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#BlackLivesMatter: How a Hashtag Maintains a Movement:

A Content Analysis of the Black Lives Matter Hashtag on Twitter

by

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Thesis

Submitted to the Department of Communication, Media, and Theatre Arts

Eastern Michigan University

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Thesis Committee:

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Abstract

American society is consumed by social media; thus, digital activism is becoming a prevalent way of advocating for and establishing social progress. The purpose of this study was to identify the frequency of engagement with the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter by Twitter users. The data collection consisted of tweets shared between the time frame of July 17, 2014, to August 17, 2014. The methodology used was content analysis, which included the examination of the volume of Twitter tweets collected from this time frame. This research adds to the impending design of a social movement structure that includes online social movements. The present thesis aims to contribute to the larger conversation of digital activism by exploring the implications, potentialities, and contributions of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag by analyzing how Twitter users engage with a digital social movement on Twitter.

Keywords: #BlackLivesMatter, Twitter, tweets, twitter users, social movement, content analysis

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Introduction

#BlackLivesMatter doesn't mean your life isn't important--- it means that Black lives, which are seen as without value within White supremacy, are important to your liberation. When Black people get free, everybody gets free. – Alicia Garza

In the words of Gil Scott-Heron (1970), "the revolution will not be televised" … but it might be tweeted. Twitter has become integral to social movements in American society, and the Black Lives Matter movement uses the Twitter platform to further its cause. The Black Lives Matter movement highlights and fights injustices within the Black community, most notably, injustices as they pertain to police brutality against African Americans. Police brutality, specifically against African Americans, is not a new issue in America. In fact, injustice against African Americans is woven into the fabric of this country's history. Nevertheless, the topic of police brutality has been trending in the news, due to the recent shootings of Black men and women, ranging in ages (specifically 18-64), by police officers and civilians across the United States. The use of digital activism on Twitter has highlighted these incidents significantly.

Digital activism is becoming an increasingly effective way to create and establish social change. It is now commonplace for social issues to be discussed via social media platforms. Twitter, in particular, has lent itself to the discussion of social issues via the Internet. With the insertion of a hashtag to a phrase, people can spark an entire social movement.

Considering this shift to a technologically driven society, and the use of social media as a catalyst for activism, studies researching the influence of social media on social movements have garnered interest among scholars. The present study seeks to understand how the #BlackLivesMatter digital social movement is engaged with by Twitter users on Twitter. This research will add to the impending design of a social movement structure that includes online

social movements and will ultimately contribute to the larger conversation of digital activism.

Twitter has become an invaluable resource for digital activism. Digital activism is defined as a "form of activism that uses the Internet and digital media as key platforms for mass mobilization and political action" (Fuentes, 2014). Recently, digital activism has become commonplace as a vehicle to advocate for change. Karatzogianni (2016) asserts that "smartphones and the Internet have changed the way political events, protests, and movements are organized, helping to mobilize thousands of new supporters to a diverse range of causes" (para #1). Twitter, specifically, has been utilized as a social media platform for activism as well as a vehicle to maintain social movements.

Twitter is a social media platform on which a social movement can promote its message. Social media allows social movements to "articulate their core beliefs and offer a frame to the public" (Ince, Rojas, & Davis, 2017, p. #1817). This allows people who may support a movement but might not be directly affiliated with the movement to spread the message. Twitter users have done this with Black Lives Matter. Ince et al. (2017) further asserted that social media allows its users to have more complex interactions with a movement. People can "talk with each other about the movement, contact movement leaders who have a social media presence, debate the movement's legitimacy, and otherwise contribute to the discourse around a movement" (Ince, Rojas, & Davis, 2017, p. #1817). Ince et al. (2017) states:

> The principal feature of social media is that users generate content. Unlike print or
> broadcast media, platforms such as Twitter encourage individuals to generate their own
> "content", which other users can discuss or link to. Thus, social media, by its very nature,
> is a decentralized method for creating and disseminating ideas. These properties---user

driven content and decentralization---make social media appealing to movements.

(p.1817)

The reach that social media allows for is expansive; therefore, movements can influence a massive audience, which they might not otherwise be able to access without the interconnectedness that social media provides. Thus, social movements are using social media platforms to further their cause because they can interact with myriad people both locally and globally.

This thesis begins with a review of literature in Chapter 1. Chapter 1 is divided into four sections: (a) Black Lives Matter as a social movement and a hashtag, (b) Twitter as a social networking site and a platform to discuss social issues, (c) an overview of social movements and their traditional structure, and (d) an explanation of content analysis as a research methodology. Next, Chapter 2 outlines the purpose of this study. Then, Chapter 3 highlights the research methodology and design for the present study; content analysis is the method of study. Chapter 4 presents the results of the data collection of this study and analyzes those findings. Subsequently, Chapter 5 provides critiques of the study, exploring limitations of the study and data collection process. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the thesis with discussion and implications for future research.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Black Lives Matter

The Black Lives Matter movement is considered to be, by some, the modern-day Civil Rights Movement. Created by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, Black Lives Matter is a call to action for Black people "to make sure we are creating a world where black lives do matter" (Day, 2015, para #7). The widespread social movement Black Lives Matter came as a response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman, a Florida neighborhood watch volunteer, who fatally shot unarmed Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old Florida resident. The movement was born out of frustration and outrage surrounding the verdict of the Zimmerman case.

Following the acquittal of George Zimmerman, protests broke out and the phrase "Black Lives Matter" became the slogan of the frustrated Black community. According to an article in USA Today, on July 13, 2013 Alicia Garza was distraught by the verdict and wrote a Facebook post illustrating her frustration and anger over the decision. Community organizer, Patrisse Cullors, shared the Facebook post and put a hashtag in front of the words "black lives matter" (Miller, 2016). Today, there are chapters of Black Lives Matter across the United States and the hashtag has been a trending topic on Twitter. Now that an understanding of the birth of #BlackLivesMatter has been explored, further definition of police brutality must be addressed.

Police brutality. Police brutality is defined as "the use of excessive and/or unnecessary force by police when dealing with civilians" (Danilina, n.d.). Further dissection of this definition exposes that the phrase *excessive use of force* is subjective: what may seem excessive to some may not seem excessive to others. For example, an entire jury did not believe that the beating of Rodney King, as he laid helpless on the ground, was an excessive use of force. In fact, "[a large share of] Whites believed that the police acted properly to subdue an unruly,

potentially dangerous Black man" (Holmes & Smith, 2008, p.1). Thus, this incident perpetuates the ambiguity of the phrase "excessive use of force". Lawrence (2000) asserts:

> Police and criminologists draw conceptual distinctions among the terms "use of force," "unnecessary force," and "brutality." The use of force, according to experts, is a necessary and legitimate tool of the police officer's job. In contrast, "brutality" is "a conscious and venal act by officers who usually take great pains to conceal their misconduct," while unnecessary use of force "is usually a training problem, the result of ineptitude or insensitivity… "Excessive force" can thus be brutal, involving malicious intent, or merely unnecessary, involving poor judgement. (p.19)

In the context of this thesis, an excessive use of force is defined as "a force well beyond what would be necessary in order to handle a situation" (Danilina, n.d.).

While physical force is typically the most common form of police brutality, brutality doesn't always present itself in that manner. Police officers engage in brutality through actions such as physical or verbal abuse (racial slurs, profanity, etc.), false arrests, sexual abuse, racial profiling, psychological intimidation, or improper/ inappropriate use of tasers (Danilina, n.d.). However, it's often difficult to prove brutality has taken place, because force is a permissible tactic for officers to use when necessary. Following an understanding of police brutality, the next section draws parallels and differences between the Black Lives Matter movement and the civil rights movement.

Black Lives Matter and the civil rights movement. The Black Lives Matter movement is essentially picking up where its predecessor, the civil rights movement, left off. Both movements champion the progress and advancement of Black people; however, the Black Lives Matter movement isn't as narrow sighted. An article written by co-founder of the Black

Lives Matter movement, Opal Tometi (2015), states "to think that our fight is solely about civil rights is to misunderstand the fundamental aspirations of this movement… It is about the full recognition of our rights as citizens; and it is a battle for full civil, social, political, legal, economic and cultural rights as enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (para #1).

Additionally, the structure of the two movements are different. For example, the Civil Rights movement was a centralized movement in which there were visible leaders. While it is known who created Black Lives Matter, there are no clear leaders. In a National Public Radio interview with Alicia Garza, co-founder of Black Lives Matter, she stated:

> It's important to us in the Black Lives Matter movement that... we're not following an individual, right? This is a leader-full movement. I don't believe you can do anything without leadership. I don't believe that at all. I think there are many people leading this conversation, advancing this conversation... There [are] groups on the ground that have been doing this work, and I think we stand on the shoulders of those folks. ("The #BlackLivesMatter Movement," 2015, para #7)

The movement has strong voices, but they are not necessarily the "leaders" of the movement. The next section discusses the significant difference between the Black Lives Matter movement and the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter.

The hashtag and the movement. There seems to be a distinct difference between the Black Lives Matter movement and the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag. The Black Lives Matter movement is made up of a network of mostly independently operating local chapters (Miller, 2016, para #5). The Black Lives Matter movement goes far beyond police brutality; the movement aims to encompass the struggles of Black people on a global scale. Additionally,

Garza (2014) states, "When we say Black Lives Matter, we are talking about the ways in which

Black people are deprived of our basic human rights and dignity" (para #11). Black Lives

Matter (n.d.- further asserts "Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political intervention in a

world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an

affirmation of Black folks' contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the

face of deadly oppression."

These principles lead the Black Lives Matter movement. According to Garza (2014), the

movement has "hosted national conference calls regarding the importance of Black people

working hard for their liberation, connected people across the country who are working to end

the various forms of injustice facing Black people, and has created space for the celebration and

humanization of Black lives" (para #3). According to Black Lives Matter (n.d.-a), there are

currently 23 chapters of Black Lives Matter nationally and one international chapter located in

Toronto, Canada. Armitage (2016) states:

> The US-born movement has spread as far as Brazil, South Africa, and Australia, where
>
> activists have taken to the streets and social media in solidarity with the victims of police
>
> killings. They've adopted the "Black Lives Matter" rallying cry to amplify homegrown
>
> movements and calls for racial justice---and used it to point out what they say is a
>
> hypocritical approach by the media and power structures in their countries. (para #1)

While there is only one official international chapter of Black Lives Matter, it is notable to

mention that Black Lives Matter has expanded its reach globally (Armitage, 2016).

The guiding principles of the Black Lives Matter movement incorporate the mission of

the movement and include principles such as diversity---"We are committed to acknowledging,

respecting and celebrating difference(s) and commonalities," restorative justice--- "We are

committed to collectively, lovingly and courageously working vigorously for freedom and

justice for Black people and, by extension all people. As we forge our path, we intentionally

build and nurture a beloved community that is bonded together through a beautiful struggle that

is restorative, not depleting," and unapologetically Black--- "We are unapologetically Black in

our positioning. In affirming that Black Lives Matter, we need not qualify our position. To love

and desire freedom and justice for ourselves is a necessary prerequisite for wanting the same for

others." (Black Lives Matter (n.d.-b) Each of the guiding principles are fully outlined on the

Black Lives Matter website and are values that the movement strives to focus on. The

movement is comprised of a total of 13 guiding principles.

However, the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter seems to serve one specific purpose—to

highlight the unjust and unlawful killings of Black citizens by law enforcement and civilians.

Since 2014 Black Lives Matter has become a popular topic and the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter

has impacted American culture. A 2016 study conducted by the Pew Research Center titled

How Americans View the Black Lives Matter Movement found that roughly 4 out of 10

Americans support the movement (Horowitz & Livingston, 2016). Conversely, only about 1 in

5 people oppose the movement. According to a different study by the Pew Research Center

titled *4 Major Recent Events Bring #BlackLivesMatter Back to the Forefront as the Tone Shifts

Overnight*, the timespan from July 5, 2016, to July 17, 2016, represented a highly active period

regarding the discussion of the Black Lives Matter Movement (Anderson & Hitlin, 2016a).

During this time frame, there was a significant shift in the tone surrounding

"#BlackLivesMatter." Throughout this period the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter appeared

approximately five million times, on average more than 380,000 time per day (Anderson &

Hitlin, 2016a, para #4).

The Black Lives Matter movement has also inspired other noteworthy hashtags addressing the killings of unarmed Black citizens by police officers such as "#ICantBreathe," referring to the suffocation of Eric Garner; "#SayHerName," which refers to the death of Sandra Bland while in police custody; and "#IfTheyGunnedMeDown," which refers to the disproportionate use of malicious looking photos of slain Black people versus the benevolent looking photos that are used for their White counterparts.

Additionally, the movement has made its way into the political arena as well as the college campus. The Black Lives Matter movement has forced politicians to address the injustices that Black people face. During the summer of 2015, activists began publicly disrupting presidential candidates at events and rallies (Foran, 2015, para #6). Following these disruptions, politicians such as Bernie Sanders began to create plans to address their views regarding their criminal justice platforms. Additionally, the Black Lives Matter movement sought for the liberal left and other Democratic voters to understand that "simply believing in something isn't sufficient to change the status quo" (Foran, 2015, para #8). Black Lives Matter activists wanted people to understand that just because they believe in equality, not speaking out in favor of equality or against discrimination, is also part of the problem. Resignations followed high-profile protests about racial insensitivity and discrimination at both Yale University and the University of Missouri. These protests prove that there is a shift happening among the younger generations. Co-founder of the Washington, D.C., chapter of Black Lives Matter, Erika Totten states:

> People used to believe that if you go to college and dress the right way, have a certain level of education, you would be spared. Now there's a growing recognition that that's not the case. College campuses don't shield you from discrimination. Students are

waking up en masse and realizing that they have to bring the fight there too. (Foran,

2015, para #15)

While civil rights agitation is not new to college campuses, the Black Lives Matter movement is

continuing the fight toward equality both on and off campus.

Twitter: The Platform

What is Twitter? Twitter is an online social networking service launched in March

2006 by Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams, and Biz Stone. Social networking 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"

(Boyd and Ellison, 2007, p.211). Twitter is a widely accessible platform. Users can access

Twitter on most cellular phones through the Twitter phone application or on a computer

through the Twitter website.

The Twitter platform allows its users to connect with one another through the post and

interaction of tweets, which contain "photos, videos, links and up to 280 characters of text"

(Twitter, n.d.; see appendix A) The site is an information network that works in real-time with

its users. As cited in Hosch and Ray (2009), "Twitter incorporates aspects of social networking

Web sites, such as Myspace and Facebook, with instant messaging technologies to create

networks of users who can communicate throughout the day with brief messages" (para #1).

Formerly named "Twittr," the site acquired the name "Twitter" after developers of the site

opted to use the word "Twitter," which is defined as "a short burst of inconsequential

information" and "chirps from birds" (Sarno, 2009, para #19). The measure of tweets shared

has increased drastically since the genesis of the social networking site. In 2011, Twitter users

shared 140 million tweets per day (Stone, 2011, para #3). In an exponential growth, in 2016, it

was found that there are more than 500 million tweets shared per day which means that

approximately 6,000-7,000 tweets are shared every second (Liberatore, 2016, para #7).

Additionally, a review of Twitter shows that usage of the site spikes around special

and/or important events (Year in Review, 2011). For example, on November 24, 2014, a grand

jury did not indict Darren Wilson, the police officer who shot Michael Brown, for any crimes

related to the death of Mr. Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, on August 9, 2014. On the day of the

decision, there were 3.5 million tweets shared regarding the Ferguson decision (Twitter Data,

2014). Other examples of this can be found in the execution of Troy Davis, which gained 7,671

tweets per second ("#YearInReview", 2011, para #3). More recently, according to the Pew

Research Center, on July 22, 2015, there was a significant spike in Tweets regarding race

following the release of details about the death of Sandra Bland in Texas. (Anderson and Hitlin,

2016b) The following section details the features of Twitter relevant to this thesis.

How Twitter works. Twitter is a social community in which users can interact with one

another through tweets. Twitter users can view the tweets of other Twitter users through their

public profile page. The profile page of a Twitter user is the home base of their Twitter account.

A Twitter user's profile page allows the user to display information they choose to share

publicly, as well as all the Tweets they have posted. A Twitter user's profile along with their

@username identify them on Twitter (Twitter Glossary, n.d.). This information can include a

brief biography, a profile picture (which appears next to the user's tweets as well as on their

profile page), and their username (the name that is associated with the Twitter user's account;

see appendix B)

The profile page also houses a timeline, which is "a real-time stream of Tweets. The

Home timeline, for example, is where a Twitter user sees all the Tweets shared by their followers" (Twitter Glossary, n.d.). There is also a public timeline, which streams the tweets of Twitter users whose pages are public. Tweets that are tweeted by users who have public profiles are viewable to the public; this includes Internet users who are not registered members of Twitter (Long, 2012, p.4). The public timeline will be used as the source of data collection for this thesis.

Another characteristic of Twitter timelines are trends. Trending topics are "a topic or hashtag determined algorithmically to be one of the most popular on Twitter at that moment" (Twitter Glossary, n.d.). Trending topics are typically signified by placing a hashtag ("#") in front of a word or phrase. Twitter is unique in the sense that it developed the use of the hashtag. The hashtag makes it very easy for searches of specific topics to be completed because, when a certain hashtag is searched, all public tweets containing that hashtag are revealed. Once the "hash-tagged" tweets have been tweeted enough, they are trending. These topics can trend regionally, nationally, and/or globally (Long, 2012, p.4). An example of this would be the hashtag "#SayHerName" that was prevalent in 2015, which was a trending topic about the death of Sandra Bland, a 28-year-old Black woman who was found hanged in police custody. Trending topics are listed on Twitter's site and are viewable to anyone, regardless of location, including Internet users who are not registered members of the Twitter community. Trends can vary in nature and have included, sayings, current news, award shows, sporting events, and names of people.

Demographics of Twitter. Sherman (2014) cites that Twitter has over 900 million existing accounts (para #2). However, despite the high number of accounts associated with the social networking site, only about 241 million users were active as of the last quarter of 2013

(Sherman, 2014, para #3). The term "active" in this context is defined as "people who logged in at least once a month" (Sherman, 2014, para #4).

The Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, & Madden, (2015) and Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan (2016) reports from the Pew Research Center provide Twitter demographic information. Data provided by the Pew Research Center from Greenwood et al.'s (2016) national survey of 1,520 adults conducted March 7 to April 4, 2016, reports that approximately 24% of online adults use Twitter (para #3). This statistic is virtually unchanged from the Duggan et al. (2015) report of 23%. Frequent users of the site are characteristically young (18-29), women, urban, college educated, African American, and Hispanic (Duggan et al., 2015). These overall findings are similar to those of the Greenwood et al. (2016) survey.

Twitter's impact on American culture. While Twitter has many uses, one of its most notable functions is its ability to facilitate and connect people with common ideas. The substantial usage of the site has allowed Twitter to become increasingly ingrained in American society. As the site is accessible to most anyone, Twitter holds registered memberships from celebrities, professional athletes, politicians, news outlets, social activists, former President of the United States, Barack Obama, and the current President Donald Trump.

Twitter has become a way for people not only to connect with one another but to gain news about events on local, regional, national, and even global scales. This is partially due to the idea that Murthy (2011) argued that Twitter is significant because it allows for "citizen journalism" (p.779). Tweets in some sense inform the news; using tweets, Twitter users can report and spread news faster than news media can cover them. Twitter users can report by more means than just sharing text filled tweets---users are sharing photos and videos as documentation as well. Thus, citizens can report news to each other through Twitter.

In a survey for the American Press Institute, Rosenstiel, Sonderman, Loker, Ivancin, & Kjarval (2015) it was found that Twitter users (81%), specifically, consume more news than general social media users and non-Twitter users. (para #1) Moreover, these Twitter users said that they keep up with the news daily: "In addition to frequency, the survey also probed whether technology is making it easier to be informed. Here, Twitter users are also noticeably more likely than others to say that it is easier to keep up with the news today" (Rosentiel et al., 2015, para #2). Additionally, 79% of the Twitter users surveyed said that they found it easier to keep up with the news today compared to the ease of obtaining the news five years prior to the survey (Rosentiel, et al., 2015, para #2).

While the Rosenstiel et al. (2015) survey found that Twitter is frequently used as a source of news, citing that 40% of participants said that they use Twitter to be alerted to breaking news, 39% of participants reported that they use Twitter to "keep up with news in general," and 36% of participants reported that they use Twitter to "pass the time." Finally, 28% of Twitter users said that they use the social networking site to second-screen (using a mobile device while watching television, especially to access supplementary content or applications) during live events. While a primary use of Twitter is to gain news updates, users have found other uses for the site. Additionally, the site has been reportedly used to used "to tell others what I am doing and thinking about," to "keep in touch with people I know," to keep in touch with celebrities ("follow famous people"), to follow trending topics, and to network. Twitter is, in other words, more than just a real-time service, but a way of staying in touch (Rosentiel et al., 2015, para #8).

Black Twitter. As previously stated, Twitter is a networking community. However, as with any community, there are subgroups within it. Black Twitter is a subgroup

within the Twitter network. Ramsey (2015) defines the term "Black Twitter" as "a large network of Black Twitter users and their loosely coordinated interactions, many of which accumulate into trending topics due to the network's size, interconnectedness, and unique activity" (para #1). Additionally, Ramsey (2015) further suggested that Black Twitter was largely responsible for grabbing the attention of the nation and putting focus on the killing of Mike Brown in August of 2014 (para #2).

The Black Lives Matter hashtag has also gained dominance because of Black Twitter. Because Twitter allows its users to create their own content and disseminate information that is important to them, the hashtag is the modern-day slogan and Twitter users are able to use chants, display marches and rallies, spread pictures or news articles from their Twitter feed. Furthermore, the network can be credited with the creation and perpetuation of hashtags that highlight racially toned disparities such as "#IfTheyGunnedMeDown," which emphasized the "pejorative selection of images used in news stories about black victims of police shootings" (Ramsey, 2015, para #3).

Lee (2017) explains that in the days following the deaths of Garner and Brown "news reports of the incidents characterized Brown as a thug, gang member, and lawbreaker. Garner was characterized as a repeat offender with news reports discussing his criminal history." The hashtag sheds light on the fact that the media generally will use a demeaning or seemingly compromising photograph of a Black victim of police brutality instead of one that would suggest that the victim was an upstanding citizen. For example, in the case of Mike Brown, "rather than using photographs of the 18-year-old, reportedly known to his friends as a 'gentle giant', in a graduation picture or in a sports team, many outlets used a photo that would solicit unsubstantiated tweets calling Brown a 'thug' who was flashing 'gang signs'" (Stampler, 2014,

para #2).

Hashtags such as "#BlackLivesMatter," "#IfTheyGunnedMeDown," "#HandsUpDontShoot," "#ICantBreathe" and many others in the same vain would be considered what Sharma (2013) defines as black tags. According to Sharma (2013), black tags are "a particular type of hashtag associated with Black Twitter users (mainly African Americans) because the tag itself and/or its associated content appears to promote 'Black' vernacular expression in the forms of humor and social commentary" (p.51). Sharma (2013) further explains that blacktags take the form of concatenated American-English words and slang, expressive of racialized issues and concerns" (p.51) Brock (2012) asserts that "Black discursive culture—specifically signifyin's focus on invention, delivery, ritual, and audience participation—maps well onto Twitter's focus on rapid discussion between groups of connected users" (p. 545). As Sharma (2013) stated, one noteworthy thing about blacktags is that they occasionally become trending on Twitter (p.48). This is an interesting phenomenon considering that "the consistent scholarly focus on the 'digital divide' all too often frames people of color as technological outsiders and has served to obscure the many people of color who *are* online" (Florini, 2014, p.224). The Black Lives Matter hashtag is a blacktag that has transcended Black Twitter and have been interacted with by the masses.

Social Movements.

What is a social movement? A social movement is typically the answer to a societal issue. Snow, Soule, and Kriesi (2004) state:

> Social movements are one of the principal social forms through which collectivities give
>
> voice to their grievances and concerns about the rights, welfare, and well-being of
>
> themselves and others by engaging in various types of collective action, such as

protesting in the streets, that dramatize those grievances and concerns and demand that

something be done about them. (p.3)

Social movements are ideally used to create change within a society, specifically within societal

conditions that people feel are unfair or unjust. According to Gamson (1992):

Social movements are essentially struggles over the definition and construction of social

reality. They must make people aware that the generally accepted view of social reality

fostered by political, social, religious, educational, legal, literary, and media institutions is

false and that something must be done about it. (p.71)

While these movements can advocate for a particular social change, they can also be

implemented to organize opposition of a social change that is being advocated by another

entity. Overall, social movements are generally utilized to incite societal and/or political

change.

Traditional social movement structure. Traditionally, social movements are comprised

of five stages: genesis, social unrest, enthusiastic mobilization, maintenance, and termination

(Stewart, Smith, & Denton, 2012, p.89). Genesis begins at the inception of a social movement.

Stewart et al. (2012) explains, "social movements typically begin during relatively quiet times

with respect to the issue that the protestors are addressing" (p.90). Typically, a perceived

"imperfection" is found in the existing order of a society, this imperfection may be an

environmental crisis, abuse of power, inequality, institutional or individual corruption, etc.

However, this imperfection is usually seen by individuals who are "scattered geographically

and unknown to one another." (Stewart et al., p.90) This is referred to as a "pre-genesis process

wherein lies birth, growth, and affirmation of consciousness." (Stewart et al. pg.90) During this

period, individuals view an imperfection that, unless addressed expeditious and earnestly, will

only grow more severe. The genesis stage can vary in length from movement to movement. However, the genesis stage is integral to social movements because without it the "seeds of discontent would wither away". Thus, there would be no movement.

The next stage is social unrest. In this stage, increasing numbers of people begin to outwardly express their concerns and frustration over the issue(s). According to Stewart et al., "the struggle may become visible for the first time in the media as a movement" (p.93) Additionally during this period, the leaders who were involved in the genesis of the movement may join agitators or turn into agitators themselves. Agitators are the ones who "stir things up." (Stewart et al., p. 93) Agitation exists when (1) people outside the normal decision-making establishment (2) advocate significant social change and (3) encounter a degree of resistance within the establishment such as to require more than the normal discursive means of persuasion (Bowers, Ochs, Jensen, & Schulz, 2010, p.4).

The third stage is enthusiastic mobilization. In this stage, "activists begin to see institutions as the problems or as active conspiracies to sustain power and stifle all reasonable efforts to bring about urgently needed action. (Stewart et al., 2012, p.97). The fourth stage is maintenance. This stage of social movements "requires the steady hand of a pragmatist who is skilled in appealing to disparate elements within the movement and with dealing directly and rationally with institutional leaders (Stewart et al., 2012, p.103). This stage is particularly important because it sustains the movement.

The fifth, and final, stage of social movements is termination. In this stage, the social movement ceases to be a social movement. Stewart et al. (2012) states that "if the social movement is successful, it may declare victory and disband" (p.107). This is generally because the social movement achieved the societal change that was initially sought after. However, "most

social movements seem to fade away because they disappear from the public scene" (Stewart et al., 2012, p.107).

Content Analysis.

This thesis will implement a content analysis to analyze the frequency of use of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter by Twitter users on Twitter within a specified time frame. Elo and Kyngäs (2008) assert "content analysis is a method of analysing written, verbal, or visual communication messages (p.107)." Stemler (2001) suggests that the content analysis methodology permits researchers to relatively easily examine large amounts of data systematically (p.1). Further, Stemler (2001) states that "it [content analysis] can be a useful technique for allowing us to discover and describe the focus of individual, group, institutional, or social attention" (p.1) As cited in McMillan (2000), Holsti identified three primary purposes for content analysis: (1) "to describe the characteristics of communication; (2) to make inferences as to the antecedents of communication, and; (3) to make inferences as to the effects of communication" (p.81). This method is used to make "replicable and valid inferences by interpreting and coding textual material. By systematically evaluating texts (e.g., documents, oral communication, and graphics), qualitative data can be converted into quantitative data" (University of Georgia, n.d.). Content analysis bridges the gap between qualitative and quantitative research methodologies.

Researchers have enlisted content analysis to examine antisocial behavior in a reality TV show (Wilson, Robinson, & Callister, 2012), demonstrate how corporations use Twitter (Edman, 2010), and explore relational maintenance behaviors portrayed by committed romantic couples on prime-time network television (Anderegg, 2013). While content analysis is generally used to analyze media representations of health, parenthood, food, religion, social

groups, politicians, and occupations, it is possible to analyze the content of almost any recorded medium (Treadwell, 2014, p.216). These mediums include, but are not limited to, lawn signs, photographs, love letters, or tweets (Treadwell, 2014, p.216).

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) cited that there are three types of content analysis: conventional, directed, and summative. This thesis will use a combination of directed and summative content analysis. Directed content analysis is used to validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory (Hseih and Shannon, 2005, p.1281). This type of content analysis is generally used when there is existing theory or prior research exists about a phenomenon that is incomplete or would benefit from further description (Hseih and Shannon, 2005, p.1281). Generally, summative content analysis is used when "qualitative content analysis starts with identifying and quantifying certain words or content in text with the purpose of understanding the contextual use of the words or content" (Hseih and Shannon, 2005, p.1283). Rather than attempting to infer meaning, the usage of this quantification is to explore usage. In the case of this thesis, tweets are used as the content that is being analyzed. The frequency of engagement by use of tweets with the #Black Lives Matter hashtag is being studied.

There are several strengths in the content analysis methodology. First, Krippendorff asserts it can "aggregate large volumes of data into inferentially productive representations" (Krippendorff, 1980, p.71). Second, its "emphasis on the systematic coding, counting, and analysis of content" (Treadwell, 2014, p.216). The procedures of content analysis should be explicit, precise, and replicable. The procedure should uphold these characteristics so that other researchers can verify the results of the research (Treadwell, 2014, p.216). Third, generally the material of content analysis is readily available (Treadwell, 2014, p.216). Fourth, because

content analysis analyzes media content human research approvals are typically not required (Treadwell, 2014, p.216).

Additionally, a content analysis is an unobtrusive selection of research where "the researcher does not 'intrude' on what is being studied and, thus, does not affect the outcome of the research" (Berger, 2000, p.181). The unobtrusive nature of content analysis allows the researcher is able to obtain an untainted illustration of the material being studied. As cited in Schreier (2012), while other qualitative methods for data analysis may add to data, qualitative content analysis helps to reduce the overall amount of data. Thus, requiring the researcher to focus on the selected aspects of meaning relating to the research question (p.170).

Chapter 2: Purpose of Study

Purpose of the Study. While digital activism has been around for over two decades, it is still a relatively new subject. However, its novelty does not negate the validity of digital activism as a means to advocate for and create social change. Additionally, whereas there is already a set structure for creating and maintaining social movements in the traditional sense, there are no explicit guidelines for creating and maintaining social movements on social media platforms. Since digital activism is becoming more common, a new structure that includes online social movements is needed. This thesis will explore how digital activism on is utilized within social movements, specifically, the Black Lives Matter movement. The purpose of this study is to understand how Twitter users engage with and use the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter.

The study aims to illustrate the frequency of usage of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag by Twitter users from July 17, 2014, to August 17, 2014. In this timespan, three major events happened within the Black community: (a) the murder of Eric Garner (July 17, 2014), an unarmed Black man who was put into a chokehold by police for fifteen to nineteen seconds and died; (b) the verdict in the Renisha McBride case (August 7, 2014); and, (c) the murder of Michael Brown (August 9, 2014) by police in Ferguson, MO. By understanding the frequency in usage of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag by Twitter users, a better insight into how people engage in digital activism will be gained.

Through exploration of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag on Twitter, the researcher can begin to understand how social movements are being not only utilized, but maintained, online. This research will add to the impending design of a social movement structure that includes online social movements and will ultimately contribute to the larger conversation of digital activism.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This thesis will implement a content analysis as its methodology. The content analysis method was chosen because this thesis explores frequency of tweets. Content analysis is defined as "a quantitative, systematic, and objective technique for describing the manifest of content of communications" (Treadwell, 2014, p.216). The content analysis method is a research technique that is frequently used within the social sciences. According to Krippendorff (1989) "content analysis is indigenous to communication research and is potentially one of the most important research techniques in the social sciences" (p.403).

Research questions. This thesis seeks understand the frequency of engagement with the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter in the real-time online community of Twitter. Specifically, this thesis will analyze the public tweets that were shared from July 17, 2014, to August 17, 2014. The research questions that guide this study are as follows:

- **RQ 1:** How does the frequency of #BlackLivesMatter tweets vary over the collection period? Does the volume vary by situation?

- **RQ 2:** What possible implications could the Black Lives Matter hashtag have on the physical movement?

- **RQ 3**: How does the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag add to the larger discipline of digital activism?

The goal of this study is to examine and expand the current research on digital social movements, specifically by exploring frequency of engagement by Twitter users with the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag. This thesis explores the hashtag within the computer-mediated communication platform, Twitter, by utilizing the content analysis research design. This method allows for an understanding of engagement with the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag on Twitter by

Twitter users. The content analysis aids in identifying the frequency of usage of the

#BlackLivesMatter hashtag through the data collected.

Participants. The participants of this study were the Twitter users who have shared the

tweets collected within the time period of this thesis' data collection. Because Twitter is public

domain, no institutional review board approval was required to conduct this study.

Text selection. The Twitter advanced search function was used to collect data. The

advanced search function can filter searches by "top," "from anyone," "latest," and "people you

follow." For this study, public tweets from Twitter users containing #BlackLivesMatter tweeted

between the days of July 17, 2014, and August 17, 2014, were used as the text selection.

In addition to searching Twitter for trending topics, the site also allows its users to

create an "advanced search" if a user is trying to find tweets related to a specific event. The

advanced search allows a Twitter user to search Twitter based on information such as words

(e.g., "this exact phrase," "none of these words," "these hashtags," or "this language"), people

(e.g., "from these accounts" or "mentioning these accounts"), places (e.g., "near this place"),

dates (e.g., "from this date to this date"), and other (e.g., "negative," "positive," "include

retweets"). A user can also create an advanced search based on a combination of these

categories. For example, if a user was looking for positive tweets about the 2016 Olympic

games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the user could specify their search by searching the hashtag

"#Rio2016," then including the specific

date they were interested in, and finally, selecting "positive" in the search space titled "other."

The advanced search option was used for data collection in this thesis.

Procedure. Data were collected on Twitter for nine days overall for between 30 and 60

minutes per day (typically with data collection being approximately 45 minutes per day) in May

of 2017. The data collected were public tweets including the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter from July 17, 2014, to August 17, 2014. The researcher used the advanced search function on Twitter to collect public tweets by taking computer screenshots of tweets that appeared with the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter within the specified time frame.

Following the data collection, the researcher evaluated the engagement by Twitter users with the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag through examination of the frequency with which the hashtag was utilized. The content of the tweets was not be examined and had no bearing on this thesis. This thesis aims only to understand the amount of engagement by Twitter users the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag garners. To collect the sample using the advanced search function, the researcher used the following criteria to narrow and specify their search results:

- #BlackLivesMatter,

- date being researched, and

- language: English.

Table 1 illustrates the process of data collection. Data were collected over a nine-day period with a break on the fifth day. No data were collected on the fifth day, and data collection resumed on the sixth day. During the nine-day collection, tweets were collected from July 17, 2014, to August 17, 2014. There were a total of 2,208 tweets collected. The tweets were broken down by researcher's collection date and original date of publication by the authored Twitter user. The data collected were broken down further into smaller time frames so that analyzation of collected data would be more manageable. Since this thesis is examining frequency of engagement with the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag, the researcher used the predetermined categories to sort the tweets, illustrated in table 1 on the next page.

Table 1
Data Collection Process

Date researcher collected tweets	Date searched in Twitter	Number of Tweets collected in time frame
May 9, 2017	July 17-18	2
May 10, 2017	July 18-19	2
May 10, 2017	July 19-20	10
May 10, 2017	July 20-21	9
May 10, 2017	July 21-22	11
May 10, 2017	July 22-23	4
May 10, 2017	July 23-24	4
May 11, 2017	July 24-25	18
May 11, 2017	July 25-26	14
May 11, 2017	July 26-27	2
May 11, 2017	July 27-28	1
May 11, 2017	July 28-29	1
May 11, 2017	July 29-30	2
May 11, 2017	July 30-31	0
May 11, 2017	July 31- August 1	0
May 12, 2017	August 1-2	5
May 12, 2017	August 2-3	3
May 12, 2017	August 3-4	6
May 12, 2017	August 4-5	2
May 12, 2017	August 5-6	2
May 12, 2017	August 6-7	1
May 12, 2017	August 7-8	24
May 13, 2017	Break	No data collected
May 14, 2017	August 8-9	4
May 14, 2017	August 9-10	2
May 14, 2017	August 10-11	94
May 14, 2017	August 11-12	120
May 14, 2017	August 12-13	188
May 15, 2017	August13-14	239
May 15, 2017	August 14-15	510
May 16, 2017	August 15-16	679
May 17, 2017	August 16-17	249

Table 1 illustrates that until August 15, 2014, several days of tweets were collected

during one day of data collection. For example, tweets from August 1, to August 8, 2014, were

all collected on May 12, 2017. Additionally, table 1 outlines the real time date that the researcher

gathered the searched tweets from each specific time frame. It is important to note that all tweets

available were collected on the date of data collection except for the tweets searched for on the

dates of August 14-15, 2014. During this collection period there were more tweets than could be

collected in the 45-minute collection time frame. Table 2 outlines the specific dates collected in

real time by the researcher.

Table 2
Data collected by date

Date researcher collected tweets	Total time frame of tweets collected searched date	Total amount of tweets collected each day
May 9, 2017	July 17-18	2
May 10, 2017	July 18-24	40
May 11, 2017	July 24- August 1	38
May 12, 2017	August 1-8	43
May 13, 2017	Break	No data collected
May 14, 2017	August 8-13	408
May 15, 2017	August 13-15	749
May 16, 2017	August 15-16	679
May 17, 2017	August 16-17	249

Chapter 4: Results

The study found that there was a large amount of frequency variation over the data collection period. This can be seen throughout the data sample. For example, data collected from July to August shows there was a significant amount of frequency variation on a monthly basis. There were 80 tweets collected in total for the month July of 2014. Conversely, in the data collection from August, there was a large spike in the number of tweets available for collection. In August 2014, there were a total of 2,128 tweets accessible for data collection.

One finding that is especially interesting is that for all three incidents, the murders of Michael Brown and Eric Garner and the verdict in the Renisha McBride case, there was no significant influx of Twitter users engaging with the "#BlackLivesMatter" hashtag on the days that the incidents occurred. For example, on from August 7 (the Renisha McBride case verdict) to August 9 (the shooting of Michael Brown), there were only 28 tweets available for data collection. However, in the days following, there was a large spike in the frequency of usage of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag. Data collection initially exposed a spike in engagement on August 10, 2014, to 94 tweets available for collection. Thereafter, the frequency of usage of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag steadily increased until the August 14-15 data collection. That period of data collection turned out 510 tweets, which was significantly more than the prior collection period of August 13-14; this collection period only had 239 tweets available. Additionally, the largest period of data collection was from August 15-16, which produced 679 tweets. However, the following day of data collection, August 16-17, provided only 249 tweets.

This is an interesting finding because this magnitude of increased frequency of usage of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag was not seen in the days following the murder of Eric Garner. In fact, from July 17, to August 10, a total of only 179 tweets were available for data collection.

While this could be explained because both the shooting of Michael Brown and the verdict in the Renisha McBride case each happened in August, it is interesting that there was no significant spike of frequency in usage of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag in July, which was when Eric Garner was killed, specifically because his death garnered a lot of media attention. It was also the catalyst for the "#ICan'tBreathe" hashtag. This finding illustrates that the frequency in usage of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag does not necessarily mirror the impact of an incident.

This thesis has uncovered one important implication that the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag could have on the physical movement. This implication being that the hashtag could potentially outlive the movement. Since social media is primarily controlled by its users, a hashtag has no expiration. The hashtag is engaged with whenever someone decides to use it; thus, the hashtag never truly falls into a state of termination. In the traditional social movement structure, the termination phase is indicative of the social movement garnering the change that was initially sought out or there not being any change brought about, and the movement dies. Unlike the traditional social movement structure, the decentralization of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag allows for the hashtag to fall into what would generally be considered a phase of termination; this can be seen in table 1 on dates where there are no tweets including the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag. However, the hashtag does not fall into true termination.

Additionally, because the hashtag is essentially an extension of the movement and as such its own entity, just because the hashtag falls into termination doesn't mean that the physical movement will. Conversely, because the hashtag may garner high frequency in use that doesn't necessarily mean that the physical movement will still maintain traction within society.

This finding is important because, as previously stated, the hashtag, which is the digital component of the movement, could outlive the physical movement. This means that the hashtag has the potential to always be around; however, the hashtag's strength as a vehicle to promote social change could become increasingly ineffective due to tremendous fluctuation in engagement with the hashtag. The lack of a termination phase for a hashtag does not necessarily mean the movement has been effective at sending its message or successful at achieving its goal. For example, in the data collection, it was found that from July 30, 2014, to August 1, 2014, zero tweets had been produced including the hashtag Black Lives Matter; this would typically be a sign of termination of the movement. However, the hashtag started to gain traction again in the August 1, 2014, to August 2, 2014, data collection. Further, during the August 1-2 period of data collection, there were two tweets available for data collection. On the days subsequent, that number rose at a steady rate, while finally reaching its peak during the August 15-16 period of data collection at 679 tweets. Additionally, in the month of August, from August 1-August 10, there were only 49 tweets available for data collection; however, from August 10 to17 there were 2,109 tweets available for data collection. This continuous fluctuation of engagement with the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag does little to advance the physical movement because the engagement is only semi-constant.

This thesis found that the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag adds to the larger discipline of social media because it serves as a platform to acquire knowledge about the way digital social movements sustain on Twitter. Through analyzing the frequency of engagement of Twitter users with the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag, an understanding has been gained of how Twitter users utilize the hashtag as a vehicle to advocate for and create social change. While, engagement is not always high, Twitter users are engaging with the hashtag on a semi-constant

basis. Furthermore, this thesis demonstrated the peaks and valleys that can occur regarding the fluctuation of frequency in engagement with a hashtag by Twitter users. This depiction potentially allows for the creation of a structure that could shift engagement from semi-constant to constant.

On a platform such as Twitter, just because there are no tweets being tweeted or a topic is not trending one day doesn't mean that the topic won't be tweeted about or trending the next day. This finding also shines a light on the fact that the traditional social movement structure will not likely adhere to social movements on social media platforms. This is because, as previously stated, even though a hashtag has been "terminated" for a day or even several days that does not mean that the hashtag won't be revived just as impactful as it was before or maybe even more-so as has been illustrated in the findings of this thesis. Because the traditional social movement structure is a centralized architype, a design that can be adapted to decentralized movements, such as those on Twitter, needs to be created for digital social movements.

However, there must be an understanding of how digital social movements live, evolve, and are engaged with in the digital arena before a structure can be created to further the effectiveness of digital social movements. Through analyzation of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag on Twitter, this thesis provides an illustration of the way that a digital social movement can use a hashtag as a way of advancement for its cause(s). From these data, there is the potential for a blueprint of a digital social movement structure to be developed. Additionally, understanding how one hashtag works on social media to preserve and sustain a movement allows for inferences about how all hashtags on social media platforms related to a digital social movement can sustain their respective movements.

Chapter 5: Limitations and Future Research

This thesis had several limitations. To start, the researcher had to extend the time frame of the data collection because the number of tweets available in the initial time frame (not used in this thesis) of July 17, 2014, to July 26, 2014, were too few to gather a substantial amount of data for this analysis, thus leading to the collection of a separate, second dataset which was analyzed in this thesis. Initially, the author sought out to understand the language choices Twitter users make when those choices accompany the Black Lives Matter hashtag around a single incident of police brutality. At the start of the research, the researcher had collected data by searching the hashtags #BlackLivesMatter as well as #EricGarner. It was initially believed that the specificity of this search would allow the author to find the answers to the research questions. After eight days of data collection, it was found that, in fact, the specificity posed a hindrance to the data collection; the search was too narrow. Therefore, the data set that was analyzed in this thesis was produced from a secondary data collection in which the author only searched #BlackLivesMatter. An additional issue that occurred with the initial data set collection was that of the 1,000+ tweets that were collected, only about 50 of them contained the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. Most of those tweets only contained the hashtag #EricGarner.

Additionally, because Twitter only allows access to "top tweets," there are some days of collection that didn't produce any top tweets. However, it can be assumed that there may have been tweets shared on that day that included the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, but they just were not selected as a "top tweet" in Twitter's archival algorithm.

Another limitation was that tweets were collected manually, without the assistance of a coding generator. Similarly, computer screen shots did not capture the same number of tweets in each picture, so this method of data collection provided limited consistency. Due to

human error, some tweets may have been counted twice in the collection of data. The structure of Twitter also may have limited the scope of tweets examined in the study, because the tweets that are archived and available for public search are the top tweets associated with a specific hashtag on a specific day. For example, only two tweets came up during the July 17-July 18, 2014, search. Additionally, because there was no coding generator used to collect tweets some of the dates were inaccurate. For example, when the researcher searched the dates July 16-17, 2014, on Twitter, some of the tweets available were actually from July 15, 2014. Now that the limitations of the study have been addressed, the next section will focus on the continued expansion of digital activism through future research.

Digital activism and its effectiveness in modern society is a topic that continually needs to be researched. Another method of studying this topic could be through rhetorical discourse analysis. Researchers have enlisted rhetorical discourse analysis to examine language. Understanding how language is used in digital media pertaining to a digital social movement would be an interesting area to further research, specifically on a social platform such as Twitter. This is because there are only 280 characters available to the user for a tweet, so the user must be more thoughtful with their message due to this restriction. Furthermore, something that was not discussed in this thesis is the high potential to misunderstand the message that a hashtag creates. As digital social movements are typically decentralized, there is a large amount of room for error when trying to get the goal or message of the movement across to an audience. The use of a hashtag to sustain a digital social movement has the potential to "muddy" the message because so many people can use the hashtag. Additionally, the hashtag potentially makes it easier for the message or goal of the movement to be misunderstood because people who utilize the hashtag may not have a full understanding of the movement

themselves. This would be an interesting topic for researchers to explore.

Additionally, all digital social movements are not the Black Lives Matter movement; therefore, all digital social movements may not follow the same path as Black Lives Matter. However, Black Lives Matter was the only movement analyzed in this thesis. Since only one movement was analyzed to understand or validate the plethora of digital social movements out there, there are more digital social movements to be studied for a more complete understanding of how hashtags work within social movements.

Chapter 6: Discussion

The #BlackLivesMatter hashtag exposes the apparent need for a social movement structure within digital activism. Unlike the traditional structure of social movements, digital movements fundamentally follow their own rules, which means that they can be essentially everlasting. A good example of this is shown in the data collection of this thesis. The Twitter search from the July 17 to July 18, 2014, search only turned up two tweets. However, the August 15-16 search turned up 679 tweets, but then for the search on the following day, August 16-17, the tweets tapered off again, yielding only 249 tweets in the search. As stated previously, this thesis uncovered a high level of fluctuation in the frequency of #BlackLivesMatter tweets. This high amount of fluctuation in engagement of the hashtag shows us that engagement is not always constant, which could be potentially problematic in terms of the longevity of the movement.

One important thing to note is that unlike the traditional social movement structure, the decentralization of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag allows for the hashtag to fall into what would generally be considered a phase of termination. This can be seen when there are no tweets including the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag. However, it does not fall into true termination. On a platform such as Twitter, topics can go from trending to not trending in a matter of days, sometimes in a matter of hours; this means engagement is inconsistent. For example, in the data collection it was found that from July 30, 2014, to August 1, 2014, no tweets had been produced including the hashtag Black Lives Matter. However, the hashtag started to gain traction again in the August 1, 2014, to August 2, 2014, search. These finding also demonstrate that the traditional social movement structure will not likely effectively benefit social movements on social media platforms. Because the traditional social movement structure is

based on a centralized movement structure, a design must be created for digital social movements to effectively maintain on social media platforms.

These findings also suggest that even though the momentum behind the movement may fluctuate significantly, some searches yielding zero tweets (see table 1.), the movement never actually terminates. This begs the question: Is an indefinite social movement an effective social movement? Furthermore, is the sporadic nature of the frequency of engagement with the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag, indicative of a lack of change being yielded by the movement? There must be an understanding of how digital social movements maintain, evolve, and are engaged with on social media platforms before a structure can be created to further the effectiveness of digital social movements.

It is my belief that the problem that Black Lives Matter has had and will continue to have—as a decentralized movement mainly stemming from social media--- is that there are too many voices able to flood the movement and cloud the message. According the Pew Research Center, from a study by Horowitz and Livingston (2016), about 36% of Americans familiar with the Black Lives Matter movement say that they have little understanding of the goals of the movement. As stated in the literature review, there is a difference between the movement itself, and the hashtag that has permeated across Twitter, as well as other mainstream social media platforms. However, even though that difference exists, the hashtag was the catalyst for the movement and continues to essentially be the driving force behind the movement. The power of social media, regarding digital activism, has the potential to continue to uphold its strength if we learn how to effectively utilize its power.

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Appendix A: Twitter Glossary

@

The @ sign is used to call out usernames in Tweets: "Hello @twitter!" People will use your @username to mention you in Tweets, send you a Direct Message or link to your profile.

@Username

A username is how you're identified on Twitter, and is always preceded immediately by the @ symbol. For instance, Twitter Support is @TwitterSupport.

Bio

Your bio is a short (up to 160 characters) personal description that appears in your profile that serves to characterize your persona on Twitter.

Follow

Subscribing to a Twitter account is called "following." To start following, click or tap the Follow icon next to the account name on their profile to see their Tweets as soon as they post something new. Anyone on Twitter can follow or unfollow anyone else at any time, except blocked accounts. See "block".

Follow(s)

A follow is the result of someone following your Twitter account. You can see how many follows (or followers) you have from your Twitter profile.

Follow count

This count reflects how many people you follow and how many follow you; these numbers are found on your Twitter profile.

Follower

A follower is another Twitter account that has followed you to receive your Tweets in their Home timeline.

Hashtag

A hashtag is any word or phrase immediately preceded by the # symbol. When you click or tap on a hashtag, you'll see other Tweets containing the same keyword or topic.

Header photo

Your personal image that you upload, which appears at the top of your profile.

Profile

Your profile displays information you choose to share publicly, as well as all the Tweets you've posted. Your profile along with your @username identify you on Twitter.

Profile photo

The personal image associated with your account. It's also the picture that appears next to each of your Tweets.

Protected Tweets

Tweets are public by default. Choosing to protect your Tweets means that your Tweets will only be seen by your followers.

Reply

A response to another person's Tweet. Reply by clicking or tapping the reply icon next to the Tweet you'd like to respond to. A direct reply count is displayed next to the reply icon of a Tweet, and indicates the total number of replies the Tweet has received.

Reactivation

You may reactivate a deactivated account within 30 days of the deactivation date. After 30 days, deactivated accounts are permanently deleted.

Retweet (n.)

A Tweet that you forward to your followers is known as a Retweet. Often used to pass along news or other valuable discoveries on Twitter, Retweets always retain original attribution.

Retweet (v.)

The act of sharing another account's Tweet to all of your followers by clicking or tapping on the Retweet button.

SMS

Short Message Service (SMS) is most commonly known as text messaging. Learn how to send a Tweet via SMS.

Timeline

A timeline is a real-time stream of Tweets. Your Home timeline, for instance, is where you see all the Tweets shared by your friends and other people you follow.

Top Tweets

Tweets determined by a Twitter algorithm to be the most popular or resonant on Twitter at any given time. Read more about top Tweets.

Trends

A Trend is a topic or hashtag determined algorithmically to be one of the most popular on Twitter at that moment. You can choose to tailor Trends based on your location and who you follow.

Tweet (n.)

A Tweet may contain photos, videos, links and up to 280 characters of text.

Tweet (v.)

The act of sending a Tweet. Tweets get shown in Twitter timelines or are embedded in websites and blogs.

Twitter

An information network made up of 280-character messages (including photos, videos, and links) from all over the world. Sign up for an account.

URL, URLs

A URL (Uniform Resource Locator) is a web address that points to a unique page on the internet.

Appendix B: Twitter Profile

Image obtained from Google images