage other users as a means of exchanging messages and dialogues about the status quo through community action(s). As observed, the language within the hashtag used for this purpose implicates that the organizational structure online implements itself to offline actions through a mediated means of promoting its events and agenda. For example, @NAACP_IU tweets, "Tomorrow!! Fri. 8/15 from 1-2PM EST #NAACPYC will be hosting a Twitter town hall use the hashtags #BlackLivesMatter #imatter Join us!" (2014, August 14). Although the promotion of these events exists through the hashtag, the promotions of the actions are contingent upon the communal constructions on and offline. These communal constructions contribute to the agentic properties through the ability to enact and occupy physical spaces for the purpose of the movement and its political effects.

Furthermore, physical presence, which is crucial in being able to judge the overall social movement's success, creates a politicization of spaces in which the language occupies as a space for action. This politicization of space is central to the hashtag's significance because it materializes through the language and through the communal action necessary for the movement's purpose. For example, user @aejohnsonphd tweets, "I am on my way. #BlackLivesMatter #Ferguson #FergusonFiasco" (2014, August 29). The use of the hashtag operationalizes the mediated space because it maneuvers the language through promotion within the community and into a space of politicization that engages the necessary structures focalizing

the effects of political activity. From promoting a mediated town hall, to promoting and

encouraging a physical presence for an event, the overall structure of the language use on Twitter

through the hashtag connects communal support between purpose and politicization.

Without this communal support, the mediated space for the movement's overall intent

becomes a contested area in which the language falls into a normal action. However, the

examples provided here are significant to the construction of the community's agency because

the language and the use of the hashtag links the spaces as political and crucial to the long term

effects of the movement. As a means of sharing these events through the communal channels

because of the use of the hashtag, the language operationalizes itself to a certain context for

viewers and receivers of the message with implications already present for the receiver without

participation in the dialogue. Ultimately, the subcategory action is vital to the communal theme

because it recognizes that the community is accountable for the outcomes of these events. While

being advantageous and involving the online community to share and promote these events for

the larger implications at hand, that hashtag's centralizing nature reinforces the importance of the

communal creation and its effectiveness to produce larger outcomes.

4.1.4 Shared mediated perspectives from physical locations.

The members participating in physical activism not only relied on Twitter as a means of

dispensing communal identities, but they further extended the platform to share their own

viewpoints from the ground. This means of expression is central to this research because it not

only extends on previous academic literature that has noted this advantage of Twitter during

social movements, but it also becomes the lens through which researchers can understand how

the platform creates an avenue of expression to which the individual user becomes an individual

channel to share the various aspects of the events taking place. More than a means of sharing

actions and news like reporting, the platform through this hashtag has become a place at which the act of sharing the information aides in the construction of the communal identity, community actions, and communal sharing of both the identity and the action taking place.

This subsection exists as a means to seek understanding in how the users used the platform in a way to share to other users, through the hashtag, the occurrences taking place and being able to share the situation on the ground. This two part lens of users on the ground who were physically present at the various sites during the events is important because it sets the individual user as an expression and embodiment of the hashtag's movement and its effects offline. This individual expression not only becomes agentic through the ability to become a pseudo platform for the events, but it becomes agentic through the hashtag's ability to share sentiments and information from actual occurrences to other users through the centralized location. As expressed by @tdudleypdx, "Mood is somber as folks walk into the March area. #BlackLivesMatter #BLMRain" (2014, August 30) that portrays a visual of the sentiments at a given time. Moreover, because the ability to share the act and message is contingent upon the presence of the platform, the platform, and the hashtag, extend the opportunity for discursive activity that can act as an object of juxtaposition to that of what may and may not be reported via traditional media outlets. This presentation by @tdudleypdx highlights the possibility for juxtaposition because the tweet offers an image contradictory to many of the images provided by the traditional media outlets.

Additionally, through the platform and through the hashtag, the ability given to a user to share the status of the movement on the ground operationalizes the hashtag as a means of displaying updates crucial to the overall well-being of the community involved. Although the individuals on the ground are considered facets of the overall community, the updates provided

by these individuals to the online community not only display real time updates on the overall

activities happening at any particular given moment, but the users on the ground become a means

through which online users can actively engage in the activities as well. For example, user

@GlobalRevLive notes that, "#Ferguson #BlackLivesMatter March so many people 3g reception

barely working just @ArgusRadio has a consistent stream for now" (2014, August 30)

presenting other members with the opportunity to access a working live stream during the events

taking place. Although, by definition, the sharing of this material through Twitter is social and is

through a computer mediated platform, the action of using Twitter for this purpose extends

notions of community through and by the computer mediated platform through which both

online and offline communities are able to view real time updates in respect to the overall

movement's actions.

To present a more personal side of the actions taking place away from the traditional

media outlets, the platform suffices as a community soundboard available to users who chose to

participate via the platform in order to engage the movement. This engagement is effective not

only from a personal perspective, but through the communal channels operating through the

continuation of the hashtag's use to perpetuate the communal activities on the ground. For

example, user @EjimDike tweets, "Sybrina Fulton, mother of #trayvonmartin & Uncle Bobby,

uncle of Oscar Grant came to support. #BlackLivesMatter" (2015, April 22). The presentations

of interactions on the ground to the users not physically present point to a communal structure

within the platform and effects the ways in which the individual users on the ground report the

message to those not present. As the example indicates, individual channels function not only to

highlight sections of the community, but they reinforce the communal notions to perpetuate the

significance of actions on the ground to members of a mediated community who rely on the

community members physically present.

As present academic literature contends, the ability to present real time news via the Twitter platform is one of the largest advantages modern social movements can capitalize on. The ability to report to a mediated communal like structure operationalizes individual users as channels crucial to the distribution of member affairs on the ground, especially if an audience member cannot physically contribute to the movement due to a variety of circumstances. Moreover, the ability to facilitate and congregate online has effects offline because the act of posting moves beyond simple sharing and operates as a poster board of communal activities available for other members to see and interact with. As the members on the ground do operate in news reporting fashion, the noted agentic difference here implicates that the communal structure is imperatively reliant on the online platform to function through its messages, imagery and apparatus. The communal identities physically present at an event are not only reiterating messages to the community online, but the community online exists through the integration of both physical and online presence for the purpose of the hashtag itself.

4.2 #BlackLivesMatter as a Personal Experience

As an aspect of social media use, users who decide to share information may not only chose to share information about a social event like that of Mike Brown and Freddie Gray, but they may also use social media to share personal aspects about their life. Koopmans and Olzak (2004) illustrate that the resonance of dialogue within a larger social context must happen in order for the message of the movement to provoke reactions from other actors in the public sphere. A specific tenant of this resonance as presented by Koopmans and Olzak assert that, "resonance occurs when the message has become more relevant and the actors articulating the message seem more prominent" (2004, p. 204). Unlike the personal messages that are posted

relatively unrelated to events taking place, there are moments were the two aspects meet and collide in the context of social situations. In the case of this study, personal postings are important to the research because they suggest not only an emotional involvement to the aforementioned communal aspect of the events, but the users create an area of investigation that associate and blend both personal emotions and sentiments to events while contributing to the larger discussion taking place.

The common ground created by the use of the hashtag not only removes Twitter as a platform of just real time news sharing information about an event, but to a place where users, through the hashtag, implicate a communal aspect to express personal sentiments to the dialogue taking place. It is this intersection of messages that opens understanding into how emotional and personal attachment to the movement effect the messages and image references on the ground. These rhetorically driven posts are crucial in understanding how the movement motivated to disrupt the status quo enacts the language of users as means of being able to create personal and emotional sentiments with a purpose outside of normal sharing habits. The postings that comprise this section suffice because they contain both the user emotional sentiment and an identifiable relationship affirmation to the hashtag and to the movement through participation. Via the use of either a reference to a personal body or a reference to the overall bodies of the movement's hashtag, the users create reference points to the image of the movement. For example, user @BrownMediaMama tweets, "I'll be damned if my black boy has to live in fear of the people who are supposed to protect him #Ferguson #BlackLivesMatter" (2014, August 30). Here, this is important because the hashtag's reference to the Black body implicates that other Black bodies carry significance to the purpose of the movement and to the critique of the treatment of those bodies.

In order to properly examine this category, it is fundamental to situate this section of the analysis as a means of exploring personal involvement (emotional or physical) to the social movement via a mediated platform where user participation is subjected to limits via physical space and time. User @iCurve_Daily highlights this personal attachment via language use by stating, "Unapologetically Black. #BlackLivesMatter" (2014, August 20). These personal sharing habits are important to the research because the sharing of these posts create an opportunity to understand how the language used in these situations motivate the use of the body (and its references) as a rhetorical object for social movement purposes as well. Although many of the postings used images of the body to display a message, language also alluding to the body is an important consideration to this subcategory because it emphasizes the importance of the hashtag's use, and the language around it to make a statement about the purpose of the hashtag and the movement itself.

Given that the users are able to make these references to the body and to the emotions at that time, linguistic emphasis on real body references and emotions are distributed via channels outside of the traditional media outlets' often subjective and biased imagery and portrayals. It creates an avenue available to users to be actively involved in creating, dispersing, and influencing the messages of a movement from the online perspective given to them. The agency suggests that the references made operate as the individual user's ability to identify, via references to the body and sentiment of the movement, to the scope of the message perpetuated by the movement's purpose. As @ZahavaMoon remarks, "They don't really see us. #BlackLivesMatter" (2015, April 23)." These references to the body articulate perspective experiences that are able to be voiced because of Twitter. By posting within the context of the hashtag, the reference to the body the context of a specific social experience. These bodily

references exercise agency by portraying the individual as the politicization of the movement, therefore enacting visual and emotional cues for the receiver that operate through the language of the hashtag and the language within the hashtag.

4.2.1 Cathartic expressions surrounding the hashtag.

As a platform, Twitter presents users with the ability to be expressive in a variety of ways regarding any social event. Although a number of posts can be interpreted in many ways, cathartic expression as an umbrella term for this subcategory is sufficient because it suggests that both the ability to express oneself through the hashtag and through the use of emotion not only connects a user, but it refers to a user's ability to participate in the expression of frustration, anger, sadness, or jubilation of a moment within the movement. Expressions of emotion suggests that a user has the capability to participate in the dialogue through the expressions important to them and to a community experiencing the complications of the status quo. As user @cosmicjourneeyy states, "I am so sad. I feel like every where [sic] I go #BlackLivesMatter is a statement that needs to be proven. Can we live?" (2015, April 20). This example enhances this point because it subjects Twitter as a platform for the voice of the dissent through emotion. As an individual user subjects the platform as a personal space for the expression of emotions, Twitter and the hashtag exists to enhance the overall communal space through the general support and expressive emotions that are commonplace to other supportive bodies and entities that exist offline experiencing similar circumstances.

As the community used Twitter as a platform to subject itself as an emotional outlet, the tweets that were posted to Twitter during this time not only contained elements of the communal support, but they were also emotionally expressive in a way that subjected the posts to be supportive. To subject certain aspects of tweets to a category of this nature is to suggest that not

only does the natural reaction of a moment that inspires social unrest contain emotion, but that the emotion felt became an aspect of the posts and the offline actions. The interconnection between the two is important because it offers the subcategory itself as a means of understanding not only how the platform was used by the individuals participating in the dialogue, but as a way to delve into how the emotional expressions used combine to effect the overall movement in terms of how it chooses to present itself through a medium. User @curvyslim's tweet stating, "We can only take SO much!!!!! #BlackLivesMatter" (2014, August 17) pinpoints the personal expression of emotion via an individual user because it provides the space to use the emotion not as a singular outlier to a reaction of societal activity, but that the emotion becomes a motive to induce and expect change or to motivate the involvement of others into the movement. Since the personal emotion becomes an aspect of expression through the hashtag itself, the language and its agentic capabilities present the movement via a mediated platform as an entity to which real life infrastructures carry real life effects and influence real life emotions.

To examine the tweets in this subcategory is to examine tweets of expression across the scope of possible feelings at a given present time. As an expressive platform that gives itself to the individual user, the user not only participates in important dialogue, but is able to express their frustrations to the end means of the movement allowing the hashtag to become a centralized location of the emotional sentiments for members of the movement. Furthermore, as a platform of expression, the emotional sentiments contained not only apply mediated pressure for a societal change in the outlook of the movement's purpose, but it perpetuates the emotional sentiment of a community who chooses to use the platform as a means of disdain and frustration towards the status quo. As illustrated by @GabeLMat "We were told to reflect after #TrayvonMartin. No we're basically being told to calm down as if our rage isn't justified #BlackLivesMatter" (2014,

August 18) the frustration towards the social forces are critical to the platform's use during the course of the social movement. Given that the platform itself provides the space for the dialogue to take place, the user extends the platform as a mediated space to underscore the experience of the social standpoint. This ability to make connections to the experiences of social standpoints reinforces the notion that the social movement's purpose is an illustration of a greater experience in an attempt to promote individual actions for the purpose of the movement.

The nature of this critique of the status quo implicates that the discursive opportunities not only contain opportunities of simple expression, but it creates a form of expression that exists in ways not normally predicated upon through formal infrastructural opportunities. The vocal opportunities present through Twitter are imperative to the overall implementation of the societal goals that the movement inspires because it facilitates a place where expressions generate dialogue representative of the community's discourse through the social movement. Although not every member or individual participating may choose emotional expression for a particular view, emotion, like that noted here, creates the opportunity for members to enhance the communal infrastructure of support. The tweet by user @liz_hawksworth highlight this by stating, "The other one." Too many other ones. #BlackLivesMatter (2015, April 22) asserting the language and the hashtag are representative of why the movement's purpose creates emotional experiences. This facet of expression via the platform is critical to the agentic argument because it provides a rhetorically motivated mediated action in order to compensate for users who are unable to participate in the dialogue otherwise.

4.2.2 #BlackLivesMatter through Black perspectives.

Through the hashtag itself, the notion that the Black bodies present within the societal structure today deserve to experience life without the institutional violence it has historically

suffered is an important message that perpetuates the movement's intent. Along with being able to express emotional sentiments as reactions to institutional injustices, the individual users who chose to participate in the dialogue also chose to discuss the importance of their physical bodies as a means of constructing an argument for the need of the hashtag. Although, as seen throughout examples for the analysis, the notion that a hashtag must exist to create this message is often met with language that expresses frustration for the need of the hashtag itself. However, the ability to reference the body experiencing this subjugation is important because it not only personifies the hashtag through an individual, but it also allows users to acknowledge that the body references provide a meaningful way to display how the infrastructural systems at work create the need for the hashtag. As exemplified by user @sarahadebibe: "Life just can't go on like "business as usual." Not when my Black brothers & sisters are being murdered indiscriminately #BlackLivesMatter" (2014, August 18) the language illuminates this argument by noting that Black bodies are the experiencers of this subjugation while personifying the need of the movement. The use of the body references also create a way to display personal perspectives otherwise not present to other members of the movement while being able to express the ways in which their bodies experience life in the current societal structure.

Overall, these references are important because it creates an opportunity to establish a dialogue of personal experience through the hashtag to not only share common experiences, but to display how these particular individuals react to an event that personifies the infrastructural injustices according to the experiences of that community. By using the body, users manufacture a space that they can occupy from a personal perspective through a mediated platform. This space works exclusively through the occupation of the mediated space via the hashtag by highlighting the Black body experience for the movement. For example, user @FreshcutMo

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tweets, "Being black is trying to remind the rest of the world that your humanity is worth just as much. #BlackLivesMatter" (2015, April 22) observing that the language and the hashtag's specific reference to one type of body occupies a space that contends that one type of body experiences life in society different than other types of bodies. This notion of creating a space for a specific type of body is important because it allows for members who do not share that identifiable quality to view into how the status quo creates the injustices that are experienced by Black bodies, thus implementing possible avenues for solidarity and coalitional building as argued earlier.

This language is indicative to the movement because it suggests that a movement for a specific type of body needs a way to create the allegiance and coalitions of others groups for the purpose of their movement. Moreover, this language and reference to a specific type of body is important because it creates agentic references to the ways in which a specific body type experiences their life while creating the discursive opportunities necessary for a change. As specified by user @soberealestate: "Please, for the love of god, stop killing and torturing black men. Police officers must be held accountable & prosecuted. #BlackLivesMatter" (2015, April 20), the language exemplifies the experience of the Black body while expressing the need for societal change important to the community involved. Although much dissent and discussion arose from such a specific reference to a specific body type (which was later met with the creation of opposing hashtags), the language referencing the body manifests itself to create visibility to that specific body type otherwise negated through historical infrastructural subjugations perpetuated through problematic media diffusion. As noted by user @CMartinezClass: "Black bodies, even docile, are always perceived as a threat. And authority is always white." –R. Johnson #BlackLivesMatter @SLCDiversity" (2015, September 24) the

Black bodies and their presence are articulated to be the receivers of this subjugation that creates and occupies a space for discussion around the experiences of those involved.

The effort to focus on a particular body type becomes agentic because it not only projects the experiences of one body, but it also alludes to the ability to express the ways in which that particular body feels while indicating personal effects the societal infrastructure has on that body. Furthermore, the choice to use the body as a reference point for the purpose of the movement not only forces the language to focus on a specific identity, but it creates a centralized focus for the movement to express the importance of that particular body. This is illuminated by user @TIWright_16 who tweets, "You honestly expect us to get over your constant mocking of the deaths of our black children, sisters, and brothers? No. #BlackLivesMatter" (2014, August 31) incorporating the personal effects of that body while creating focus on the movement's importance to that body on a societal level. Here, the importance lies in the ability to create a focus of language specific to a body type therefore creating a dialogue around specific experiences that are foreign to those outside of that body type. Although these continual bodily references are common, they operate to different end means by using the reference to either create a place for the discussions revolving a specific body, to highlight the subjugation of the experiences of that body, to create coalitional opportunities, and to display effective change for the benefit of that body.

This perspective of personal experiences through a shared community creates a place to discuss and dispense how these experiences must be taken into account in the larger structure of society. This window of opportunity to discuss and critique the status quo creates a moment of agency not only through a platform, but through the ability to contradict, discern, and frame messages through discursive opportunities important to an individual and to the group as a

whole. The applications within this subcategory are important not only because of the use of the hashtag, but the tweets also leads research into deconstructing how the hashtag itself facilitates the language necessary to extend agency. Agency through a personified reference here notes that the experience of Black bodies remains consistent to the experiences of those who are subjects of the societal infrastructures. The personification of the platform is important because it notes that the communal aspects of the online platform resonate and exist not just through the events of two highly publicized events, but through experiences common enough to suffice as a thematic category.

4.3 Critique through Mediated Commentary and Action

As a means of voice and contingent agency construction, Twitter is critical in not only being able to build a community and use it to a movement's advantage, but is also important in giving activists a platform to critique and frame certain messages in a way that presents an alternative to the traditional media structure. Cammaerts (2012) uses the term 'mediation opportunity structure," which builds off of discursive opportunities structures, and is defined as the "extent to which movements are able to get their message across media….measuring the degree of cultural influence in the public sphere" (p. 119). Though the platform that presents itself is a viable enough place to create a dialogue in what can become a place to debate and explore possibilities for social change, the hashtag presents itself as a place to critique the status quo while attempting to enact suitable societal changes propagated from within the community. Though not necessarily intended for the politicization of societal commentary, Twitter's platform intercepts media outlet structures, personal societal perspectives, and discursive opportunity structures unlike that available to those who are not actively involved within traditional media outlets. Furthermore, the ability to provide a platform for critique not only incites research

inquiries into how successful influential voices can arise out of the platform, but it can also draw inquiries into how these voices from within can determine an overall successful outcome and apply it to the world outside of the platform.

Although this research does not extend enough over time in order to see the end result of whether real world outcomes manifest out of #BlackLivesMatter, the organization currently has gone so far as to meet with current candidates in the United States for the 2016 presidential election. However, in the noted time frame, research is capable of investigating how the language used through the platform and the hashtag creates a pseudo manifesto where researchers can understand what kind of language was used in the aspirational attempts to create a real world frame for discussion and expected societal changes with real world impacts. Although the manifestations of societal change are ultimately determined by the very infrastructures that activists from within and outside of the communal structure are engaging via mediated or physical forms of protest, the influential possibilities from the community can be taken into account through discursive positioning. Without the ability to participate in the discussion, in non-mediated or mediated forms, is to suggest that access to the platform is futile. However, in order to examine the effectiveness of the specific language used here, this subsection, broken down into two groups (critical reporting and critical debate) allows the research to extend arguments into how the discursive opportunity presented through the platform creates a linguistic motivated force behind any institutional changes that may present themselves.

Currently, some institutional changes that have come from the physical and mediated protests have included pressuring police departments into having their officers wear body cameras to record interactions between officers and citizens. Although this change has been accepted by some as a small victory coming from activists, there have been debates as to the

effectiveness of these cameras in the overall prosecution of individuals involved. However, what remains to be seen is whether or not political pressure from activists can force police departments to take a more fundamental look at training methods, force current legislative bodies to review public policy that policies communities of color more stringently than others, and governmental institutions to better regulate troubled encounters that occur between police institutions and civilians. Although these discussions exist outside of this research, the mentioning of these discussions is important to this section because it highlights the ways in which the discursive opportunities allows a communal block to participate in the dialogue for a greater selection of outcomes.

As noted below, the language used through the hashtag for this particular section of the analysis was categorized into understanding how users focused on using the platform as a means to create a discussion through the critiquing of the status quo. The ability to critique while using Twitter as a real time news reporting function creates a set of language that negotiates the mediated space as a space to debate important topics, and as a place to discuss expectations on how to change the current situation. Ultimately, a review from this use of language with examples that personify the use of the platform with these intentions creates a way to understand not only how the politicization of this mediated space can be used for societal outcomes, but also how the platform through its architecture facilitates a space of political enfranchisement with influence to reach potential political presidential candidates.

4.3.1 News reporting through a critical lens.

As means of news-like reporting, Twitter as a platform not only presents users with the ability to share news and reports coming out of the traditional media structure, but also the ability to take the work and language of traditional news outlets used to frame situations, share it

through their own channels, and use the platform's infrastructure to be able to critique the language chosen by the media. Due to this interaction present within the platform, this ability to directly create a critique not only serves as a means of creating agency through the platform, but it gives users the ability to create a dialogue that brings light to the contradictions present within the traditional media structures. For example, user @Progress4Ohio shares an article stating, "Cleveland PD murders unarmed Black couple, firing 137 shots [link to article] #CLEVELAND #RACISM #BlackLivesMatter" (2015, April 22) to not only share a news article that depicts the incident of a police encounter, but uses Twitter as a means to apply a critique meaningful to the hashtag's community. This interaction between critiquing the established media structure while being able to report items of concerns to the movement through an infrastructure already focused on a purpose is not only imperative to the movement's success, but it creates agentic properties by allowing users engaging in this discussion and the space to deconstruct and confront narratives present within the media. Another example of this is shown by user @DreQJones who shares, "AND ANOTHER: Savannah Police Shoot and Kill Handcuffed #CharlesSmith #BlackLivesMatter [link to news article]" (2015, April 29) as a means of sharing an article critical to the movement's purpose while contextualizing the tweet as a critique.

Furthermore, the entanglement of traditional media structures using Twitter as a platform for their own purpose convolutes the research because it implicates that when a user choses to critique an established member of the media, it not only figuratively challenges a structure of real world society, but the user linguistically chooses to challenge any problematic inconsistencies within the language perpetuated by the media. This interaction presented by the platform is important because it creates the interpersonal interactions presented by social media normally recognized through person to person communication and converts that to a direct interaction

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between an individual and an architectural infrastructure. User @kragtbakker creates this interaction by posting a link to an article originally posted by a news outlet that shares footage of an incident between a police officer and a civilian tweeting, "No charges? Did they watch the video #BlackLivesMatter [link to article]" (2015, April 25). To suggest that an interaction between an individual and a societal infrastructure via a mediated platform creates immediate and noticeable changes is to oversimplify and exaggerate the possibilities presented through internet interactions. However, this critical form of creating an opposite means of framing while confronting the language present in an article is a prime example of how the platform's use creates a secondary means of transmitting messages for the community.

Users participating in this critical reporting are important to the analysis because the postings of this type also exist for the diffusion of different perspectives not present within the current media architectural infrastructure present. An extension of this critical reporting exists when a user has the ability to share content of an incident taking place at a physical protest site. For example, during the protest clashes between civilians and police in Ferguson, users used Twitter as a means of sharing their own perspectives of the events taking place. As user @jonswaine shared, "Just saw teargas land right at the feet of Al-Jazeera America camera crew. They say they were also shot at #BlackLivesMatter #Ferguson" (2014, August 13) indicating that although the media was present at the protest site, the platform existed as its own news reporting platform as well. Moreover, as the situation between civilians and police escalated, the hashtag and the platform became a place at which demonstrators united to share helpful information regarding safety and precautionary measures. For example, @TallyAnnaE notes, "People in #Gaza are tweeting information on how to handle tear gas for the citizens of #Ferguson. #BlackLivesMatter" (2014, August 13) using the hashtag and the platform as a place to

incorporate important critical information for others who needed the information.

This ability to provide news like functions critical to the community on the ground occupies this mediated space as a place for contradiction and the presentation of other narratives imperative to the social movement's purpose. Additionally, it also serves as a place to solidify the distance between the narratives perpetuated by the media and the personal experiences that one might not otherwise encounter or have the ability to share. This ability to share the perspective is highlighted by the user @davepell who tweets, "Lesson One: Don't abuse reporters if you don't want a story to spread. Lesson Two: Everyone is a reporter #BlackLivesMatter (2014, August 24). This approach to news reporting becomes agentic because it operationalizes how one provides an alternative approach to the worldview through the hashtag. The ability to present opposing narratives is not only important because it provides a different reality than what is being shared, but it becomes agentic to the community because it serves as the information being consumed by users of the platform. This intake of opposing information is crucial to the movement's purpose because it creates boundaries in the narratives served in order to highlight the differences between experiencers.

The lack of formal gatekeeping, at least the gatekeeping experience that is present in formal traditional media outlets, allows users to critique, share, and report media that better represents a reality through the platform. Critiquing real world structures and providing critiques of traditional media function not only as part of the platform's advantages, but they highlight how the platform itself provides a unique opportunity to dispense information crucial to a critical lens of current structures. Furthermore, the platform provides a means of critiquing structures influential to those situated outside the communal standpoint. For example, user @kirin_rosemary tweets, "No media. No entry into the city. State in emergency. Young people

being gunned down. Tanks brought in. #Ferguson #blacklivesmatter" (2014, August 26) to highlight not only the critique of the actions of the state, but also to provide a purposeful critique for the movement's message at that time. More than logistical purposes, this fashion of news like reporting exists as a means of critiquing both the language being distributed by traditional media structures, as well as on the ground reporting that provides an alternative presentation more in tune with what the community was experiencing.

4.3.2 A space for mediated debate.

As the critique of the status quo is important to the user's ability to voice their own opinions, another advantage that arises out of the ability to critique is the ability to create and detect topics that need discussion. Although this particular subsection solicits mediated debate, it is an umbrella term used to identify topics highlighted by the users of the hashtag deemed of important significance that alludes to the need for legislative or social changes imperative to the overall movement's motives. Similarly, this subjection aims to highlight how the societal debate and discussion on a large, real world scale must take place in order to alleviate some of the real world infrastructural harms taking place. Though these particular set of tweets do not necessarily promote a specific cure to the experiences of a community, the posts highlighted here subject the ability given by the platform to create a town hall effect on how existing social forces must be changed or addressed in order for the existing perspectives and experiences to change. This sentiment, as shown by user @ElsnerLily points the discussion towards critically addressing the need for a discussion around the movement. By tweeting, "We need to live up to our founding tenets. This should be the land of the free. #BlackLivesMatter" (2014, August 17), this user negotiates not only rhetorically driven language recognized by the larger social group, but focuses on the differences between experiences linked between the social factors at large and the

community experiencing those differences. The discursive opportunities that exists in this form contextualizes the personal experiences noted in the critical review portion of this analysis while extending to the communal experiences highlighted in the community section as a way of merging the functions of the platform in an agentic manner for the movement.

These intertwined sections of the analysis, contingent upon the ability to participate in the discussion, point to the platform's ability to not only present an opportunity to participate in the discussion about a community, but to participate in the discussion through a centralized locative space for the shared experiences of a community. Conversely, however, to suggest that an entire mediated or real world community wholly agrees on an end means of necessary changes to improve on the personal experiences is it to oversimplify the necessary process of the social movement itself. However, it does not negate the ability to participate in the dialogue for the individual user. Moreover, the opportunity to bring topics of discussion forward through the mediated platform not only creates avenues of access to disenfranchised members of the community with access to the platform, but it furthers the ability to identify problematic areas of social actors as a means of focusing on how these actors create separation from the movement. For example, user @coyahope tweets, "Pres. Obama asking for peace in #ferguson when the Grand Jury announces. Why isn't he asking for Justice? #MikeBrown #BlackLivesMatter" (2014, August 31). Though the tweet is unlikely to garner a response from President Barack Obama, this tweet exemplifies the ability to create discussions by the community about the course of action taken by social actors.

Secondly, critical debate is important to the analysis because it situates the experience of political activity into the hands of the individual user. Through the noted subsections of the personal theme above, an individual user with access to the platform not only has the capability

to share an experience of their own or contribute to that dialogue, but an individual user may now politicize those experiences in a manner that contradicts and even conflicts with notable, well established agreed upon social norms. To present an alternative to those accepted ideographs is not only to create a place of contradiction through the presentation of a second reality, but it is to present and secure a place in which these alternatives and presentations of a second reality gain considerable traction through a mediated platform that has potential effects on the real world social forces. Through a tweet by user @AwakeBlackWoman who states, "They system isn't broken. It's working the way it's SUPPOSED to work. #RekiaBoyd #StayWoke #BlackLivesMatter #ShutItDown (2015, April 20) the language serves as a presentation that contradicts the perceived reality of individuals living in the United States. Furthermore, user @Chicago_iso contends that, "Cops play judge, jury and executioner when black & brown lives are at stake. And the legal system condones it." #RekiaBoyd #BlackLivesMatter" (2015, April 20) and creates a narrative against the effectiveness of the judicial system. The agentic properties behind postings like this serve as a means to use the platform to occupy a space for critical and necessary debate perpetuated by the community around the hashtag.

Through a formal real world representation, the #BlackLivesMatter movement's ability to create these debates online implicate the mediated space as a place for that dialogue through the platform while holding the online presence as a tenet of that dialogue important for the purpose of discussion and debate. Although end outcomes exist outside of the mediated platform, it is the language used via the platform and the hashtag that exemplifies discursive opportunities for critical reviews of the status quo. In order to create possible end results necessary for the movement's goals, users also use the platform to discuss how these changes can be experienced

through the infrastructures it encounters. For example, user @swinnubst tweets, "Reporters must ask the 2016 presidential candidates about the recent killings of unarmed Black people by police. #BlackLivesMatter" (2015, April 15) as a means of not only highlighting the importance behind necessary change, but also a means of using the platform in order to address how participation in political discussions via Twitter can impact the traditional structures once unavailable to the ordinary individual. The intrinsically woven aspects of interaction refer to how linguistic behaviors online shape the language of discontent that carry real world implications of everyday experiences. However, it is through the mediated platform and its ability to concentrate language that gives the user's ability to carry out these discussions and critiques on how personal experiences shape their world view.

As the posts and tweets about the events continued to be sent out, users participating in the dialogue through the platform continued to be the operational character of the platform's influence outside of the traditional media structures. Although a sole user may not reach or achieve leadership status in the movement, the indication of community driven identity sustains the ability of participation to the platform dialogue driving the dialogue forward through individual users with applications useful outside of those presented by the traditional media outlets. Through the sections noted in this chapter, the platform that is Twitter is important to social movements and group identities because it allows the users to create an avenue of control while facilitating avenues of participation crucial to the overall movement's language. Although language coming from individual users is not subject to a review process, language by the users is important to the discussion because it implicates discursive opportunities into the hands of those previously out of range through physical boundaries.

Through communal building systems operating through the hashtag on Twitter, the

#BlackLivesMatter movement developed linguistic mediated tendencies that were advantageous to their purpose. By using Twitter, users participating in the dialogue relied on the ability to frame messages of support in order to develop and use the community to enhance their presence. Secondly, the hashtag's ability to produce and expand on community was utilized in order to build solidarity and coalitions across demographics. Although the hashtag focuses on one specific demographic, the ability to extend coalition and solidarity is critical when considering agency construction for the long term success of the overall movement. In order to produce a social movement proper, the #BlackLivesMatter movement utilized the hashtag as a means of creating and dispersing information regarding physical events in order to physically occupy space. The politicization of these spaces proves to be agentic because it negotiates action for the purpose through a mediated discursive structure. Moreover, the hashtag serves as mediated space in which members on the ground participate in the online dialogue to share and expand viewpoints of the occurrences at physical sights. This sharing strengthens the community because it reaffirms the purpose across physical spaces for other individuals not present.

Additionally, the hashtag, albeit focused on one specific body, is meaningful to the community because it creates and occupies a space in which Black bodies hold importance to the discussion about their experiences. By being able to share cathartic messages to the community, the hashtag not only creates emotional sentiments, but it links those emotional sentiments to the experiences of the Black bodies. These links are agentic because they offer other users to access the experiences that are otherwise unavailable to them. Furthermore, the hashtag serves a purpose in being able to critique social actors and infrastructures while prompting discussions and debates through the mediated space. Ultimately, this area of critique and debate is crucial to the argument because it enfranchises political discussion for members of society outside of the

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traditional access points to critique and debate. Albeit a mediated platform, this discursive

opportunity suffices in this discussion because it implements political activity from the

individual user by way of the platform that contributes to the discussion for the movement's

purpose.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 A Review

In the first chapter of this research project, it was explained how social media sites have become not only an important academic topic for researchers, but an important social factor that holds serious social and cultural weight. As social media sites intersect and intertwine with traditional media outlets, they have now become an identifiable source in further understanding how Twitter has become a place for dialogue, discussion, and community like building apparatuses that influence the world around it within its own capacity. As noted, current social media research endeavors no longer only seek to understand how architectural implications of the website affect the users, but instead, research is now attempting to understand how social media creates concrete implications for the ways in which they can operationalize the user, their surroundings from within the sites, and a presentation of the self in ways not previously understood. Furthermore, as research continues to grow in publication, a push towards understanding real world effects through social media have also implicated spaces that allow for the critique of advertising, gaining and moving capital, and status quo worldviews exist in the online world. These trends not only push research forward across multiple fields, but it is important that the field of communication understand how these online spaces interact with the world around them in similar ways that the field previously researched other mass media. Although the time frame of social media research and the speed at which social media information flows exists on two different levels, understanding the impacts that social media have on its users opens windows to understanding how social groups and discursive opportunities present within the online worlds creates social capital and social networks crucial

to their own personal survival while attempting to make a stand in the real world. Social media's continual integration into the real world implicates that the world in which exists offline can change, through various outlets, because of the ways in which social groups and communities form online.

Chapter two provided crucial literature as a viewpoint to understanding current academic literature and its place in the discussion while also providing critical theoretical literature in an attempt to situate this research project as an extension of foundational communication theory. The literature review served not only as a means of situating this particular research in the discussion amongst other current social media literature, but it also used foundational communication theory and critical cultural studies as a means of attempting to understand how social media interacts with its user beyond basic end means architectural and functional designs provided by a specific social media site. Through the current academic literature provided, current themes were discussed highlighting the importance of current users and the various ways in which social media sites are used, identity issues taking place on social media, the importance of hashtags, and how social media sites have been used in the past when discussing particular social movements and events. More notably however, the literature review provided previous discussed arguments about how social media and its use can create implications for arguing on agency creation through its outlets previously not discussed in academic. Although the literature review does provide means of understanding previous uses for people involved in social movements and mobilizations, previous literature does not indicate or dissect the ways in which these outlets present the opportunity for discursive opportunities through previously dismissed standpoints in traditional media structures and how the combination of the two provide opportunities for agentic purposes through dialogue and contradiction. Moreover, chapter two

discussed how social media and its uses provide a means to create and move dialogue across the political atmosphere offline in hopes of creating a sufficient enough change through the social opportunities online.

Through the research questions and the analysis that followed, my project contributes to the current academic literature by fixating on the language used by users during a time of social unrest. As current literature seeks to understand identity issues and pragmatism, this endeavor operationalizes Twitter as a means of voice to delve into understanding linguistic capabilities through the platform. Although my research investigates a specific social movement as a case study, it explores the mediated space as a secondary platform available to those outside of traditional media structures and the ways in which the platform is utilized for the social movement. By definition, the social aspects of Twitter contribute to the construction of a community like structure, however, the hashtag's existence and purpose are agentic as such because of how it creates a space specific to the purpose of the movement. Being that Twitter operates to disperse real time news about social events, #BlackLivesMatter extends agentic properties by existing as media consumed to produce communal identities while studying (and later critiquing) larger social factors and actors. The agency construction that makes #BlackLivesMatter different than previous discussions exists solely in part due to the creative content creation that users experienced when discussing via the platform. The discursive opportunity that exists via the platform not only explains how the movement chooses to create an online presence, but it also explains how the movement capitalizes on the presence of the platform for the benefit of the movement.

In chapter four, the analysis described highlighted various common themes within the selected timeframe noted and what those themes highlighted about discursive opportunities.

Among these themes three major themes were prominent among the language used by users. These three themes included community, personal references, and the ability to critique through the social media platform, which situated language usage and dialogue as the means in which users can create infrastructures that not only portray a sense of their reality, but also implicate how these infrastructures can enact change outside of the online world. Through the analysis, it became evident that the themes highlighted by the open coding process were not products of random language use by users operating on the social media site, but that the themes constructed were constructed through a continual use of language and sentiment that holds the members of the community together online. Through this process of dissecting and reviewing the language via Twitter, through the appropriate hashtag and timeframe, this study reveals users to contribute to important social discourse and how online infrastructures not only aide in social movements, but how in this study's case, is crucial to the interactions between members of a community and how it can reach outside of itself through the platform.

5.2 Within the Discussion of Current Research

In conclusion, this research endeavor hopes to add to the present academic literature the importance that social media provides to its users when discussing important social events through the platform. Additionally, this research endeavor hopes to extend the argument that social media platforms do not exist as internet outliers, but are engrained, intertwined, and relevant to communication research when attempting to understand the communicative opportunities that exist within the platform when researching specific events or social topics. In this study, it is evident that Twitter and its users not only use Twitter as a means of logistically situating themselves during a social movement, but that Twitter and its users are advantageous in discussing using the platform to create communities and messages with a purpose while

distributing information and relevant language while critiquing their surroundings. As noted by the discursive opportunity structures theory, this research implicates the space that is social media not only as a place to participate in the discussions of real world events, but also that the discussion on social media has impacts in diffusing messages through the traditional media structures that exist outside of social media. Although formal gatekeeping processes do exist and ultimately impact media coverage and messages that exist in traditional media outlets, the lack of official gatekeeping that exists on social media impacts the amount of information about a certain topic that becomes accessible to other users. The accessibility of information is important to the discursive opportunistic structures because it suggests that not only do traditional media outlets and their affiliates have a position or presence concerning a topic, but that members of traditionally disenfranchised communities have access to the discussion in ways not previously mentioned or studied. The opportunity for dialogue noted here situates this study, and its findings, as a means of unraveling the convoluted large amounts of information into a manageable area of communication research that goes beyond one facet research endeavors.

According to the research findings, the three main themes developed and explored within the constraints placed on the research material developed as community, personal, and critique. Ultimately, the communal aspects uncovered and explored influence the overall sentiment of the research, but does not encompass the entirety of social media use during this particular research endeavor. The ability to create a community online is especially crucial to this research because it highlights how discursive opportunity structures online impact a traditionally disenfranchised community within the media. Through this online community, surrounding the use of a hashtag that highlights a section of institutionalized violence, the discursive opportunities that emerge not only implicate how a community can use Twitter logistically during movements on the ground,

but it also notes how communities online can forge networks to discuss important messages and needs of the community during a social movement proper. Furthermore, this communal aspect lends agency to the community by allowing the members participating in the dialogue the opportunity to discuss their own standpoints and reality that subject them to the institutionalized violence experienced as their own. This communal aspect is important through the personal descriptions because it situates personal realities and dialogue otherwise not accessible to others outside of that particular community. This presentation of a reality not otherwise subject to sharing through the traditional media outlets is important because it highlights the versatility of Twitter during social movements when observing not just how it is used, but to what extent it is used for.

Additionally, the ability presented to critique their social surroundings is also important to this research. As the language that is presented by traditional media outlets on Twitter is critiqued by members of the community through Twitter, Twitter's platform extends itself as not just a space to create dialogue, but a space to create dialogue about problematic themes perpetuated by traditional media outlets. Moreover, the ability to critique does not end with media presence on Twitter, but also presents users with the ability to interact with real world structures through Twitter. This critique, through a communal aspect, is important because it not only allows users to create a dialogue about aspects of how to improve social situations from their standpoint, but it creates a critical perspective of how social structures create oppression from real world infrastructures. Moreover, through the Twitter platform, these realities are not only discussed and shared, but the critical aspect of the platform operationalizes the space as a space to discuss and share what it means to experience the institutionalized oppression from a specific community. These aspects of critique are crucial to this research because it extends

agency in discursive opportunities, but also extends agency to platform as a centralized location for the discursive opportunities themselves. Although the platform itself does not exist with agentic properties intrinsically, it is the user and the language that is presented through the user that implicates the space as agentic and with a specific purpose.

These findings are crucial to the argument constructed because it suggests that its agentic purposes are not because of the platform, but because of how the users choose to exhibit agentic properties through the platform. As a contribution to the field of communication research, this study further extends literature on agency construction, language use to develop that agency, and the purposefulness properties that social media can have on its users. As an extension of theoretical communication channels, Carey's (1988) notion of ritualistic communication impact the study by highlighting how Twitter not only creates the transmission of information, but how it creates ritualistic properties to the message to produce, in short, the communal aspects highlighted by the research findings. Furthermore, Grossberg's (2010) notion of critical culture perspectives not only implicate a window of opportunity for research, but also highlight how the platform itself becomes an access point to study the critical aspects of a social moment. As an extension of that critical moment, users who chose to participate in the dialogue also implicate Grossberg's previous work by becoming a voice for how those critical social moments impact the community members involved while being able to discuss how foreseeable changes can impact those subjugated by the critical moment. Although these contributions to the field are intertwined and do not exist mutually exclusive to the one another, they highlight how the field can dissect and deconstruct the uses of social media during a social movement to further understanding of social situations across demographics and through a critical lens. As Trottier and Fuchs (2015) argue, the internet's interaction with real world structures does not mean that

the internet cannot be studied, contrarily, they argue that the internet, through dialogical processes, contain elements crucial to life experiences outside of the internet. This particular study contributes to this by highlighting and analyzing the larger context by deconstructing the power structures at play on Twitter, and how the users choose to interact with those power structures.

As Molaei (2015) notes, new technologies have enabled movement organizations to communicate with local and global networks that allow users to share and exchange ideas, and produce and distribute news and information in a cheaper more affordable way. This research contributes to this point by highlighting how Twitter not only works as a one way mechanism, but as a site of interpersonal activity for the benefit of the individuals involved. The interpersonal aspects provided through the architectural infrastructure highlight the communal aspects and themes explored in the analysis chapter. Though discursive opportunity structures implicate the role of information dissemination to the traditional media outlets, it is the argument in this research that discursive opportunity structures exist because of the platform and the information dissemination exists through the platform. The opportunity for discursive opportunities through the platform not only exists as a place for dialogue, but exists as the place through which dialogue becomes interpersonal, raises awareness, and promotes legislative and offline infrastructural changes. Koopmans and Olzak (2004) use discursive opportunity structures as a means to bridge the gap that is left between political disenfranchisement and framing theories, whereas this research not only extends this by placing social media as the space for discursive opportunity, but argues that this space gives members of an effected community the power to frame, discuss, deconstruct, and distribute a message important to that community. This contribution is important to the field because it argues that the field of communication must

research social media not as a place to which people use, but as a place to understand to what extent it used and for what end goals.

5.3 Limitations and Implications

Initially, this research project highlights (as well as attempts to combat) the limitations of social media research. Most notably, this research experienced limitations through the amount of information available to research. Although specific research limitations were set in order to combat this, it is important to note that the limitations set were set while evaluating specific events, under a specific hashtag. The specific events allowed this research project to explore one social movement, but it is imperative to note that all social movements and social experiences are not experienced the same across the board. Though this research makes arguments surrounding one event, perhaps a research endeavor analyzing two separate events or movements that utilized Twitter would give researchers an interesting take on discrepancies and similarities across demographics, cultural and physical spaces, and, more notably, across different worldviews provided through users living in different countries and state institutionalized censoring of the internet and its platforms. This cross analytical perspective would not only implicate the usage of social media in social movements across spaces, but it would also implicate a better understanding in language use through the power structures across different state infrastructures.

Secondly, a limitation to this study is that of highlighting events notably concerning Black men. Though Michael Brown and Freddie Gray highlight the importance of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, this research does not highlight Black women or Black members of the LGTBQ community who also experienced similar cases of state violence. This is considered a limitation to this study because it does not highlight how (or if) the language surrounding #BlackLivesMatter changes at all and to what extent when individuals are not Black males.

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Additionally, though this study implicates Twitter as a space for discursive opportunity, this study does not unveil the ways in which members of the LGBTQ community use or discuss their experiences online through these events or if experiences of these individuals effects the usage of the hashtag for the social movement's purpose. To explore this limitation is to explore different identity and oppressive mechanisms that effect people of those identities as a means of contributing to their standpoint perspectives through the platform.

Finally, a last limitation to this study exists when access to the internet becomes a matter of privilege. Although the Pew Research (2015) notes that 23% of internet users use Twitter, the lack of access to the internet whether through desktop, laptop or accessible phone device becomes a matter of who has access to the internet through these devices and who does not. This is an important implication because it implies that the discursive opportunities and the standpoints that which are voiced through them are limited insofar as an individual or a community has the ability to highlight their perspective through the access to the internet. Although this study highlights and notes the advantageous perspectives present in the ability to participate in the dialogue, it does not imply that access to the internet or the discursive opportunity is not even across the board, and ultimately, perspectives are left out.

Through conducting this study, it was found that the open coding approach not only suffices as a methodological approach for conducting this research, but that it also creates implications for understanding how open coding can lead to important findings in social media research. Although the limitations discussed effect a larger, more inclusive view of social media usage, this study was able to develop important arguments to the field of communication in an attempt to understand what is being said and how it effects the overall landscape of the social movement. As #BlackLivesMatter moved offline and became a social organization proper with

enough cultural and social influence to effectively meet with presidential candidates of the 2016 campaign, much of the language and discourse dispended by the social movement proper originates from the online discussions through social media outlets like Twitter. As a contribution to the field, this research is important because it highlights that Twitter, social media, and social infrastructures are social aggregates no longer existing outside of each other. I submit this study not only in hopes to further understand the ways in which Twitter is used during social movements, but also in hopes that this study moves the field forward in an ever growing realization that the social media world has real world implications through its own right and its own space and not just as a logistical tool.

5.4 Final Thoughts

Within the realm of social activism, the #BlackLivesMatter movement exists as case worthy of investigation due to the nature of its evolution. Its initial appearance as a hashtag online and into a social organization proper creates the need for research endeavors into understanding how a hashtag becomes an integral part in an upcoming presidential campaign. This study attempts to seek this understanding by observing the language within the hashtag as a means of unraveling linguistic patterns crucial to this evolution and the agency in which the users create because of the hashtag. As Ems (2014) argues, new visible channels available to protestors via social media provides an obvious advantage to modern social movements, however, this research seeks to understand what linguistic patterns are enacted in order to use those visible channels effectively. Due to the fact that Twitter is no stranger to social movement use, this study extends on previous social activism literature by investigating what content control and lack of gatekeeping contributes to the discussion. Moreover, this research attempts to contribute to the understanding of the role Twitter plays in social movements by interpreting the

language used as a motivating factor for participation through the platform. The mediated

community factor noted in this study is crucial to social activism because it creates a way in

which researchers can manage the flow of content as sections similar to social groups in

mediated spaces for specific purposes and in reactions to specific social factors.

These factors relating to social activism are key when discussing mediated agentic

properties. Because users have control of the content created for a specific purpose, users have a

variety of ways in which they can enact linguistic cues to their benefit. Although this is not new

to the academic literature, #BlackLivesMatter contributes to this discussion because it asserts

that discursive opportunities through mediated technologies, and specifically hashtags, can create

interpersonal relationships, identity similarities, coalitional building while politicalizing a

community, an individual, a mediated or physical space for the benefit of a social movement.

The politicization of these spaces is crucial for online activism because it allows individuals an

area of agentic properties through the architectural infrastructure of the social media site. By

being able to compensate for individual across physical spaces and time, social media sites create

spaces in which individuals rallying for a specific cause can gather and occupy to their benefit.

Although changes relative to the #BlackLivesMatter movement exist outside of Twitter, social

activism success can be contingent on the success of an online presence.

Twitter's existence has undoubtedly changed the ways in which social activism plays out

across social groups. Contingent upon access to the platform, #BlackLivesMatter has proven to

be a unique example of online mobilization turned physical collective action. Although the

platform does not fully explain the steps in which this process happens or the ultimate success of

a movement, this research critiques the language use on the platform as a means of navigating

the perception social media has as being ruled over simplistic or exaggerated in its role to social

movements. The interpersonal and linguistic approach taken here contributes to the literature because it reveals habits enacted by users in order to engage and compete with structures outside of the platform. As #BlackLivesMatter made its way into the traditional media outlets, discussions online continued to push and carry out its functions as a means of pressuring the status quo. The influence that the social movement obtained, albeit controversial to the opposition it met, was able to experience that outlet not only because of its diffusion into the public sphere, but because of how the proponents of the movement's message utilized the tools at hand via linguistic cues to make it a cultural influence.

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VITA

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This thesis was typed by Joseph Lawrence Flores