

**The Communicative Power of Social Media during the Never Again MSD
Movement**

by

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Master of Arts

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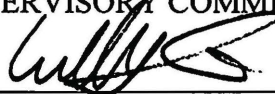
Movement

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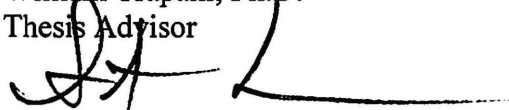
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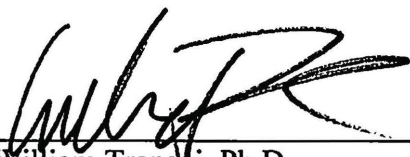
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As I began thinking about possible thesis topics, concepts of social media and activism kept reoccurring in my mind. Then on February 14th, 2018 a tragic school shooting occurred in Parkland, FL. Being born and raised in Florida my whole life this tragedy stuck home. From the very beginning of this movement I watched as students from Stoneman Douglas utilized their social media accounts to advocate and demand change. I would first like to thank the students of Stoneman Douglas for their courageous efforts to make a difference in this world and ultimately being the motivation and reasoning behind this thesis. I would like to then thank my thesis advisor Dr. William Trapani for his continuous support and immense knowledge throughout this process. My sincerest thanks also goes to Dr. Noemi Marin and Dr. Deandre Poole for their sincere and valuable guidance. Thank you to Dr. Stephen Chabonneau for your continuous encouragement and meaningful advice. Lastly, I would like to thank my family and friends for supporting me always. I am extremely thankful and appreciative of you all.

Abstract

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Social media played a pivotal role during The Never Again MSD Movement. This study examines the communicative tools social media, specifically Twitter, provides its users in order to communicate and distribute information. Authors Evans, Twoney, and Talan describes Twitter as “a valuable tool because it allows for instant communication to a wide audience” (9). Twitter is a valuable tool for communication because it fosters an online space where activists utilize the following communication tools: conversation, community, connection, collaboration, and accessibility. The study describes how activists use those tools in the type of messages being communicated on digital spaces. Through a context analysis on tweets from 3 prominent leaders of the movement: Sarah Chadwick, David Hogg, and Cameron Kasky, common themes were identified. The data was collected from a 6 week period ranging from February 14th, 2018 - March 28th, 2018.

The purpose of this study is to ultimately examine how activist communicate on online spaces during social movements. Twitter offers activists a series of communication tools such as community, accessibility, and collaboration. Activists use these tools to first communicate about a variety of different topics relating to the movement as well distribute information and encourage involvement from other users.

The results from the analysis determined that there is indeed power in communicating your message in online spaces. The study concludes with these findings: social media, specifically Twitter, is represented as a communication tool. The leaders of the Never Again MSD Movement use those tools in a variety of different ways such as communicating their personal opinion, encouraging involvement as well as promoting collaboration, community, and accessibility.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Definition of Terms

This thesis will use three significant terms throughout the context of this paper. The terms are as follows: Activism, digital activism, and social media. “*Activism* is defined as “organizing tangible actions in the real world to protest against a given issue” (Sanchez 18). The word *digital activism* is defined as “as the utilization of digital technologies by individuals with the aim of causing social or political change” (Gorkem 102). Lastly, *Social media* is “a specific set of online offerings that have emerged over the past three decades – including blogs, social networking sites, and microblogging” (Treem et al 769).

In addition to the terms presented above, the next section will define the Twitter jargon that will be used throughout this thesis. The first word is *Twitter* and it is defined as a social platform that allows users to compose tweets that are at most 180 characters. A *Tweet* is a short message posted to your Twitter feed or profile. A *Retweet* is a re-posted message that users share on their Twitter feed. The word *Quoting* means to add a comment to an original tweet. A *Reply* is when users respond to a particular tweet. A *Follower* is a person who follows another user or profile on Twitter. *Twitter Feed/Timeline* is a list of tweets that update as new posts are created.

Overview of Student Activism

Student activism plays a vital role in both high school and college campuses. Academic success is a critical goal for students to achieve, but students are always trying to make a difference and put out a call for change on several different topics including school safety, equality, politics, and sexual health on and off campus. Former generations of student activists have used methods such as posting fliers around campus, word of mouth, going door to door, and advertisements in local newspaper to convince others to get involved. These actions lead to protests, sit-ins, marches, and rallies. For this research paper, the study is interested in how modern day student activists are now utilizing a unique tool such as social media to accomplish the same thing. The universal goal of wanting to put an end to injustice has not changed, but social media has changed the way activists now do so in digital spaces. When students engage in digital activism, they used strategies such as “building” social networks, informing large groups of people, and spreading awareness to advocate for social change. It is essential to discuss this topic because social media has changed the resources students use to inform, organize and conduct student activism. Instead of posting flyers around campus, students now choose to post a flyer on their social media accounts. Instead of going to door to door to inform and recruit support, students now send a tweet that thousands of people can see and interact with. Instead of going to churches and other organizations to gain monetary donations, student activists choose to create a GoFundMe page to raise funds for their cause. The research is not necessarily arguing that student activists do not engage in these traditional forms of activism, but instead looks closely on how social media has allowed a quicker and more efficient way to participate in activism.

Statement of Problem

Since the early 20th century, the term slacktivism has emerged to describe how users engage in forms of low-risk digital activism. According to the article “What’s wrong with Slacktivism? Confronting the Neoliberal Assault on Millennials”,

One of the interesting features of these attacks is that they are two-pronged: they come from both Bill O’Reilly-influenced Baby Boomers, who think of this generation as lazy, stupid, and dangerous; and they come from progressives who fail to appreciate the role of social media in contemporary activism, and who miss the ways that this generation wants to make politics pleasurable (McClennen 298).

Also, according to the article, “Activism or Slacktivism”, “It requires minimal time and effort, often without mobilization and/or demonstrable effect in solving a social issue” (Glenn 82). These two statements discussed the lack of involvement associated with digital activism and the lack of participation from students when it comes to social issues. In actuality, students are using their digital spaces to participate in social movements that yield impactful results more than ever before. In Henry Jenkins book, *By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism*, he quotes scholars Melissa Brough and Sangita Shresthova. Brough and Sangita state,

Over the last few decades, the younger generation in particular have become civically and politically engaged in new and different ways, related less to electoral politics or government or civic organizations and more to personal interests, social networks, and cultural or commodity activism. These modes of

political participation are often enacted through informal, noninstitutionalized, nonhierarchical networks in and around the internet (8).

In response to this problem, this study will identify the online tools social media provides. Then this study will investigate a recent example of digital student activism and how the leaders utilized these online tools in both its structure and its messages. Studying this issue will allow for a better understanding of different social media tools and how they are used by activists during social movement. Those specific implications will be studied using Grounded theory and could help resolve the issue.

Purpose

The goal of this study is to refine our current understanding of how students engage in online activism. The objectives of student digital activism should be studied in order to comprehend the communication tools that activist use on online spaces to conduct a social movement. The specific tools reviewed include using their online spaces to inform large groups of people about a particular cause, organizing quickly and efficiently, and differentiated levels of involvement on and off-line. The results of this study are additional research that will contribute to the field of student activism and social media as a communication tool. Understanding the dynamics in which students engage in online activism can be useful as a how-to guide for future activists.

Theoretical Framework

Grounded theory in correlation with secondary data from the Never Again MSD Movement and March for Our Lives provides the necessary framework for this study. This study is structured around social movement theory.

“GT is a widely used qualitative research method to systematically analyze qualitative data. This method is defined as ‘discovering theory from data. Data collection and analysis are interrelated, meaning the data analysis starts as soon as data is gathered. The main tools of gathering data are interviews, observations and memos” (Yilmazer and Acun, 138). It is useful in studying a specific process that focuses on how students successfully engage in digital activism. It also takes a closer look at the online communication strategies that are used by Parkland students and their experiences with such operations. Specifically, the researcher studied the students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School and their social media activity after the February 14th, 2018 School shooting in Parkland, FL to support specific ways Parkland students utilized online communication tools to advance their movement. Those specific ways include how students use their digital space to inform, organized and be involved in social movements. The research also explored additional interviews and journal articles that mention digital activism, student activism, and any recent publication done on the #NeverAgain and March for Our Lives Movement to support its reasoning.

The Never Again MSD movement was chosen because it is a relatively recent example of digital student activism. Also, the Never Again MSD movement was created, inspired, and run solely by students. The movement began in Florida but spread to other geographical areas across the United States. The range of the movement is significant because it supports how specific tools of social media affects where activism is spread and conducted. Since this movement is still ongoing, the research will only include the social media activity from February 14th, 2018 to March 28th, 2018, which is 4 days

after March for Our Lives occurred. This period is defined as the peaking point of the movement itself and the social media activity of Parkland Students.

This study offers an exploration of online communication tools as well as a textual analysis on tweets. This study hopes to describe the communication tools social media provides their users and then discuss how activists implored these tools during social movements. A series of themes will be identified from the data in order to provide specific examples on what activists chose to communicate.

As the previous student-led groups worked towards informing their inner circle, friends, and classmates. Current students have a larger network of individuals on their social platforms whom they choose to communicate and educate on a specific social issues. Public awareness occurs quickly and easily when it comes to distributing information about a social movements online. Secondly, it now takes a group of student leaders and their supporters to organize, encourage protest, and lead a discussion on the topic. On online spaces, they can discuss their thoughts and opinions freely, share ideas, release dates of in-person protests, announce a plan of action, and even speak against those who oppose the movement. In addition, conducting a social movement online has changed the level of individual action previously required to participate in a movement.

The Significance of the Study

It is essential to study this topic directly because social media plays a pivotal role in social movements. The internet has the ability to foster communication, build communities, and offer users a digital space to spread their message. Also, this topic was worthy of study due to the lack of academic research done on the Never Again MSD Movement. According to the article “Digital Justice: An Exploratory Study of Digital

Activism Actions on Twitter”, “Activists are using social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, as an organizing tool to facilitate protests and other related activities” (Sanchez 2). It is important to study these tools because it allows us to support the narrative that social media has the tools necessary to equip student activists. It will also be beneficial in fostering future research on how students engage in digital activism. Real changes are happening in our digital spaces. Student activists are tweeting with a purpose and for a purpose. Through real emotions, thoughts, and a need for change comes a plan of action, establishing a group of supporters, and organizing in ways that can and will make a difference.

A few things to note is that Parkland students are using social media in ways that haven't happened before compared to the aftermath of past school shootings. Parkland students are a part of a generation of young people who have been connected since birth and have shown that they can use this to their advantage. Despite criticisms, as digital natives, “millennials are seasoned users of technology who are innately or inherently tech savvy, and that they behave and think differently because of their use of technology” (Judd 99). Some examples of the specific acts of activism include using Twitter to speak against gun legislation, politicians, and the National Rifle Association (NRA), while also advocating for improved gun reform. Parkland survivors also used Twitter to immediately communicate that a school shooting was occurring at their school. The actual acts of activism may be similar to traditional forms, but it has changed; the resources that social media has provided an activist a larger platform to communicate their messages effectively and competent organization, and a new levels of connection. The study is important to college students, student activists, and different fields in

academia who study global activism such as Communication Studies and Gender, Sexuality & Women Studies.

Chapter Overview

Chapter 2 offers a literature review on the theoretical bases that will be fueling the rhetoric in this thesis. It introduces a brief history of social media and an overview of grounded theory and its process. It then explores recent studies that have conducted a Twitter analysis as well as provides a discussion on current literature on The Never Again MSD Movement.

Chapter 3 offers a more profound description of grounded theory and how it will be used to conduct a content analysis on Twitter posts. The research questions and research design are presented alongside the case study and themes used in the analysis portion of this paper. Data is collected from 3 leaders of the Never Again MSD Movement and their Twitter profiles. The data is collected from a 6 week period. The data is then analyzed to identify common themes, words, and post frequencies.

Chapter 4 discusses the results and finding of the research based off of grounded theory. It also answers the research questions in the discussion portion of that section. Finally, chapter 4 presents a description of how Twitter is represented as a communicative power.

Chapter 5 is the conclusion and presents the significant finding of the study and outlines the limitations within the study and potentials for future research. This thesis represents a smaller concept within a broader framework of how social media has transcend social movements.

Summary

This thesis seeks to determine the communicative power of Twitter during social movements in regards to how activists use this platform to promote dialogue and advance their message. It will also offer an examination of the communication tools used by activists such as conversation, connection, collaboration, accessibility, and connection. There is very little research on how student activists use digital spaces in relation to social movements. This thesis and in this particular chapter, the researcher explained the rationale that is fueling this study while introducing the method and case study that will be used to conduct this analysis. In the following chapter, a detailed description and synthesis of available research done on this subject area is presented.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Social media is a part of our everyday lives, and it offers users a network to connect with others, share and research information, business purposes, and many other functions. Student activism has occurred in the United States and internationally for several decades. Students emerged from within their universities to address social and economic issues that were either affecting them directly, while others chose to advocate for other global issues. Social media has changed the way one now engages in activism. Social media affects student activism in regards to the fact that social media provides activists with the necessary tools and strategies for their activism. This literature review will offer an analysis on the extensive research done on social media such as how it is defined and social media opportunities as well as social media limitations, slacktivism, functions of digital activism, and a Twitter analysis and how it's used in regards to social movements. The second portion will address recent literature on Parkland and the #NeverAgain movement. The third portion will explore Grounded theory and how other academic scholars have used this method. This literature review provides the significance of social media and how it relates to digital activism as well as an exploration of correlating concepts such as Parkland, Grounded Theory, and a Twitter analysis that all contribute to the greater thesis.

Social Media Defined

First, the term social media is loosely defined. Daniel Trottier and Christian Fuch in the article “Theorising Social Media, Politics and the State” argues, “that the notion of social media had been associated with multiple concepts: the corporate media favourite user generated content, Henry Jenkins’ media industries focused convergence culture, Jay Rosen’s the people formerly known as the audience, the politically infused participatory media, Yochai Benkler’s process oriented peer production and Tim O’Reilly’s computer programming oriented Web 2.0” (4). So although there are multiple definitions of social media, many of those components fall under the social media umbrella. The authors go further into what the term “social” means in the word social media. Social media sites are sites that promote interaction between its users. There are of course opposing views on whether or not the Web is considered a social entity “Max Weber’s social action” alongside “Karl Marx notion of collaborative work” are two theories that define what it means to be social in different ways. Ultimately it is determined that “all computing systems, therefore all web applications, and also all forms of media can be considered as social because they store and transmit human knowledge that originates in social relations into society” (5). There are many fundamental aspects of how social media can be defined and Trottier and Fuchs address the significance of these different theories of social media. Ultimately, determining the factors that make social media what it is.

Authors, Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein, breakdown two components that assist in defining social media. According to Kaplan and Haenlein, “in our view—and as used herein—Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on

the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (61). When social media is defined this way, it pushes the need for categories to specify to what type of social media sites are included. Popular sites such as Wikipedia and Facebook are considered social media because they fit the definition. However, there are limitations to this definition because a classification system needs to take into account the new sites created daily. Kaplan and Haenlein also state, “to create such a classification scheme, and to do so in a systematic manner, we rely on a set of theories in the field of media research (social presence, media richness) and social processes (self-presentation, self-disclosure), the two key elements of Social Media” (61). Ultimately, determining that six “different types of social media that can be classified by social presence/media richness and self-presentation/self-disclosure” (62). The article goes further into describing the six different types of social media listed in the table below.

Table 1: Classification of Social Media by social presence/media richness and self-presentation/self-disclosure

		Social presence/ Media richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self-presentation/ Self-disclosure	High	Blogs	Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)	Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life)
	Low	Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia)	Content communities (e.g., YouTube)	Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)

Source: Kaplan, A. and Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), pp.59-68.

As shown in table 1, Kaplan and Haenlein classify sections of self-presentation/ self-discourse and social presence/media richness of blogs, social networking sites, virtual

social world, collaborative projects, content communities, and virtual game worlds on levels of low, medium and high (59-60). Table 1 also provides an example of each type of site.

Lastly, Lynn A. McFarland and Robert E. Ployhart characterize social media as a digital Web 2.0 platform that generates information, content, and collaboration by its users (1654). McFarland and Ployhart provide a preeminent descriptive of each specific category. Social media is a digital entity because it requires internet access. Social media provides a platform both online and mobility that connects people and information. Also, content relates to the posting of: texts, photos, and videos online; which can be compared to the older Web 1.0. The Web 1.0. consisted entirely of emails and text messaging but lacked the ability to transfer information to large networks. A few recent examples of social media sites are as following: Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, and YouTube. Although new social networking sites are created daily, there is an underlining structure that defines social media. Social media sites represent the single ability of users to create, manipulate and distribute content.

History

The emergence of social media derives from the use of email. It is debatable that email contributed to the origins of social media but “email marked the beginning to the much more collaborative social media years later” (Patil 70). Email allowed for continuous communication between different parties. The properties of email continue to advance throughout the late 1900s. In 1979, the Usenet was used as an online messaging exchanging platform, in 1984, LISTSERV distributed message to a large group of people, in 1988, IRC transcended previous forms and created a platform for individuals to

communicate in chat rooms and one on one in private messaging (Patil 70-71). The functions of the email include sending and retrieving messaging, storing and organizing messages, and simple and easy use. These are common themes that contribute to the foundation of social networking sites.

After the popularity of email, the 1990s brought the use of blogs, wikis, and podcasts. Danah M. Boyd and Nicole B. Ellison describe a few major social networking sites created in the 1990s and their functions. One site, in particular, was SixDegrees.com, users could have profiles, friends and a searchable friend list (Boyd and Ellison 4). Another common site was Classmates, it was a social site solely for high school and college, students were able to be affiliated with their individuals' schools and the students that went to their schools, but it took a few years for the site to have profiles and friend list (4). Standard features of social networking sites (i.e. dating profiles, blogs, and email groups) are that most include user profiles, a friend list, and messaging components

Authors Simeon Edosomwan et al, describes popular social media sites of the 1990s in the article "The history of social media and its impact on business". Those sites include BlackPlanet, Asian Avenue, and MoveOn (4). Social media sites allowed individuals to interact with one another, while other sites were used for political purposes such as public policy and a web of contacts model (4). Blogger sites were also common during this period. Blogger sites such as Epinions, Third Voice, and Napster served different purposes. Some sites focused on product review where users can post and read about products, while others allowed users to share files among each other and post comments (4). Additionally, Edosomwan et al discuss social networking sites during the

early 2000s. The authors described social network sites of the 2000s as “highly boosted and transformed the interaction of individuals and organizations who share a common interest in music, education, movies, and friendship, based on social networking” (4). Common social media sites of the 1990s were LunarStorm, Fotolog Sky Blog, Six Degrees, Cyworld, Ryze, and Wikipedia.

A transactional period was occurring in social networking sites during the early 2000s. It was during the early 2000s where sites such as Friendster, Myspace, and Facebook emerged. Authors Danah M. Boyd and Nicole B. Ellison explored the contributing and limiting factors of the social networking site Friendster. Created to compete with Match.Com (a dating site), Friendster focused on building relationships based off of friends-of-friends interactions. The reasoning behind this is because they believed a friend of a friend would make a better romantic partner than a stranger (Boyd 6). The authors further explored how Friendster faulted as an SNS because it was not able to equip a large number of users, had restricted activity for its users, and banned the profiles of Fakesters (Fake Friendster profiles), which most users enjoyed.

Authors Sharon Griffith and Liwan Liyanage look further into the SNS Myspace and its capabilities. Some capabilities include talking online with friends, matchmaking, keeping in touch with families, networking opportunities, studying and looking for long lost friends (Griffith and Livanage 77). Myspace is also popular among young adults and teenagers. Likewise, James Caverlee and Steve Webb study the characteristics of Myspace. Through studying the Myspace’s sociability, demographics, and language model they hope to encourage the development of “new models, algorithms, and approaches for the further enhancement and continued success of online social networks”

(Caverlee and Webb 1). They discovered that the functionalities of Myspace include social aspects, i.e., group participation, activeness, and ability to connect with others, as well as the location of its users and age range helps users better understand who uses Myspace and in what way.

According to Ralf Caers and Tim De Feyter et al., “The introduction and rise of the social network site (SNS) Facebook have been one of the most important social trends of the past decade” (983). The authors go on to study specifically a few of Facebook prominent features such as user profiles, friend lists, home page/news feed, status updates, the like button, and the comment section. They also used literature from academic scholars to support the motivating factors to why individuals chose to join and actively engaged in Facebook. Noting a studying done by Sledgianowski and Kulviwat (2009), the sample interviewed 289 students from an American university and discovered that they joined because of the “perceived playfulness and the critical mass of the site” (984). Another important aspect of Facebook is its networking qualities. “Early research by Lewis and West (2009) found that users with a large number of Facebook friends do not necessarily have the same number of close friends in everyday life” (986). The authors also note the lack of research done on Facebook networking. Future research should study the impression of users with larger networks than others and the effects of having many Facebook friends have on users.

Evidence presented by Niels Bruggers suggests that during the spring of 2006 Facebook enters a transitional period because it allowed for users outside the education system to join such as popular businesses like Apple and Microsoft (1). Facebook also allowed anyone above the age of 13 to join and increased the number of languages

available on Facebook that same year. Other changes included Facebook video, allowing political candidates, restaurants, musicians, and organizations to create a profile, status updates, Facebook mobile, and Facebook advertisements. Facebook was a fast-growing SNS, and as we moved deeper into the 21st century, the functions of Facebook move beyond user-generated content and social profiles. Those changes, as well as the rise of other social media sites and their contributions to the context of my paper, will be studied in the next section.

Social Media Today

As we move deeper into the 21st century, sites such as Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and LinkedIn have emerged as the new social networking sites. Compared to former social media sites, they have substantially the same functionality which includes giving its users the ability to create and post content as well as connect with friends and build their networks. Social media platforms today now give users the ability to conduct social activism, alongside others functions. In this section, the research will explore existing literature on the functions of modern social media sites, specifically focusing on research that relates to digital activism.

Authors Rony Medgalia, Jeremy Rose, Tom Nyvang, and Oystein Saeboa explore the functions of social media. The authors describe specific functions of 4 popular social media sites: Facebook, Myspace, Second Life, and Twitter. The authors determine that features often vary amongst social networking sites since their purpose and target groups vary, as well (6). Facebook, for example, was created for private use as the owners control the infrastructure and users control everything else from pictures, status updates, individual profiles, etc. (6). Myspace, an older SNS, has all the traditional functions of

social media such as profiles for its members, networks, and interactions between its users (7). Second Life is an Internet-based virtual world. Residents (users) have the opportunity to explore, use currency, and interact with other residents (9). Lastly, Twitter serves a microblogging site. Users can post “tweets” which are accessible to other users. Through an analysis of 4 SNSs, the authors conclude with 6 common features/functions of social media: Digital persona/virtual identity, network building, network maintenance, network interaction, user generation of virtual content, and network self-governance. With this approach, we can see what they have in common and how they differ as individual SNSs.

Alexander Richter and Michael Kochrefers describe common functions of social networking sites. The functionalities of social media are spilled into six basic functionality of SNS: Identity management, Expert finding, Context awareness, Contact management, Network awareness, and Exchange (3). Ritcher and Kochrefers further describe each of the functions in detail and how each role ultimately mirrors back to the goal of SNS which is to “support building, maintenance and usage of social networks” (5). The authors concluded that the functions of SNS’s would help mobilized and integration the use of different social networking applications.

According to Cat Pausé and Deborah Russell, the creation of social media have transcended academic scholarship compared to traditional forms. Despite basic functions, sites such as blogs, Twitter, Tumblr, and Facebook now gives its users the ability to communicate knowledge (9). Social media have transcended scholarship because it allows scholars to promote their research on SNS. Research is easily accessible to social

media users as well as allowing users the opportunity to comment on research and share it with others.

Just as social media can facilitate and transform businesses, organizations, and education, it has contributed significantly to the field of activism. Social media provides users with a series of tools that assist in facilitating different forms of activism through an online realm. According to Dr. Maria Bakardjieva, Dr. Jakob Svensson, and Dr. Marko M. Skoric, when citizens, activists, and participants are a part of social movements, they do so in hybrid media environments (1). Social media provides the necessary tools and possibilities for mobilized activism. “With massive growth in online social networking, digital infrastructures offer citizens new channels for speaking and acting together and thus lower the threshold for involvement in collective action and, eventually, politics” (1). With these changes, the authors studied further how online activism has led to digital storytelling. Digital storytelling allows users to engage in significant political issues and discussions in online spaces. To further support their reasoning, the authors include digital activism studies from other academic scholars. Quoting Henrik Serup Christensen, he used survey data to determine that people in Finland who engage in political activity online are not less informed compared to individuals who don’t engage in any. Christenesen determined that although many people believe that digital activism is causing slacktivism, he states that his study is proof that it isn’t. Yana Breindl’s describes European activist groups’ interconnection between on and offline activity. The authors’ state, “With respect to the particular cause mobilizing these activists, the ability to participate as well as the chance to emerge as a leader is strongly dependent on technical competence, belonging to geek culture, being male, highly educated and urban” (3).

Authors Marcos Sivitanides and Vivek Shah explored the fundamental aspects of digital activism. The authors looked explicitly into how digital activism is defined and how it has transformed activism compared to traditional forms. The authors defined activism as “the doctrine or practice of rigorous action or involvement as a means of achieving political or other goals, sometimes by demonstrations protests, etc (2)”. The center of digital activism is its digital infrastructure. The infrastructure allows users to connect through technological devices. Through a study of its infrastructure, the authors determine that the value of digital activism comes from 3 user perspectives: optimists, pessimists, and persistent. An optimist believes that digital activism is an empowering tool, a pessimist’s views digital activism as impactful but notes the technology can be impartial, while persistent users have a neutral feeling on technology affects digital activism (4)”. The authors conclude with the fact that digital activism alongside individual acts, existing orders, and innovation, have the opportunity to evoke real change.

Author Maria Cernat references previous examples of digital activism such as the Arab Spring and Moldova’s Twitter Revolution to support the notion that technology leads to social progress. Digital activism has many advantages because many people have access to SNSs, it is reasonably priced to join and be a part of, and users can easily communicate with other users. Although, Cerna confirms that digital activism is impactful, she more interested in studying the challenges of digital activism. The two main obstacles she discovered is “the indirect danger represented by the neoliberal deregulation perspective allowing the Internet to become a highly restricted and almost “feudalized” environment, and the direct and obvious dangers authoritarian regimes bring

forward when trying to transform the liberating technologies into oppressive ones” (1684). To support these ideals, Cernat discusses others digital activism examples that involve these challenges. One example described is the 2009 Moldova, where members of the NGO attempted a flash mob using Twitter (1685). Although they used an SNS, 15,000 people did not show up solely because they saw it on Twitter. Other factors are involved in making an online protest, off-line. Since the internet now has to power to at least assist in these large scales social movement, the author questions whether or not the internet should be regulated and this is where the challenges concur. If internet use must be regulated, we face the dangers of political decisions being more restrictive while, deregulation allows companies financial constraints (1685). The author concludes that there is a digital divide and the future of digital activism lies between choosing between political or corporate control. Choosing between these two mediums is not an easy choice because the goal is chose an option that better benefits the public.

Author Trisha Barauh describes social media as a useful tool for communication. Barauh provides examples of how online communication tools increases users ability to spread awareness and share ideas. Social media also represents a social space where users can find various sources of information with less cost and very little time and effort. As Barauh concludes a study of Guwahati residents on whether they consider social media to be a significant communication tool she determines, that collaborations become easier online as social media provides inexpensive tools to organize, communicate, and contribute to the discourse.

Twitter analysis

Digital activism commonly uses social media for its efforts. Social media data is raw information collected from social media activity. It could be anything from likes, and retweets, tweets, mentions, comments, and shares. The data can assist in answering as well as contributing to the research question and the overall thesis. Social media sites also have a large impact when it comes to social movements and protest.

The Arab Social Media Report studies Facebook and Twitter usage trends during the year 2011. The study wanted to explore how citizen utilized social and civil mobilization online to organized demonstrations, spread information, raise awareness, and engage and encourage participation among citizens (2). The data portrayed this by monitoring how many times a user used a Facebook tool, the blackout period when usage was low, a map tracking calls of protest on Facebook, and the growth rate of Facebook users during the 2011 protest (4-5). On Twitter, they were able to track the number of tweets in the Arab region as well as the number of daily tweets. The study also tracked the top 10 Twitter trends related to the social movement such as #egypt, #jan25, and #libra. Through this study, the authors determined that studying Facebook and Twitter usage does play a role in “mobilization, empowerment, shaping opinions and influencing change” (24).

Social media has offered political protest, a digital space in which users can engage in different forms of activism. Author Alireza Karduni, studies data collected from Twitter to better understand the dynamics following the shooting of Keith Lamont Scott in Charlotte. Karduni studies specifically how a specific social media site responds to a specific protest (9). Through a natural language process on tweets to pull meaningful

information about the location of the protest and using the Named Entity Protest Recognition (NER) Karduni was able to document the location, date, people, organization, etc., of the particular protest. Secondly, Karduni studied tweets in order to determine peoples involved in the movement. Through this method, a connection and nodes are created between users who tweet or retweet something relating to the movement.

Authors Sebastian Valenzuela et al, studies the correlation between social media use and protest behavior. Considering the period of the Chilean Winter which a massive student-led protest took place, the authors configured a cross-sectional survey tracking social media use prior, during, and after the protest (2047). Through the study comes a series of score matching and a separate analysis of how Twitter effect protest based on survey results. The authors determined that social media does affect if Twitter has a positive effect on whether an individual will join a social protest (2056). This data set is studied for a period of 3 years. Twitter data can be used to determine the likelihood of joining a social protest based on how regularly they use these sites.

Parkland Students and the Never Again MSD Movement

Minimal academic research is available on the Never Again MSD Movement. One particular article by Mike Kennedy describes the aftermath of the February 2018 School shooting. Kennedy describes how Parkland students transformed their grief into meaningful action (22). The shooting led to a nationwide discussion about gun violence and changing gun laws. Some believe that restricting gun use will lead to a safer campus, while others think the opposite. Kennedy describes that compared to other school shootings, Parkland students “harnessed their passion and anger and created a youth

movement to pressure lawmakers to adopt greater restrictions on who can acquire guns and what kinds of firearms are legally available” (23). Through this movement Parkland students utilized social media and other offline strategies to recruit supporters and encourage lawmakers to change gun laws as well as planned a national march called March for Our Lives. The author also discusses solutions that have transpired because of their actions. A few of those solutions were Florida Governor Rick Scott proposing a \$500 million health and school safety initiative, encouraging law enforcement to remove guns from someone who is under the age of 21, banning guns from anyone with a history of domestic violence or restraining orders, etc. (24). Other potential solutions remain up in the air because there is still an ongoing debate on whether or not arming teachers will solve the problem or limiting gun use is the better resolution.

While previous researchers have focused on digital activism, social movements, and the effectiveness of using both coherently, current literature lacks a study of how Parkland students were able to use social media as a medium to communicate their message to a broad audience. It is crucial to study the specific strategies they used and the outcome of such strategies. The Never Again MSD Movement is still ongoing and the need to study this topic is significant.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory (GT) is a methodology conceived by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. Grounded theory configures theories through data. There are common misconceptions when it comes to conducting a literature review on grounded theory. Scholars argued that a literature review of grounded theory isn't conducted until the analysis is completed (Glaser & Strauss 1967). The reasoning behind this is that

scholars believe that conducting a literature review may create preconceived conclusions before one conduct their research (Glaser 1992). Authors McGhee, Marland, and Atkinson, argue for doing a literature review because it prevents a researcher from being contaminated. Also, it helps avoids assumptions as well as keeping the researcher vision clear (8). Opposing view advocate for using a literature review before research. Several reasons include theoretical sensitivity, an additional source of data, emerging questions, theoretical sampling, and supplementary validity (4). These are benefiting factors to individual research. Also, Glaser argues for several levels of literature required with grounded theory (4).

The Process of Grounded Theory

Ina Peters describes grounded theory as a research method in social movement theory. Peters describes that this method offers a variety of techniques to collect data such as interviews (7). Researchers can use the method any way they wish but it should include an analytical approach as well as objectives (12). Peters states that the central point of grounded theory is coding. Coding occurs after data is collected. Concepts and categories derives from research. Coding has the ability to change throughout research (16). Coding occurs in three forms: open, axial, reflective. Finally, the results are assessed based on 3 criteria objectivity, reliability, and validity. The author concludes with the limitations of Grounded Theory as a qualitative method. He describes grounded theory as a time-consuming methodology as well as the coding process requiring patience and an open mind because research can change (24).

For the case of this literature review, the researcher will explore previous studies that have used Grounded theory as it relates to methods of digital activism. Author Jose

Marichal used grounded theory to study politically oriented Facebook group. Marichal developed a digital front stage theory. Through this theory, Marichal conducted a qualitative content analysis of 250 political Facebook groups (4). Marichal used the digital-front-stage as a framework for determining political identities on SNS's. Marichal states, "The analysis led me to highlight four distinct dimensions of an expressive political performance (expressivity, identity, signifiers, length)" (5).

Authors Jake Wallis and Lisa Given use a mix of research methods to study the online campaign of an environmental movement in Tasmania. The purpose of the study is to determine how ecological activist utilized digital media to mobilize public engagement and influence policy. Explicitly focusing on functions of grounded theory, Wallis and Given created an approach that pushes a process of data collection and analysis, an understanding of how data can change, and the process of developing categories and themes from data (6). Ultimately, determining that online structures focus on the type of organization (activist groups, campaign groups, media, government, etc) and the number of network nodes (varies) all relate to the formulation of public policy (15).

Authors Lin Qui et al, applied the grounded theory methodology to establish categories of online collective behavior in China as well as survey its users to understand its motivation better. Through grounded theory, Qui et al discovered 70 occurrences of online collective action and randomly selected 10 and labeled each one. The labels led to a reoccurring theme. The rest of the 60 behaviors is categorized into other themes (50). In the survey portion of the study 174 participants completed a survey that sought out to predict the psychological factors of participation in online collective behaviors in China

(53). The four categories are social and political attitudes, identification with online collective activism, feelings of estrangement, and normative influence.

Summary

In this literature review, a series of academic sources were used to describe how different authors define social media. Ultimately, determining that there is not a central definition of social media but there are obvious implications that describes social media such as user-generated content, social networking profiles, and the ability to communicate with other users. How social media is defined is relevant to the study because social media represents a medium which activism derives from. Also, clearly understanding social media meaning, functions and others underlies is beneficial when we study how activists use social media sites. The next section described previous research done on the history of social media beginning with the creation of email in the mid-1900s to the transactional period during the Facebook era. The social networking sites although differ in their purpose; all have essentially the same capabilities and features. Those capabilities include user profiles, friend lists, and user ability to create and post content. The functions of social media are clearly identified. The final section describes how academic scholars currently view the functionalities of social media sites today. Those functions vary amongst authors from network building/interactions, user generation of virtual content to identity management and network awareness. It was important to briefly note how social media affects other disciplines as well as look at other research that focus specifically on digital activism. Authors have conflicting ideas of digital activism as it is indeed impactful but of course, has challenges and limiting

factors. Lastly, the researcher describes an overview of the Never Again MSD Movement as well as a description of grounded theory and how it is used in academic research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Social media has played a prominent role in the Never Again MSD Movement, also known as #NeverAgain and #EnoughisEnough since its origins. After the February 14th school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas in Parkland, FL, survivors used their social media accounts to express feelings of grief and mourning over those unfortunate events. Even as the events were unfolding right in front of them, students used their smartphones to record and post about the shooting. Those initial feelings ultimately transpired into a full-fledged social movement. Through digital methods alongside other off-line strategies, Parkland students were able to transcend what it means to conduct a social movement in digital spaces. The present study is two-fold. In the next section, the research will explore the communicative power of social media in order to determine how sites, i.e., Twitter, contributed to the success of the Never Again MSD Movement.

Since its formation and the continuous action of the Never Again MSD Movement, Twitter has played a prominent role. Through Social Movement Theory (Cohen, 1985; Buechler, 1995; Klandermans, 1991), specifically, Resource mobilization theory, this thesis studies the digital activist tactics used by Parkland students and how the tool of social media has allowed them to take action. Eduardo Canel describes resource mobilization theory as a,

Challenge of the functionalist basis of collective behavior theory — which emphasized integration, equilibrium, and harmony — and proposed a conflict model of social action. Collective action, they argued, is triggered by well-entrenched cleavages in society, not by short-term strains resulting from rapid social change (4).

The “resource” studied is social media, as well as the correlating concepts such as giving users a space to inform, organize, and encourage involvement. These theories will be applied using a grounded theory approach and a textual analysis of its data. A qualitative study of 3 leaders of The Never Again MSD movement Twitter profiles and its content will be studied. The purpose of this approach is to conclude how these activists utilized social media as a communicative power. Specifically, this will be identified by studying how these activists used online tools and resources. Also, the research seeks to answer the research questions listed below.

Research Questions

This thesis seeks to analyze the data collected to answer the following questions:

1. *What role Twitter play during the Never Again MSD Movement?*
2. *What communicative themes appeared on Twitter during The Never Again MSD Movement? And what impact did those themes have on the movement?*
3. *What effect did social media have as a communication tool during the Never Again MSD Movement?*

Research Design

Grounded theory seeks to create a method based off a collection of data to address issues in our daily lives. Barry A. Turner describes the advantages of using grounded theory. Turner states, (grounded theory) “promotes the development of theoretical accounts and explanations which conform closely to the situations being observed, so that the theory is likely to be intelligible to, and usable by, those in the situations studied and is open to comment and correction by them” (226-7). Other advantages can include the general complexity of the grounded theory to cause appeal and utility as well as allow the researcher the ability to use their intellect and imagination in interpreting data (Turner 227).

This thesis uses a grounded theory with a qualitative approach to study Twitter. The content was analyzed during the first 6 weeks of the movement from February 14th, 2018 – March 28th, 2018. Grounded theory employs the use of secondary data in an attempt to solve a problem. Secondary data in a qualitative and grounded theory approach can include collecting data from several sources such as interviews, observations, government documents, newspapers, videotapes, letters, and books (Corbin and Strauss, 5). Through data collection, a coding process, and categorizing of common themes these factors assist in creating a theory.

Authors Corbin and Strauss further explain that through the process of data collection the researcher has captured relevant data as soon as it is perceived (6). Through this process, categories are created based on common concepts and through the process of coding. The method of coding begins when data is analyzed, compared, and then placed in a category. Coding helps constructs common themes, descriptions, and theories

(Walker and Myrick, 547). The concepts that appear most prominently in the data collection portion become categories. Categories “must be developed in terms of its properties and dimensions of the phenomenon it represents, conditions which give rise to it, the action/interaction by which it is expressed, and the consequences it produces” (Corbin and Strauss, 7-8).

Many social media sites were used during the Never Again MSD Movement. Twitter was chosen specifically because this was one of the sites used by Parkland survivors and supporters during the movement. Also, the content posted on Twitter came directly from Parkland survivors and leaders of the movement instead of outside sources. This thesis is also limited in length so, it is essential to keep the platforms that are analyzed narrow to provide more of a detailed analysis of those sites. The Twitter profiles of the leaders of the Never Again MSD Movement are also public and readily available for viewing. The content posted on these pages such as images, videos, links, questions, and comments are also relevant to the overall thesis.

Twitter is used in the United States. In regards to social movements, Tremayne states, “Twitter has emerged as a popular organizing and communication tool for protestors around the world” (110). The common use of Twitter by the population and in social movements makes it a relevant area of study.

Twitter also represents a new public sphere. These social media sites are considered a public sphere because they foster communication between users. Communication can include anything from exchanging ideas, opinions, and commentary on different topics.

The exchanging of ideas and the interaction between users individuals has reached a higher level thanks to the using of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. These users can communicate freely with each-other and consequently can come together for a certain theme (Cela, 196).

The communication practices that social media provides are beneficial to social movements. For this thesis, the researcher studied the communication/content posted by the leaders of the Never Again MSD Movement. The researcher also identify the specific communications tool used in digital spaces and by the movements' leaders.

The data collected is analyzed in hopes of finding general themes and purposes.

Ultimately, it determined that social media has played a prevalent role in the Never Again MSD Movement.

The results derived from this qualitative study must be reliable and valid. To produce reliable results --- results that can be replicated, and validity --- how accurately the subject is being measured, “the researcher must aim at describing the analyzing process in as much detail as possible when reporting the results” (Elo and Kyngas, 112). Reliability and validity are necessary to ensure that the research is producing accurate and consistent results.

Data Collection/Analysis

Method

Using the foundations of grounded theory and qualities of qualitative research, an inductive content analysis of written secondary data retrieved from Twitter was conducted. Content analysis is a process of making valid inferences based on data and its context in order to provide knowledge, insights, facts, and a guide to action (Elo and

Kyngas, 108). To conduct a content analysis, tweets from Twitter were collected and then process within a coding computer program called NVivo 12. The content within these posts will be coded based on 5 major categories: informing, personal opinion, useful, other, and involvement. Each post will also be coded based on the type of media it contains including text, images, videos, and URLs. This is necessary because tweets especially are limited to only 180 characters. Because of this, tweets offer quick snapshots of information. It is common for tweets to include images, videos, or URLs. The main objective of studying this content is to determine the communicative power of social media during the Never Again MSD Movement. As well as pinpoint which types of posts impacted the movement, the social media tools used by activists, and how these communicative factors led to the overall success of the movement.

Sampling

The research will examine the first 6 weeks of the movement ranging from February 14th, 2018 – March 28th, 2018. Also, March for Our Lives, a national demonstration led by the movement, occurred on March 24th, 2018. This was a March organized by leaders of the Never Again MSD movement and signifies a major accomplishment and event for the movement. The movement is still ongoing, so it was decided to stop collecting data on March 28th, 2018. This period is marked as a significant event and provides data that includes the aftermath of March for Our Lives. The data pulled for this period is recognized as the peak of the movement and data collected will be analyzed to identify common themes and patterns.

Many Twitter pages were created in support of the Never Again MSD Movement. The researcher examined the Twitter profiles of 3 prominent leaders of the movement:

Cameron Kasky, David Hogg, and Sarah Chadwick. Kasky is 18 years old from Hollywood, Florida. Kasky is known as one of the co-founders of the Never Again MSD Movement and organizers of March for Our Lives. He is currently a senior at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL. Hogg is a co-founder of the movement. Hogg wrote a book about his experiences called “#NeverAgain: A New Generation Draws the Line”. Hogg will be attending Harvard University starting fall 2019. At the time of the shooting, Hogg was a senior. Chadwick is a 17-year-old from Margate, Florida. Chadwick is an activist and one of the co-founders of the movement. Chadwick still attends Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL.

The researcher chose to collect data from these pages because they provided the most factual and up to date information. The leaders of the movement posted relevant information relating to social change. These pages were also public so a vast number of users had access to their profiles. Users were also able to freely like, comment, and share/retweet content on all three pages. Also, after a review of their profiles alongside a comparison of other leaders in the movement, their profiles contained the most useful information as well as the most engagement based on a numbers followers, retweets, and likes.

Other twitter pages who supported the movement exist but were not included in this study because their posts are random and have less engagement amongst its followers. The pages chosen for this analysis are considered the best representation of the movement and the information posted on these pages contain the most relevant information to the researchers’ knowledge. This information is related to this study as well as the ideals, purpose, and goals of the movement.

Data Analysis

To conduct a proper analysis of the data, the process includes two major steps. First, the data is coded to discover major categories. Once the data is analyzed, it is used to answer the research questions and contributed to the discussion/findings portion of this research paper.

The coding process is analyzing the discourse that occurred on one major social networking site: Twitter; during a selected period during the Never Again MSD movement. The discourse then transcend into categories. This process allows the researcher to identify what type of conversations were occurring on these pages as well as organized these conversations into categories. If conducted properly, content analysis is a powerful tool in analyzing large volumes of data. It is beneficial because it can provide a systematic, replicable technique for compressing common words in a text into categories based on the rules in coding (Stemler, 10). The purpose of this coding process is to determine which posts were most common among the users in this study.

First, the data is collected. Then the content is coded into 5 major categories as well as 4 sub-categories. The 4 major themes contain posts that fall into the following topics: informing, personal opinion, useful, and involvement. Other themes will be classified into an “other” category and those posts will be analyzed in order to determine their purpose to the study. Secondly, posts will also be coded into these categories if they contain tPhe following: text, images, video, and URLs.

The first category is posts that fall into the useful category. Useful posts are important to the overall study. Useful posts can include advice, words of encouragement,

quotes, general thankfulness or anything similar that may positively contribute to the movement. Useful posts cannot fall into multiple categories

The second category is informing/awareness. Posts that fall into this category include content that provides any general information about the movement. Posts that contain factual information about guns laws, gun reform, and the current state of the movement such as pitfalls, achievements, potential solutions, and survivors' statements also fall into these categories.

The third category is personal opinion. Posts in this category include the personal views of the user based on a series of topics. Topics include anything related to the movement such as its progress and opposition and personal views of politicians, the NRA, etc. Posts in this category do not contain any factual information.

The fourth category is involvement. These posts pertain different ways to get involved both online and off-line. Some examples will include general information on how to get involved, flyers, dates, and locations of in-person rallies and marches, links to Go Fund Me accounts, petitions, etc.

The last four categories are as following: text, images, videos, and URLs. Posts in these categories must contain at least one of these aspects to fall into this section. It is also possible that some of those posts may include multiple aspects and are categorized as necessary.

The Twitter Analytics tool called Foller.me, offered a review of the Twitter profiles of Chadwick, Hogg, and Kasky. Chadwick (@sarahchadwickk) has a total of 320,928 followers and 8,377 tweets. The topics Chadwick commonly tweets about is voting, Florida, elections, and Parkland. Popular hashtags include

#endgunvioleceetogether, #voteforourlives, #march4ourlives. Hogg (@davidhogg111) has a total of 921,589 followers and 5,672 tweets. Hogg commonly tweets about the NRA, guns, laws, and violence. Popular hashtags include #gunviolence and #march4ourlvies. Lastly, Kasky (@Cameron_Kasky) has a total of 433,553 followers and 3,945 tweets. Kasky commonly tweets about people, love, fighting, and children. Kasky most common hashtag is #guncontrol.

Limitation of Study

Common in many research papers, this study has a few limitations. One limitation is that research only includes one social media site. During the first 6 weeks of the movement, many other outlets created social media pages in support of the movement. Those pages may also contain useful information that may positively contribute to the movement. However, due to time constraints and finances those pages cannot be included in this analysis.

Secondly, the research only studied the posts within the first 6 weeks of the movement. Because, the movement is still ongoing, millions of posts may have emerged after March 28th, 2018. Future research can study other social media sites as well as a longer period within the movement.

In this section, the research introduced how using grounded theory and qualitative research will be used to conduct a content analysis on social media posts that occurred on Twitter during the Never Again MSD Movement. Secondly, the research questions and research design are presented. Using a coding system called NVivo, posts will be coded into 5 major categories and 4 subcategories. These categories as a following: informing/awareness, personal opinion, involvement, useful, other, as well as the text,

image, video, and URLs. The purpose of this study is to analyze the communicative power of social media to determine how sites, i.e., Twitter, provides activists with the necessary tools to communicate and the specific ways activists use these tools to communicate and advocate.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

In this section of the paper, the research conducted on the communications patterns of 3 prominent leaders of the Never Again MSD Movement will be presented. Ranging from February 14th, 2018 – March 28th, 2018, a set of data was collected. The research surrounding this thesis seeks to answer how the communicative power of social media, specifically Twitter implored the discourse of those 3 leaders. The data analysis process includes a collection of Twitter posts from each leader during the 6 weeks. After the data set is created, the information is then analyzed and sorted to identify common themes and patterns. Each theme was given a description based on observations and characteristics within each dataset. Then those themes were further analyzed to better understand the type of messages being communicated on Twitter as an overview of individual posts. Also, the analysis will answer which themes were most common and which words were consistently occurring in their discourse. Ultimately, supporting the research questions that were presented in Chapter 3.

Twitter Discourse during the Never Again MSD Movement

Overview

Posts relating to the movement began immediately on February 14th, 2018 and remain frequent up until March for Our Lives on March 24th, 2018. The analysis portion included 4 days after the March to accurately track the decline of posts. Among the profiles of Chadwick, Hogg, and Kasky, these users posted multiples times a day. In this section, Chadwick, Hogg, and Kasky will be referred to as “leaders” when discussed as a collective group unless otherwise stated. Chadwick averaged about 29 posts a week, Hogg averaged 43.86 posts a week, and Kasky averaged 50.57 posts a week. The leaders

of the movement posted less frequently about the Never Again MSD Movement after March for Our Lives. The overall frequencies of these posts over 6 weeks is displayed in figure 1.

Figure 1

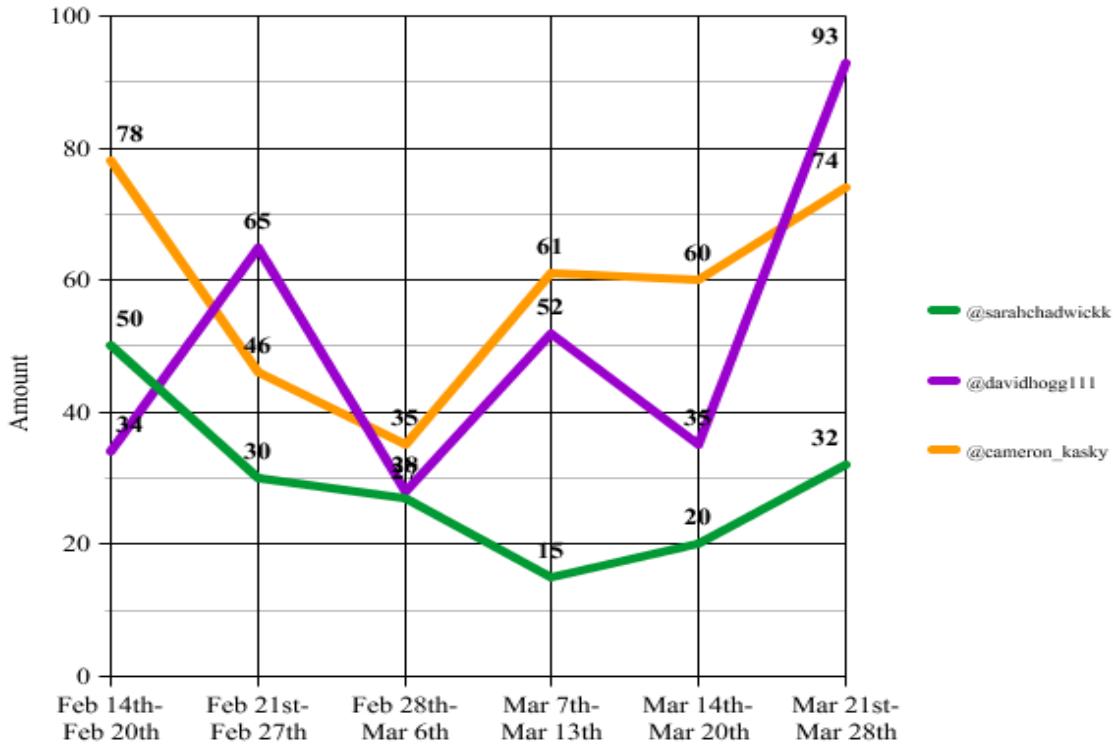


Figure 1: The frequency of posts over a 6 week period.

Twitter Posts

The Twitter posts described below will each contain the Twitter handler of the user the tweet belongs to and a reference number. The data set only includes original posts by the leaders. Retweets were not included in this analysis. Tweets were reviewed, coded repeatedly to maintain the best level of accuracy. A total of 835 posts were collected from the Twitter profiles of Chadwick, Hogg, and Kasky and uploaded into the computer program NVivo 12 Plus. From the data set, 174 tweets belonged Chadwick,

307 tweets belonged to Hogg, and 354 tweets belonged to Kasky. Posts were coded once into the following major themes: informing, personal opinion, useful, other and involvement. Posts were coded a second time or multiple times (depending on the tweet) if they included one or more of the following component: text, image, URLs, and videos.

Figure 2

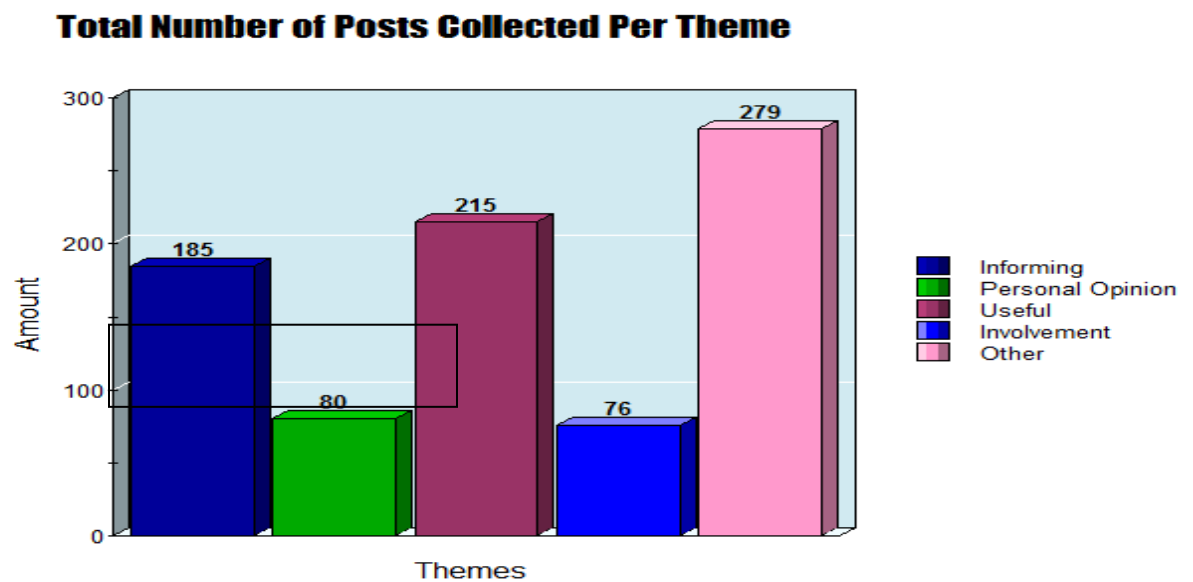


Figure 2: The total number of collected posts per theme. (Based on the key, themes are represented in order from left to right)

Other

Of the total posts collected, 279 posts were categorized under the theme other because they contain information not directly related to the Never Again MSD movement or March for Our Lives. Other posts covered 14.21% of all total posts. Other tweets often included information about their personal lives for example: “On spring break rn” (@davidhogg111, reference 11) and “Daaammnnnn who is this hottie (@sarahchadwickk, reference 66). Another commonality of “other” tweets is that they were difficult to categorize because they did not directly fit into the other categories.

Tweets in this category were often sarcastic, used ridicule, and were personal attacks against those who opposed the movement. Some examples include: “The current White House is like a more intense version of Henry VIII’s marriage history” (@cameron_kasky, reference 46) and “Guys I just heard a crazy wild ridiculous bonkers rumors that amendments can be amended (@cameron_kasky, reference 50). These tweets don’t align with other examples that represented the characteristics of the Never Again MSD Movement. Secondly, it difficult to identify why these posts were created. It is also impossible to determine if these tweets were posted for a purpose and if they expected it to make a difference in the movement. Although it was a possibility to create a new theme for these type of posts, the amount of posts were limited. It would not warrant enough information and be worthwhile to examine further if there were in their own individuals themes based on the discretion of the researchers. Since these types of tweets were still occurring over 6 weeks, they are included in the overall analysis of the data set.

Useful

215 posts was coded under the theme useful. They cover a percentage of 19.91% of all total posts. Useful posts were the second most frequently coded posts in this sample. Useful posts contain words of encouragement, advice, quotes, and general thankfulness to those who supported the movement. These posts were ubiquitous because the leaders often commented on their need to incite a sense of unity and solidarity among those who believed in their message. See figure 3.

Figure 3



Figure 3: An example of a useful post from @cameron_kasky.

Although the situation (Stoneman Douglas School Shooting) was a very difficult one, leaders often commented to its supporters the idea that despite what happened they would be able to overcome it and incite real change. A few examples of this include: “The strength of the movement always has and always will come from unity. Different communities with different people and different views must continue to interact with and support each other (@cameron_kasky, reference 8), “If you can’t fly then run, if you can’t run then walk, if you can’t walk then crawl, but whatever you do keep moving forward (@davidhogg111, reference 1), and “Thank you to everyone for your kind words and support. I’m going through all my DMs and just seeing everyone standing together to make a change gives me hope” (@sarahchadwickk, reference 34). The purposes of these

types of messages were to motivate their supporters that this was a cause worth fighting for despite all the underlying circumstances of the situation.

Informing

A total of 185 posts were coded in the theme informing. These posts covered a percentage of 17.31% of all total posts. Informing was one of the most interesting themes to examine because the topics differ among users. Informative posts include factual information that relates directly to the movement and issues surrounding it. The leaders of the movement informed their audience on many topics including general updates on how the movement is progressing alongside updates on laws, the NRA, and voting. Figure 4 listed an example of an informative tweet. Other examples are as follows: “Since the shooting at my school, approx 3000 Americans have died of gun violence. That’s almost the population of our entire school. #NeverAgain #MarchForOurLives” (@cameron_kasky, reference 23). “104, that’s the number of town halls we have right now there’s 435 house seats and long push ahead please continue making town halls for 4/7. #TownHallForOurLives” (@davidhogg111, reference 3). 70% of Americans want stricter gun laws! THAT’S HUGE! I promise we won’t stop until change has been made” (@sarahchadwickk, reference 21). As mentioned previously, other posts were just general updates about the movement. For example, “Students and I just met with Rick Scott and discussed ideas about gun safety, mental health, and school safety. Hope to see this will ignite a change in the state capital” (@sarahchadwickk, reference 23) and “So great that so many cities are taking @March4OurLives into their own hands. @forparkland keeping it at home. The March on Washington is going to be huge but the marches all are just as important #NEVERAGAIN” (@cameron_kasky, reference 61).

Figure 4



Figure 4: An example of an informative post from @cameron_kasky.

These informative posts were accessible to a broad audience and differ from the information others may have been receiving from news sources and other types of media. Twitter is also considered an emerging form of news media. According to Murat Demibras et al, “Twitter is becoming regarded as the fastest way to reach to breaking news. Users’ collaboration has given Twitter a clear edge over news centers, and recently news centers have set up Twitter accounts and encouraged users to interact with these accounts in order to capture breaking news” (2). The purpose of these posts was to keep their audience informed on many topics surrounding the movement. Keeping other informed was an essential aspect of this movement because it allowed supporters to be more knowledgeable about the issue which lead to dialogue and then action.

Personal Opinion

The next theme is personal opinion. A total of 80 posts were coded under this theme, covering 8.9% of all total posts. Although posts in this theme were small in numbers, users expressed their opinions on a variety of topics. Those topics included their views on guns laws, politicians such as Marco Rubio, and the president of the United States, Donald Trump, as well as the NRA. Their views often disagreed with the topic at hand and did not include any statistics or facts to support whatever statement they were making. An example of an opinion post is shown in figure 5. Another example included: “The United States also has a very massive gun violence problem because of “very stupid” politicians that are owned by the NRA” (@cameron_kasky, reference 12). This is clearly an opinion because Kasky did not include any statistical information to support his statement. Other examples include: “Marco Rubio’s current political state is apprehended Scooby Doo bad guy grumbling about meddling kids” (@cameron_kasky, reference 35). “Wow, America really does put guns before children” (@sarahchadwickk, reference 4). “This is atrocious, golf over children’s blood?!?! What does that say about our future? You are either for or against the children and right now you’re against them. This is why we must take action because these politicians won’t (@davidhogg111, reference 29). These posts do include strong claims, but they are all just opinions on a variety of topics.

Figure 5



Figure 5: An example of an opinion post @davidhogg111.

Involvement

The final theme is involvement. This theme collected a total of 76 posts and covered 8.62% of all total posts. Involvement was the most interesting theme to categorize in this sample because it included a call for action. Leaders of the movement urged their supporters to get involved in many ways on and offline as well as provided updates on the steps they were taking to push the movement forward. An example of an involvement post is listed below.

Figure 6



Figure 6: An example of an involvement post from @sarahchadwickk.

Getting involved in the movement called for many different actions such as signing a petition, donating to a GoFundMe, and participating in a school walkout. For example: “I will be walking out tomorrow alongside my classmate, we are walking out for those who cannot anymore” (@sarahchadwickk, reference 6) and “I’m thankful for everyone’s thoughts and condolences, but please take your anger and sorrowfulness and direct it towards congress and law makers. Please call, email, write, etc...to our lawmakers and beg them to make a change. What happen yesterday should never happen again (@sarahchadwickk, reference 15). Some included just simple requests such as

tweeting or retweeting a specific statement such as “Hey everyone, at 5:00 EST please tweet with #MarchForOurLives, friendly reminder” (@cameron_kasky, reference 11).

An abundance of tweets urged people to get involved by registering to vote and going out to vote if they have already registered. For instance: “Hi my name is REGISTER TO VOTE” (@cameron_kasky, reference 7) and “YOU MUST register to vote in most primaries!!!! Many are coming up for local elections on Tuesday the 13th. #Getregisterednow especially 18-29 year olds. YOU ARE NOT heard when you do not vote. Make YOUR VOICE HEARD, VOTE! (@davidhogg111, reference 15). Other tweets simply encouraged people to get involved in any way they can and support those who were already doing their part. For example, “UCLA supports students who use their right to peacefully demonstrate and have their voices heard. We stand with you” (@davidhogg111, reference 23) and “also college students get out and join the revolution! You did so in the 60s do it now we need you!” (@davidhogg111, reference 10).

Lastly, although others post encouraged supporters to boycott brands who supported the NRA and organized town hall meeting with politicians; most of the dialogue surrounded March for Our Lives. Leaders sought to encourage others to either attend the national march in Washington, D.C. on March 24th, 2018 or organized a local march in their towns. Other request encouraged supporters to either donate to the March or promote the March using the hashtag and flyers. Some examples include: “And JUST as our gofundme is launched, the donation button on marchforourlives.com is up. Much easier, but feel free to donate to either” (@cameron_kasky, reference 14). “#Whatif we could go to school without fearing for our lives? Join us on March 24th and visit

marchforourlives.com #NeverAgain” (davidhogg111, reference 7). “Can’t make it to the DC on March 24? You can now see if there’s a march in your area – and if not, create your own & check out the toolkit! Thanks to @everytown @GliffordsCourage for supporting this effort. #MarchForOurLives” (@cameron_kasky, reference 10).

Multiple posts encouraged supporters locally and nationally to get involved. Although this theme had the smallest number of posts, it probably had the most significant impact on the movement itself. There is no way to track how many supporters actually did get involved but the research does have the ability to examine the attempts of Chadwick, Hogg, and Kasky to evoke real action and change within the Never Again MSD movement.

Text, Images, Videos, and URLs

Tweets are limited to 180 characters. The users often include a resource such as images, videos, and URLs. These resources offer additional information. This relates to the communicative factors that occurred on Twitter, as Twitter provides a space where users can communicate through those different mediums.

As it relates to the Never Again MSD Movement and the data collected from the twitters profiles of Chadwick, Hogg, and Kasky, a total of 162 posts including images, 23 posts included videos, and 24 posts contain URLs. All posts contained text. Figure 7 offers a summary of these numbers.

Figure 7

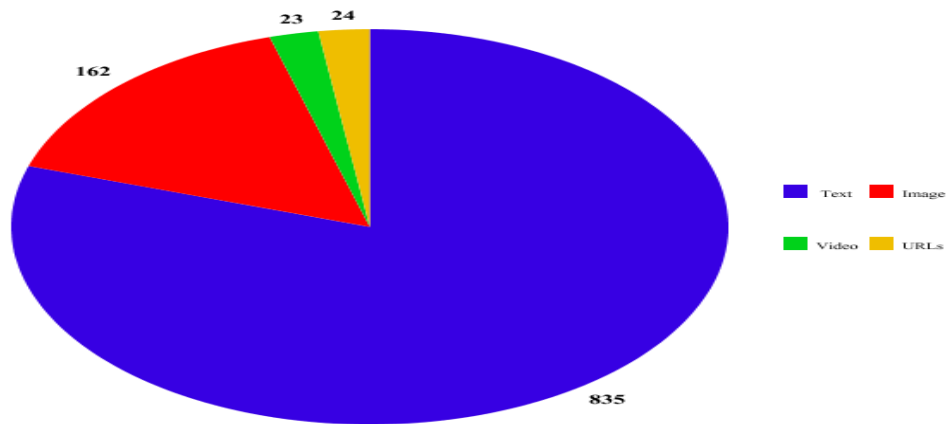


Figure 7: The total number of posts that contain one or more of the following: text, image, video, and URLs.

Images covered 7.36% of all total posts in this category. Images were posted more frequently than videos and URLs. Posts that incorporated images almost always included selfies and group photos. Other types of images were flyers, memes, and snapshots of events relating to the movement. The leaders conveyed a sense of solidarity and togetherness with selfies and group photos while memes were normally used to ridicule or make a joke or a sarcastic statement. An example of this type of image is listed below.

Figure 8



Figure 8: Twitter post @sarahchadwickk.

In the above image, Chadwick is comparing March for Our Lives to the Krusty Krab while the NRA is compared to the Chum Bucket. Chadwick is stating that obviously, March for Our Lives is the superior choice while the NRA is the terrible option between the two.

As mentioned previously, the other images posted were only snapshots of events the users attended and flyers that promoted a few different things such as “What can you do to end gun violence” and “Don’t put a price tag on our lives”. These posts were useful to the movement because they provided real-time images of what was happening in the movement. These images were public, easily accessible, and saved and retweeted many times.

Similar to images, videos offered users a chance to record the events surrounding the movement. Some of the videos posted contain advertisements promoting the march, gun reform, and dismantling the NRA. Others videos were simply re-posted videos from

corresponding news outlets or YouTube. These were informative type videos that included factual information about the movement, gun reform, changing laws, etc. Users also posted videos of themselves participating in interviews and conferences as well as informal videos of them by themselves or with other students from Stoneman Douglas. These videos were also easily accessible and had the option to be saved and shared many times.

Lastly, the leaders of the movement used URLs in their Twitter posts. URLs are links that are either clickable or can be copied and pasted into a web browser. These links provide a gateway to several different outlets such as images, videos, web pages, and articles. This was probably the most vital resource because an abundance of information was available at the click of a button. The leaders of the movement utilized these resources by posting links mostly to news articles that talked about the movement or articles that they were mentioned in. Others posts included links to the official web page of The Never Again MSD movement and March for Our Lives. Links to petitions, GoFundMe accounts, and informative videos were also ubiquitous. Posts that contain URLs are accessed by anyone with a Twitter Page and reposted and shared to a large number of users.

Frequently Used Terms

Once the twitter posts were analyzed, and themes established, a textual analysis was then conducted using the same program, NVivo 12. A word cloud was created showcasing a summary of frequently used words and phrases. Basic words such as ‘the’, ‘and’, and ‘not’ were added to the stop word list because they were meaningless to the analysis. The word cloud was used to support the themes previously created as well as

Twitter as a Communicative Power

Twitter is a social media platform and a useful tool for communication. Twitter provides users a plethora of communication tools. Through Twitter, users can create and exchange messages among other users. Twitter is accessible to almost everyone and allows for a space for open dialogue. Through likes, retweets, comments, and quotes users can also interact with any posts they choose to. The information posted online can also be re-posted and shared with a broader audience. Also, Twitter offers users the ability to engage in effective communication. By being able to post a tweet quickly and effortlessly, it has changed the forms of traditional communication.

Twitter is a social platform, but businesses, organizations, and social movement are taking advantage of the communicative tools Twitter provides. Beyond the days of sending an email or placing an ad in the local newspaper, it has become more efficient to post your content online. It is important to look further into what these tools are and how these tools are being used, particularly by the leaders of the Never Again MSD movement. The following communication tools of Twitter will be described in detail below: conversation, community, connection, and collaboration, and accessibility.

Conversation

Twitter allows for space where conversation can occur almost instantly. Users can post real-time updates on any topic of their choosing without having to worry about any restrictions or limitation other than character count. There is not a set limit on the number of tweets users can post in a day. Initially, tweets start the conversation, and when other users interact with said tweets, it leads to dialogue or conversation. Having the ability to communicate whatever one wants, to whomever online audience they chose, is very

efficient especially when it comes to social movement. For example, Chadwick tweeted almost immediately when the school shooting occurred at her school. She was able to communicate with her followers what was happening, as soon as it happened. She also posted soon after that she was okay, and she made it out safely. For example: “To everyone asking, I’m ok. I got out but the fbi is everywhere and helicopters are all over the place. We’ve heard gun shots and the paramedics were everywhere, apparently, multiple people got shot and I still have friends that are stuck inside the school. I’m so scared” (@sarahchadwickk, reference 42).

Through the movement, a universal conversation started about school shootings and gun reform. Users all over Twitter were able to join the conversation and chime in with their opinions on those topics. The leaders of the movement also used Twitter to encourage users to get involved, promote March for Our Lives, and communicate about many issues such as the NRA and politicians. The ability to communicate and start conversations on Twitter is a powerful tool because these features led to users being engaged and more knowledgeable than ever before.

Community

Through communicative factors, Twitter can foster a community where individuals with shared values and beliefs may come together. The purpose of a community comes from a “shared focus on an interest, need, information, service, or support that provides a reason for individual members to belong to the community” (Preece, 349). Communities thrive in online spaces where individuals can communicate and express their ideas and goals effectively. In the instance of the Never Again MSD Movement, individuals quickly formed a community. The leaders of the movement

encourage community, as well. For instance: “The strength of this movement always has and always will come from unity. Different communities with different people and different views must continue to interact with and support each other. All they want is to tear us apart. We won’t let them” (@cameron_kasky, reference 8). Through these communities, individuals were able to express their concerns, spread valuable information related to the movement, and collaborate on a number of different things. The benefit of this online community is that no matter where the individual was in the world they could get involved. Social media allows people to build relationships with anyone across the globe. This online community did not just include survivors from Stoneman Douglas; there was teachers, parents, professionals, young people, and the elderly. Young people were especially encouraged to get involved in the movement. One leader stated: “To the students around the world who are taking leadership positions for themselves and are demanding action without being thrust right into it—Thank you. Your leadership is inspiring. The world will follow us in the right direction” (@cameron_kasky, reference 34). The Never Again MSD Movement created a community of people who advocated for safer schools, better gun laws, and for the situation that occurred at Stoneman Douglas to never happen again.

It did not have policies and procedures common with traditional communities, but the roles of the leaders (Founders of the Movement) and supporters existed. Although messages could not easily be discovered and trace from a single webpage, users were encouraged to post on their pages as well as support the official page of the movement and the personal accounts of the founders of the movement. Characteristics of this community included using the hashtag #NeverAgain and #MarchForOurLives when they

tweeted something related to the movement. It also incited supporters within the movement and community to get involved by doing anything from a simple task like tweeting a particular message or significant actions like organizing a local march. It was a community where individuals were free to express their opinions and communicate with one another. Although this community did receive backlash for those with opposite views, it could not take away from the change configuring within.

Connection

The feature of communication involves a connection. Twitter allows users to connect to a large quantity of information. Users are also able to communicate with other users both locally and internationally. “Social proprioception tells us where the nodes of our community are and provides a sense of connectedness to and awareness of others without direct communication. Internet is the third place where people connect with friends, build a sense of togetherness” (Baruah, 4). Connections led to shared knowledge and information among users. Also, information available on Twitter is available from many resources such as other users and official account. Users can also view photos or videos that also have additional information. Another way users have access to primary resources is through URLs. URLs offered links to other web pages, resources, videos, and images that aren’t posted directly on Twitter. Information on Twitter can also come from the media and news outlet. Also, users can access this materials compared to traditional forms of media.

Leaders of the Never Again MSD Movement utilized Twitter to offer supplementary information to their supporters. Through being connected to the information posted by the leaders of the movement, users become more aware of a

number of different topics. Topics range from updates about the movement, laws, and how to get involved. URLs to GoFundMe accounts and petitions as well as videos and photos were readily available. One example includes: “Hey everyone, a good friend of mine @arixali who also is a student at MSD is a part of a nationwide group right now that are pushing for more regulation on getting assault rifles banned. This is their petition. Every signature counts” (@sarahchadwickk, reference 13). With this particular tweet, users are connected and encouraged to get involved in the movement. A large quantity of information improves on awareness, offers opportunities for involvement and allows data to be shared among users.

Collaboration

Collaboration occurs when users work together to accomplish a shared goal. Online collaborations can occur in many different ways. Baruah describes a few of those ways as collaborating on teams projects, study groups creating and co-drafting documents, spreadsheets, presentations slides within Google Docs, and faculty members utilizing blogging and micro-blogging as additional teaching/learning resources (9). Beyond blogging sites and Google Docs, social media has become a front runner when it comes to collaboration. Facebook groups, for examples, utilized collaboration tools by allowing people to join a specific group. The purpose of each group may include promoting organizations, movements, products, events or advocating for a particular cause or issue. Within these groups users are enabled to network, organize, and implement ideas among one another. Others aspects of online collaborations are assigning tasks/responsibilities and roles among users, manage and spread content, and

establish processes and strategies. Collaborating on online spaces is common among companies, organizations, and movements.

The Never Again MSD Movement utilized Twitter among other social media sites in their collaboration efforts. Specifically, Twitter differs from other social media sites because they do not offer private groups. There are individual pages that users must request to follow, but the official page of the movement and the personal profiles of the leaders of the movement were public. Collaborating on Twitter included using the hashtag #NeverAgain and #MarchForOurLives. Users were encouraged to use these hashtag in their tweets and retweet them as necessary so they can connect with other like-minded individuals. For instance, “Everybody please tweet #MarchForOurLives want to look us up (@davidhogg111, reference 15). Users also searched the hashtag to discover and track relevant information. Following the personal profiles of the movement leaders also promotes collaboration. Users can gain useful insight, offer advice, ask questions, access related links, share their opinions, and answer the call for action. For example, “Good morning. Push for a town hall in your area today. Listen to @lauradreyfuss sing today. I’m getting back to work- you can too. Put pressure on your lawmakers. Don’t let them off the hook” (@cameron_kasky, reference 1). Online communication offers collaboration and joined effort for users and leaders to work together to raise awareness and advocate for real change.

Accessibility

The last communicative factor of Twitter is accessibility. Accessibility is the ability for users to stay connected to their social media platforms through several different mediums. Those mediums can include anything from computers, tablets, cell

phones, and laptops. Any device that has internet connection or data can access social media sites through the actual website or application (app). Twitter is also available in many different languages. The usability of web pages versus the app does differ. For example, if Twitter users' login using a computer they do not have access to emoji's versus if they access Twitter with a cellphone. The overall functions are still the same as users can post tweets, retweet, like, comment, share posts, view other profiles, and follow/unfollow other users. An important aspect of accessibility is that users can stay consistently informed of what's happening no matter where they are. Twitter updates real-time information every minute. Also, a large number of users who have access to this information, they also partake in sharing, reposting, analyzing, and replying.

In this instance, both the supporters and leaders of the Never Again MSD Movement benefit from Twitter being readily available and accessible to its users. For instance, leaders of the movement were consistently updating their Twitter accounts with real-time information. For example: "Great meeting today with the team about our structure moving forward. A large demographic of people that haven't been voting is about to show up at the polls and there will be some MAJOR changes coming. Represent us or get kicked out. The midterms are going to be monumental" (@cameron_kasky, reference 3) and "Right now I'm sitting in a room surrounded by such influential voices. We're all together. Remember that. We're fighting for change" (@sarahchadwickk, reference 33). Once the tweets are posted, users are informed with updates on the movements as well as interact with these tweets through retweeting, sharing, and replying to those tweets. Twitter users were able to remain connected and involved on the go. Accessibility on Twitter is a significant factor in the movement because if it were not for

the leaders' ability to post tweets and the user's ability to interact with them, the movement would not progress as quickly and efficiently as it did. Twitter has become a global social platform. With so many factors affecting the communicative process on Twitter, the goal of the movement remains to speak out against gun violence and school safety.

Discussion

The research questions presented in Chapter 3 will now be further examined and answered. The first research question being: *What role did Twitter play during the Never Again MSD Movement?* Traditionally, social movements were conducted solely in person. Characteristics of social media include organizing, advocating, and participating in collective action between group members. Information was shared by word of mouth, phone calls, columns in newspapers, and going door to door. These actions led to protests, sit-ins, marches, and rallies. These forms of activism all occurred in interpersonal settings. With the creation of social media, the way people manage social movements has transcend. However, the universal goal of wanting to put an end to injustice has not changed. Modern day students activists are now utilizing a unique tool like social media to essentially conduct social movements with a mix of traditional and contemporary methods. According to the article "New media and internet activism: from the 'Battle of Seattle' to blogging",

Since the 1990s, there have been growing discussions of internet activism and how new media have been used effectively by a variety of political movements. Since then, broad-based, populist political spectacles have become the norm, thanks to an evolving sense of the way in which the internet may be deployed in a

democratic and emancipatory manner by a growing planetary citizenry that is using the new media to become informed, to inform others, and to construct new social and political relations (Kahn, Keller 87-88).

In a technology-driven society, students now have new and unique resources to get their message across specifically through social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and even Snapchat. Specifically, Twitter has changed the tools students use to inform, organize and conduct student activism. Instead of posting flyers, students now chose to send a tweet. Information is then spread through retweeting and sharing posts.

Some of the specific roles Twitter played during the Never Again MSD Movement is that Twitter is a social platform that provides users with the necessary resources to communicate and advance their movement. These tools included spreading information instantly as well as being easily accessible. Twitter also allowed individuals to spread awareness and offer ways to get involved and act. Some examples of the specific acts of activism include using Twitter to speak against gun legislation, politicians, and the NRA, while also advocating for improved gun reform. The actual acts of activism may be similar to traditional forms but the resources that social media has provided such as allowing activists a larger platform to reach more people, effective organizing, and new levels of involvement, has changed. Another factor is that activists are using their social media account to represent the movement. Their accounts are no longer used to make jokes and comment on lighter topics. These social spaces encourage users to express their thoughts and allow their voices to be heard. These efforts would have been difficult in the past. Users are also able to transcribe events happening offline

such as demonstrations and marches by providing their personal accounts online on their social media accounts.

Social movements are shaped by technology. The Never Again MSD Movement utilized the tools of Twitter to advocate for their cause. However, because the research is describing how Twitter played a major role in the movement, it is important to mention slacktivism as it is a critique of digital activism. Throughout this thesis, social media is praised as a positive tool for social movements. However, according to other scholars, slacktivism occurs when users perform simple tasks or actions in hopes of supporting the movement and isn't a contributing factor in digital activism. According to Sokolov et al, "However, recent research shows that Internet users, which only display online activity and never participate in "live" events, play a big role in organizing different campaigns" (2). Since the Never Again movement configured on social media, simple tasks were commons. Leaders of the movement often encouraged their supporters to tweet the hashtag, sign a petition, or donate to the movement. These actions required very little time and effort. However, despite criticism these actions still made a meaningful impact on the movement. According to author Deepa Ray, "the right/opportune moment (determined by environmental characteristics and triggers), a collective identity is formed via framing processes which make participants believe in the movement's cause. The group then uses the mobilization structures (tools/repertoire) to coordinate and take action" (3124). The Never Again MSD Movement followed a similar structure. Leaders of the movement weren't only tweeting, they were organizing, spreading information, and getting involved both on and offline. Whether the actions were small or big, they still

made a difference. In this particular argument, slacktivism is not a concern. The role of Twitter as a social platform is used to organize a protest and spread information.

The next research question answers the following question: *what communicative themes appeared on Twitter during The Never Again MSD Movement? And what impact did those themes have on the movement?* Due to the small sample size, it is difficult to pinpoint every single theme that occurred during this time period but the most prevalent ones are discussed in this section. As mentioned previously, the leaders of the movement used Twitter to communicate many different topics. From the analysis portion, the researcher was able to determine the following themes: personal opinion, involvement, useful, other, and informing. The rhetoric powering the movement appeared in these themes. Communication was rarely lacking and most purposeful in its nature. Some tweets within these themes included a call to action while others provided critical information relating to the movement. Mostly, tweets of solidarity, support, and encouragement appeared most frequently. While tweets inciting involvement and personal opinion appeared less regularly. A few tweets appeared under the theme other because they included tweets not directly related to the movement.

Through a more-in-depth analysis of these themes and their context, the researcher was able to determine the impact the leaders had on the movement. The rhetoric within these themes encouraged users to make a difference, collaborate, and share information. Individuals are encouraged to get involved in many ways including signing a petition, liking a tweet, reposting a video or image. The political processes promote action whether it was intentionally or unintentionally. Even just reading a tweet allows the user to be better informed than before. As the leaders of the movement promoted inclusivity,

hopefulness, demanding change, and advocate for safer schools; every engagement with their tweets such as a like, retweet, or quote meant one supported them and their cause. Users were able to exchange ideas, organize, and distribute information among one another. What they chose to do with that information such as getting involved in the conversation by leaving a comment or sharing their opinion to participating in a march or organizing a town hall all makes a difference. Although this thesis focuses mainly on communicative factors, it's important to mention the potential actions that may have occurred even though isn't directly studied here.

The final research question seeks to answer: *what effect did social media have as communication tool during the Never Again MSD Movement?* The communicative power of social media describes the communication strategies and tools that social media implores to its users and social movements. Social media offers its users the space to communicate their messages to a boarder audience compared to traditional forms of communication. Messages are read, accessed, and shared. Firstly, the leaders were able to share their message with over a million users. For example, David Hogg had a total of 920.8k followers, while Cameron Kasky has a total of 433.4k followers. Every single thing they tweeted had the potential to be seen by a majority of their followers. This number does not take into account the number of pages visits, comments, retweets, and quotes that came from both from their followers and other users since their social media accounts were public. Naturally, the researcher is arguing that a major factor of the movement was its ability to both reach, exchange, and share a large quantity of information through Twitter.

The second major impact comes from its resources. The movement and the March were funded mostly from online donations. The leaders posted the link to the movement's GoFundMe account on their personal Twitter pages. The link to the official webpage of March for Our Lives with another donation link was also posted. With the movement's large social media presence, many people took notice including celebrities. For example, Oprah Winfrey tweeted this on her personal Twitter page, "George and Amal, I couldn't agree with you more. I am joining forces with you and will match your \$500,000 donation to 'March for Our Lives.' These inspiring young people remind me of the Freedom Riders of the 60s who also said we've had ENOUGH and our voices will be heard" (Oprah). Many other celebrities such as George Clooney and Steven Spielberg among other supporters help fund the movement and the March for Our Lives campaign. According to the 'March for Our Lives' GoFundMe account, they raised 3x over their initial goal of 1 million dollars. Also, according to an interview from the Miami Herald, "Donations will be used to pay the expenses associated with the [March 24] March for Our Lives gathering in Washington, D.C., and to provide resources for young people organizing similar marches across the country. Any leftover funds will go towards supporting a continuing, long-term effort by and for young people to end the epidemic of mass shootings that has turned our classrooms into crime scenes" (Smiley and Daugherty). This does not take into account the other GoFundMe accounts and donations also created in support of the movement. The resources to power this movement comes from social media. The leaders of the movement utilized Twitter to ask and promote funding for their movement, and it truly made their efforts worthwhile.

Lastly, the communicative power of social media tools offers the opportunity to get involved. As mentioned throughout this thesis, involvement was an important factor of the movement. It was actions that would lead to real change. Twitter offers users' the platform to encourage others to get involved both online as well as ways to join the movement offline. The opportunity to get involved was ultimately up to each user. Organizers of the movement often posted their examples on how they were getting involved both on and offline. Online actions included staying updated as the movement progressed, using the hashtag #NeverAgain, supporting movement related profiles, signing petitions, and participating in the conversation. Offline actions included participating in marches, rallies, bus tours, lobbying, writing letters to politicians, etc. It is challenging to track how many people decided to act because they were encouraged to do so on social media, but regardless we know that through these actions significant changes were occurring. According to the digital voyager, "Companies like Delta and Hertz ended their discount program for members of the NRA. Both Walmart and Dicks Sporting Good have raised the minimum age for gun purchases to 21" (Samuel). Time Magazine describes, "That on March 14th, nearly a million kids across the country left class for the National School Walkout to protest the school shooting epidemic". "And that come March 24th with the Student-Led March for Our Lives, over 800 demonstrations have been registered in all 50 states and on six continents" (Anderson). And these are only a few examples of all that have occurred under the leadership of students from Stoneman Douglas. The communicative power of social media, specifically Twitter, helped fuel these actions. As the researcher studied closely a group of tech-savvy students with the determination and necessary tools to make a difference, combined with

Twitters ability to foster communication, the study can concur that social media as a communication tool has indeed had an effect on The Never Again MSD Movement.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis sought out to study the communicative power of Twitter during The Never Again MSD Movement. This thesis seeks to present insight on how Twitter provides users the necessary platform to communicate and distribute information. Through communicative factors such as how activists chose to communicate and what they chose to communicate, social media has transcend social movements. The research conducted offers a more-in-depth analysis on how these factors have impacted social movement.

To study this concept further, the researcher chose to analyze a recent example of digital activism: The Never Again MSD Movement. The research carried out for this project studied the first 6 weeks of the movement ranging from February 14th, 2018 - March 28th, 2018 as the selected time frame. Tweets are collected from 3 prominent leaders of the movement: Chadwick, Hogg, and Kasky. In this section, a summary of the major finding is presented as well as limitations and suggestions for future research.

Major Findings

A qualitative content analysis of collected tweets configured 5 themes. The themes informing, personal opinion, useful, involvement, and other assisted in

categorizing the content within these tweets. Tweets were also placed in 4 separate themes if they contained images, text, videos, and URLs. It ultimately concludes on how the organizers of the movement utilized Twitter's communication tools.

The first major finding is confirming that there is power in communicating your message on social spaces. This conclusion is not to take away from other forms of interpersonal communication that occurs offline, but to recognize the capabilities of communicating online. The leaders of the movement started a conversation about social issues: gun control. With Twitter, they were able to share their message with millions. With very little censorship online, leaders of the movement were free to express their thoughts, ideas, and opinions ranging from many topics such as boycotting the NRA to tweets promoting March for Our Lives. These tweets were readily available for users to view. Information was also continually updating. It provided users with real-time information including examples of personal accounts, live videos, and location updates. A major strength of Twitter is that it promotes dialogue. Other users were free to like, comment, retweet, and quote tweets from the leaders of the movement. The personal accounts of Chadwick, Hogg, and Kasky were also public. So anybody with or without a Twitter account can search and view their content.

Through Twitter's ability to facilitate conversation, users can express themselves online. The data set provides multiple examples where the leaders of the movement were free to express their emotions. Leaders of the movement were also able to tweet their personal opinions on any topic of their choosing. Compared to traditional forms of the media such as radio, newspaper, and TV news, they posted how they felt without any buffering or alterations. Their tweets were raw, uncut, and real. Communication allowed

them to build an online community of supporters. Individuals were encouraged through tweets to answer their call for action. Getting involved include small task such as using the hashtag, #NeverAgain, to signing a petition. The leaders of the movement also offered ways to get involved offline such as attending a march and writing a letter to your local politician. The ability to encourage others to act through its messages is another significant finding.

Lastly, the final conclusion describes Twitter's accessibility. Twitter has transformed how quickly users can gain access to information. The research describes Twitter ability to distribute information and incite action, but without an audience to view these messages, its content loses its purpose and power. Users can stay always connected through the use of mobile devices, laptops, computers, and tablets. Information is then offered instantaneous through either the mobile app or the internet webpage. Twitter accessibility feature is a free social platform where users can post short direct messages under 180 characters to millions of users. And no matter where users are located or what times they are checking Twitter the information remains readily available. Tweets also stay in the Twitter database as a record and users can search and locate old tweets for entertainment, academic, or research purposes.

In conclusion, Twitter played a pivotal role in The Never Again MSD Movement. And then offers insight on how the leaders of the movement use those tools in the type of messages being communicated and the ways they used their digital spaces. Through these actions, we can conclude that they were able to spread awareness on gun control, promoting solidarity and unity among its audience, and encouraging others to act and get involved. We can concur that the success of the movement should be measured solely on

its merits to inform and facilitate conversation in an online space. Moreover, as we conclude this analysis, the leaders of the movement were able to apply Twitter as a medium for communication.

Limitations and Future Research

This study does not take into account other social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat and the rhetoric used on those sites during The Never Again MSD Movement. Also, the study only uses a short time frame of 6 weeks as the analysis examined only original posts tweeted by the leaders of the movement and does not include comments or quotes. In addition, tweets were only received from 3 prominent leaders of the movement, while other leaders also have content that could also be examined.

The possibilities for future research are endless. The Never Again MSD Movement is a relatively recent example of digital activism, and very little academic research is published on this topic. Some implications for future research may include studying how the leaders of the movement utilized other social media sites. Future researchers can also consider a longer time frame as well as chose to look further into Twitter engagements. Studying the hashtag #NeverAgain may also be an area of interest. Future research can identify the impact of using hashtags in social movements. The results of this study may also be beneficial to the overall understanding of the roles social media plays in social movements.

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