SOCIAL MEDIA MOBILIZING YOUTH ACTIVISM

by

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ABSTRACT

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The shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in 2018 paved the way for activism controlled by youth led by key students banding together following the incident. Student activists from the school emerged particularly via social media and organized large-scale efforts in order to create discourse surrounding gun control through their March For Our Lives movement. Studying the overlap between youth activism, the response to trauma, the systems at play within social media, and the role of commercialization, this paper dives into the complexities of activist based discourse as it evolves and the forces at play within youth activism in general. Looking at these existing efforts aids in exposing both the pros and cons of activism mediated by social media and the role that larger systems play in an activist's mission.

SOCIAL MEDIA MOBILIZING YOUTH ACTIVISM

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INTRODUCTION

The shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida on February 14, 2018 was a tragedy that made an impact on the nation. As an armed student entered the school and opened fire on classmates and teachers alike, a pivotal moment was created. While the moment was attention-grabbing, violence impacting youth occurs on various scales every day. Each day 8 children in the United States die from gun violence with another 32 injured ("16 Facts About Gun Violence and School Shootings"). As these situations occur and are brought to light through various forms of media, the question persists: how does the public respond? Youth from Stoneman Douglas High School sought to answer this question through student-led activism, motivated by the drive to mobilize other students and create policy change based through their discourse. Utilizing social media as a grounds for their goals to spread, the youth activists emerging from this tragedy strategically employed the tools available to their group in order to create a movement within pop culture, activism, and politics.

Youth as a subculture exist in an interesting place in society as they are affected by the issue of gun violence in places where they are meant to feel protected, such as schools, yet are oftentimes considered to not have a voice within policy based discourse. As this group is seemingly left out of conversation, the potential for the mobilization of their voices and ideas through social media has opened a new door into advocacy. For those who own a phone or have access to the internet, conversations can be joined, and their voices can be heard. Societies that fail to recognize youth voices and the potential

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for youth to mobilize via social media are missing a large piece of society. As youth regurgitate the opinions of their parents and form their own, many new ideas are sparked, and change can occur. Realizing the discourse taking place on social media surrounding the topic of gun violence and youth brings light to systemic problems youth voices face as well as overarching issues for social media-based activists in general.

Subcultures such as race, class, and gender all play a role in any given voice's perceived importance within society. Youth existing in the intersection of these subcultures face even more difficulty when speaking out. Even though 24% of the total population within the United States consists of individuals under the age of 18, these voices must actively propel themselves out of the margins and into mainstream discourse through their unique viewpoints and skillsets, with systemic obstacles to overcome even then (Howden). Effected by "economic shock, social instability, and conflicts" youth are a group with potential to contribute that are pushed to the side due to their age and inability to utilize their voices in an institutional way within a democracy that places focus on individual's votes as a means to show their opinions (Columbia University, 6). Youth who face discrimination or further marginalization due to their membership within subgroups of varying ethnicities, classes, and genders are subsequently even less included in public discourse with little reference to their needs or desires. "Negative effects on the cohesion and stability of the societies in which they live" (Columbia University, 6) can be seen as youth are shown through marginalization that their voices are less valuable to society than those of older individuals living under the same social and political restrictions. While the drive behind activism and advocacy initiated by youth is oftentimes rooted in personal experiences and opinions, the underlying desire for positive

systemic change propels groups forward towards the achievement of their goals and the demarginalization of their group.

Considering the multitude of ways in which the term "youth" and "youth culture" can be interpreted and defined, the book *Resistance Through Rituals* has provided theorization into youth subcultures and their participation within public discourse. As subcultures are formed in regard to the "distinctive activity and 'focal concerns' of groups", when analyzing youth voices within political activism there is a focus on the role and "persistent features of the 'parent' class culture". Furthermore, "some subcultures appear only at particular historical moments: they become visible, are identified and labeled" holding space within public discourse, to then fade after time (Clarke, et al). Historic names in youth activism, such as the Lowell Mill Girls, Little Rock Nine, Malala Yousafzai, and Greta Thunberg, among others, have brought light to the discourse surrounding their political and systemic involvement at various moments in time, the existence of these voices in public spheres is not a new concept. Advocacy in general is a driver of social change, with an interest sparked in individuals to pursue this change, an activist can be born out of anyone at any age. Activists can be born out of circumstances in which they seek to enact change on their worlds, envisioning an improved future for themselves and others to come.

One of the first recorded instances of advocacy surrounded the female workers at the Lowell Mill in Massachusetts in 1834. With as young as 10-year-old females at the head of operations, the mill provided inadequate living and working conditions as well as insufficient compensation. The employment of these youth was cause for strike and with poor working conditions at play, the girls were led to band together against the mill

seeking changes in their provided accommodations (Robinson). The 1800's was considered an age of uncertainty for youth as the lines between youth and adulthood were muddled with responsibility and little increase in clear boundaries signifying adulthood (Grinspan). Having this in mind, those participating in labor at the Lowell Mill were experiencing these blurred lines of childhood and adult responsibility, causing them to step into the position of an advocate for themselves. Although the mill failed to respond to this strike with any direct action, the act of these individuals led by Harriet Hanson Robinson, who was just 10 when she began working in the mill, historically shows youth that they can come together over a mutual desire for change at any age and with any level of resources. The efforts of a strike garner attention backed with little to no financial resources, sheerly relying on the organization and time commitment made by the activists. It also shows an interesting situation as youth placed in an "adult" situation respond in a way that is looking to create change systemically, benefiting themselves and others.

Figure 1: Protests by The Lowell Mill Girls ("The Lowell Mill Girls")

The Little Rock Nine activism occurring in 1957 surrounding segregation continues to show the role of youth activism in sparking change as well as the relationships that exist within this type of movement. This group of nine Black students enrolled in a formerly all-white high school in Arkansas, attempting to push the limits of segregation within schools at the time, demonstrates a way in which individuals who were repressed utilized their voices through action. After black students had been denied entry to Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, public attention was brought to the issue of segregation in schools. Thus, the Little Rock Nine was formed as nine black students later attended the school accompanied by federal troops, making a public statement and letting their viewpoints on segregation be known with government support ("""Massive Resistance" and the Little Rock Nine"). Being youth members of the Black community, the marginalization of these individuals is felt two-fold as they exist within two repressed subgroups. The act of segregation is negative, isolating, and at times violent. Placing children in this position and seeing activism spark in the wake is similar to the occurrences at the Lowell Mill as the youth were all placed into a position that is not typically associated or expected for children. This systemic placement in both instances was then met with resistance.

Figure 2: Statement Made by The Little Rock Nine ("Little Rock Nine")

While the Little Rock Nine and the girls at Lowell Mill sought systemic change through their physical actions, technological advancements have provided grounds for new forms of mobilization and communication benefiting activism in general. These outlets give voices the opportunity to hold attention for potentially extended periods of time with larger audiences. Malala Yousafzai, now a Pakistani 23-year-old, began advocating for female's access to education within Pakistan in 2009. She began her advocacy through an anonymous online diary on BBC Urdu, a Pakistani oriented radio station and news website. Following the continual sharing of her story, Yousafzai became even more well-known upon being the target of Taliban violence in 2012 for her discourse against this group ("Profile: Malala Yousafzai."). Doing this shed light on the education and women's rights issues within Pakistan. This story, and the mainstream media that was able to spread it, caught worldwide attention providing Yousafzai with a large platform to advocate from. She grew from being marginalized as a female Pakistani

youth to being promoted and supported via the internet. Under the Taliban suppression she lived, the media aided in propelling Yousafzai's message into the light, providing her with a significant increase in resources to employ and a wide variety of supporters to join her cause.

Advocates similar to Yousafzai seeking reform in everyday aspects of their lives, exist within a digital age that connects individuals to one another through their viewpoints and ideals. As youth advocates who have access to the tools needed in order to participate in the digital sphere emerge historically and are being granted increased visibility through media, the importance of these voices and their ability to participate within social and political discourse is shifting, allowing greater space for them to speak. Although their discourse may have been previously marginalized, their use of media provides them with the ability to challenge this suppression.

Utilizing the internet and its capabilities, youth have worked to uncover the ways in which a participatory culture can be built and mediated by technology. *By Any Media Necessary* by Henry Jenkins and others explains the participatory nature of youth politics and the way in which youth have "refreshed and renewed the public's symbolic power as they fight for social justice" (Jenkins et al, 2). Early instances of activism revolve around a collective storytelling, or group creation of a narrative through the simultaneous telling of stories from various viewpoints and entities, occurring in person through physical strikes, sit-ins, and demonstrations of activism. These can be juxtaposed with more recent instances of activism, such as Yousafzai's fight for education that revolved around storytelling mediated by social media. Yousafzai's activism based in Pakistan has drawn worldwide awareness due to the narrative features of her story. Utilizing the internet,

youth can move from being "informed citizens", with a general awareness of societal

issues, to behaving as "motivated citizen's", those that have the ability to promote action

in others as they utilize their uniquely fostered, technologically mediated connections

(Jenkins et al). By harnessing the power of a participatory culture, youth have been able

to develop multiple points of entry to their missions therefore reaching a broader

spectrum of individuals willing to take part in the activism.

Importance of Youth Voices

Youth are assumed to be politically disengaged because of their low voter turnout.

Furthermore, they are assumed of clicktivism, the act of being involved in politics solely

through online efforts. Each election, there is a large call to action for new voters to

exercise their right to vote as they are told their ballots matter and have the potential to

make a difference within the overall outcome of the race. Research shows that "less than

half of young Americans vote, even in presidential elections, and just 10 percent of

Americans between 18 and 24 met a standard of "informed engagement" in the 2012

presidential election" ("Groundbreaking Report"). Young individuals excluded from

political conversation in regards to voting, until they are of voting age, seemingly have

not been instilled with a drive to participate in political discourse when considering

simply their participation at the polls. The foundations of this disengagement potentially

result from the belief that youth political action is "performative" or that youth voices are

only engaged via social media in a simple, inauthentic way. There is a perceived

disconnect between their advocacy and their credibility from those considering them to

be "clicktivist", looking to engage performatively online rather than bringing their efforts

in person (Perara). Youth politics though can be attributed to many more characteristics than just attendance at the polls, with activism occurring on small scales enacting larger political action from collective voices.

While these individuals are affected by occurrences within the world, their viewpoints are taken less seriously due to their age by more traditional activists focused primarily on the "clicktivist" nature. Analyzing existing literature on youth culture and political conversation in Britain, researchers Paul Corrigan and Simon Frith found that within academic literature "nothing can be said about its political implications because politics hasn't been allowed into the discussion. If institutions are excluded from the analysis, if no attention is paid to the active role of young people in their culture, then nothing can be said about the concrete struggles in which young people may (or may not) be engaged; youth culture is non-political because it has been defined that way" (Hall and Jefferson, 231). As a result, we need to look at new dimensions in which youth are acting politically other than voter turnout and other linked democratic institutions. We can see the limitation in other ways in which youth's engagement online is often dismissed as nothing more than apolitical "clicktivism". Restricting the youth to conversations excluding politics ignores the simple fact that these individuals are affected by the decisions of the government just as anyone else is. As Corrigan and Frith suggest, the term "youth" and the term "politics" have been defined as mutually exclusive and by doing this, even the youth voices participating in activism are doing so within a contained sphere of relative credibility, within a contained notion of what constitutes political engagement.

Even as these preexisting biases surrounding the voices of youth persist, the marginalization of these individuals lessens as they age. The viewpoints of this age group, while ever-present, are considered to be growing in noteworthiness as the individuals age. Seeing as humans learn and expand upon their knowledge over time, "youth are often socially or biologically considered to be "in transition," not yet "fully-formed" adults or members of society. Told that they must be a certain age to do certain things, such as participate in government, youth become equated with a lack of something" (Columbia). Although they have the ability to participate formally within the government at age 18 with the right to vote, individuals are still not considered biologically "fully developed" until age 25 ("Brain Maturity"). With this in mind, the concept of an individual growing increasingly credible and valuable within discourse as they age promotes the idea that "youth" is a transitory phase where "adulthood" is the goal. Conflating youth's viewpoints with the need for growth likely attributes to this group's apathy in regard to participation in organized politics and social issues during their upbringing as well as society's hesitancy towards listening to these opinions.

Expanding upon this further, systemic hierarchy placing youth as subordinate members of society furthers the overarching view of these individuals as less beneficial contributors to worthwhile conversation. This group's existence within a position that calls for their aging and growth is not a new concept. Colonialist hierarchies have historically placed higher rank with increased age and are then continually placing youth within a subordinate position to adults (Dejong). This hierarchy, in turn, positions adults dominantly within society. While adults fall into their own subgroups based on various

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other factors such as class, ethnicity, and gender, their placement as dominant to youth has granted them agency over the conversations produced by youth.

The civil disengagement of youth can be attributed to various excuses but is explained to be ''because they are alienated from the institutions and processes of civic life and lack the motivation, opportunity, and ability to overcome this alienation'' (Thackeray). While this does not necessarily mean they are not politically engaged they have been found to be, overall, uninvolved in organized political discourse. Furthermore, a U.K. research group found that "focus groups with young people suggest a generation bored with politics, critical of the online offer...Young people protest that 'having your say' does not seem to mean 'being listened to,' and so they feel justified in recognizing little responsibility to participate" (Rheingold). Uninvolved due to their perceived unimportance in overall discourse, there is a disconnect between youth interest in activism and the actual action that occurs.

Since this innate interest to participate still lingers in these individuals, the marginalization of their voices results in a generation that is engaging in different ways. Conversations, media use, and participation within popular culture show the youth's methods and interest in utilizing their voices. Through this study it seems youth have been conscious of their pseudo-importance within political conversation but see this as only one avenue in the general ability to influence public opinion and policy. Perceptive of their subordinate position within society, youth disengaged within political conversation, looking to bring about change, have to decide whether to remain uninvolved or find new ways as activists to participate within public and political conversations that have meaning and the ability to enact change. Youth advocacy

programs such as Rock the Vote, founded in 1990, have and continue to produce campaigns in order to promote youth democratic participation. The Rock the Vote organization seeks to explain the realities of voting while showing youth "what's broken, what they have the power to fix, and how much time it's going to take to fix it" ("Young Americans & Increasing Voter Participation"). By opening up this dialogue, future generation's knowledge of democracy increases as well as their understanding of the role they play within a growing society. Bridging the gap between what youth have to say and how they say it, organizations and methods of highlighting youth voices are continually working towards situating youth within public discourse in a way that holds large scale impacts.

Displaying the importance of interaction and physical presence as an extension of social media-based activism, a case study was created surrounding an individual considered to be a youth activist. In 2015, Justin Rodriguez, a 17-year-old student in Newark, New Jersey leveraged social media and texting to spread information and gain support for a school walkout in protest of budget cuts impacting Newark education (Fullam). Through this study, it was found that youth's interest in activism "was mediated, not produced, by social media activism", instead defined through both their use of social media and face-to-face relationships in seeking change (Fullam). Social media is useful in "disseminating information and communicating across time zones and geography" but cannot make up for the progress that is to be made in person (Fullam). Through hashtags and organizations, it is easy for a social media user to interact with content aligning with activism but the drive behind these interactions differs from that of individuals attending a physical rally as the relationship between an individual and their

likes and comments is different than a relationship between an individual and their time and resources spent physically supporting a cause. Neither is inherently more beneficial, arguably both are useful components within present day activism, but viewing social media as a mediator rather than a producer, helps dissect the role it plays in a movement.

Similarly, the #OccupyEverywhere movement, beginning in 2011, found mobilization through social media (Juris). With mass marches occurring multiple times per week around the world, supporters of this movement seeking to disrupt economic inequalities banded together in order to show the strength they held in their numbers. Some sectors of the movement, like those mobilized in Tahrir Square in Egypt, did not have access to social media and were instead called into action by word of mouth. But others were able to spread information quickly through social media platforms (Juris). These platforms can aid in the spread and control of information surrounding a movement or planned event, but in this case, there was also noteworthy efficacy found within platform's ability to "link and help to stitch together interpersonal networks, facilitating the mass aggregation of individuals within concrete locales through viral communication flows" (Juris). Creating an environment for like-minded individuals to exist then creates a landscape for networking to occur. Bringing individuals together under a similar cause allows them to band together as a force, rather than as a mass number of disconnected individuals. Instead of simply reaching a user and their close friends, these social media messages were able to reach a user and their pool of friends, acquaintances, coworkers, families, and seemingly random ties, with a spreading effect outward into the networks of that first audience. As these ties are created and mediated by social media, the platforms have created a unique space for activists of all ages to

participate in discourse and mobilize large groups quickly for physical demonstrations. Combining comfort and accessibility with these mobilizing characteristics provide youth a unique landscape to create change.

This access point paired alongside the tools social media provides to spread information grants users a unique opportunity to tell their stories, both individually and as a collective group sharing an experience. Hashtags, livestream videos, and the shareable nature of social media-based content, places activists within a unique position to promote their message, if all tools are used strategically. Hashtags in activism allow for the quick access of new information just by the search of key, associated words. By utilizing these words as hashtags, meaning is formed and various narratives from individuals are brought into a collective. Stories coming from individuals may differ slightly but if they are united under a similar cause, or hashtag, the hashtag will grow to be increasingly associated with these stories. This grants the hashtag the power of the stories it is associated with. These searchable terms can be used alongside various types of content. Photographs, videos, blogs, essays, journals, and livestream footage can be found via hashtags. Each of these pieces of media, especially livestream footage, bring readers directly into a story. Through the imagery, either written or displayed, an individual can take on the feelings associated with being present within the captured moment. It's these tools that can transform an individual from a social media user to an activist.

By analyzing activism surrounding gun control in general, as well as the discourse led by students following the shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in 2018, the value social media and its complex systems hold within youth activism will be determined, as well as the importance of the role external factors such as privilege and

commercialization play in the spread of a message overall. While many movements do not reach the position to receive national attention, factors aligned for the March for Our Lives movement to become a focal point of political discourse in 2018 and onward, especially in situations concerning the topic of gun control. Studying these aligning factors gives insight into the role of each component within the actual activists and their relationship with social media, while also providing a look at the future of activism as a whole.

CHAPTER 1: YOUTH ADVOCACY AND THE HISTORY OF GUN VIOLENCE

Activism often comes about when individuals hold personal ties to an issue. Youth advocacy though, is displayed differently than advocacy from more legitimized, preexisting groups would be. Understanding the means in which youth mobilize their voices, and the history of advocacy surrounding the issue of gun violence that impacts youth, attests to the Stoneman Douglas student's efforts in advocating for policy based gun control both on social media and through in person efforts. While youth look to be civically engaged, their means of doing so takes different forms than individuals who show political engagement through participation within community government and support of a voter's democracy.

How Youth Advocate

The act of making strides towards political change is not an age specific effort but the means in which youth participate in discourse surrounding public issues makes their advocacy unique. Although youth have been considerably marginalized, particularly within party affiliated political discourse, the rise of social media and the conversations surrounding the importance of youth participation are acting as a means of adapting existing ideologies, extending the efforts of youth through platforms that harness the ability to reach indefinite audiences. Research has found that "American youth are interested in civic engagement as well as in playing with media" (Rheingold). The overlap of these interests creates a space for youth to participate civically while utilizing

media. There is no surprise that within an increasingly digital age students are utilizing social media as one of their primary means for discourse mobilization, pursuing their interest in enacting change. Research shows that within the United States in 2018, "95% of teens now report they have a smartphone or access to one. These mobile connections are in turn fueling more-persistent online activities: 45% of teens now say they are online on a near-constant basis" (Anderson and Jingjing). Having utilized social media as a means of cultivating a following gives the vast majority of youth, especially within the United States, a unique platform to speak with no bounds as to whom the information could reach within the country, and potentially further. Furthermore, social media acts a comfortable entry point for young individuals, operating similarly to that of popular culture, that Jenkins has identified within *By Any Media Necessary.* Viewing popular culture as an entryway for youth to utilize when discussing human rights issues, Jenkins states that "for these young fans- who often come from privileged backgrounds- it is easier to access human rights concerns through allusions to popular culture than through traditional mechanisms of consciousness raising and identity politics." (Jenkins). As privileged youth with limited knowledge, comfort, or experience discussing societal issues look to participate politically, gates such as popular culture and social media provide a familiar landscape for these potentially unfamiliar conversation.

By looking at university student's use of social media to enact change at their institutions, research exploring social media activism in schools has identified a recent growth in social media mediated conversation surrounding, particularly in this case, the Black Lives Matter Movement beginning in 2013. Studying these existing social media campaigns at the university level has allowed for insight into the benefits and restrictions

that lie within advocacy mediated by technology and social networking sites.

Understanding the strengths and limitations observed within previous movements held on

similar mediums allows for recognition of comparable characteristics and potential

projections for the future movements mobilized by social media. This study focusing on

the Black Lives Matter movement at the University of Missouri found that a large portion

of the success of the movement relied on social media's ability to gain support as it

"galvanized participation through the development of immersive, relatable, and easily

shared (via social media) narratives" (Gismondi and Osteen). A student's ability, through

social media, to quickly and repeatedly share these personal, relatable stories filled with

emotion and perspective allows them to connect with others on a technologically

mediated face to face basis. Furthermore, the movement allowed for organic growth

through the inclusion of diverse viewpoints as students at the school had access to

participate freely.

Figure 3: Black Lives Matter Protests at Mizzou (Lewis, Renee)

As this large-scale participatory nature is positive, it was also found to, at times, deter from the movement's overall strength by creating goals that were "too broad to the point they are unwieldy to administrators seeking actionable change" (Gismondi and Osteen). The competition for desires that arises within diverse voices and motives can cultivate an air of competition within solutions. These obstacles can slow, or even stop, the momentum of a movement. Unless successfully centered on a specific mission, many voices striving to form a narrative can lead those able to create action or participate, down an action-less rabbit hole, filled with passion and purpose but no clear direction. With little direction then comes little accountability on the part of university officials in relieving the student's various concerns.

Utilizing social media though has been found to be just a step within youth activism rather than the primary form of mobilization. While use of social media and general technology has the potential to act as a driver for change, "Engaging in advocacy efforts through use of technology is not intended to replace traditional advocacy efforts such as face to face meetings with decision makers, but rather enhance and augment them" (Rheingold). The downfalls of social media as a means of cultivating change within a society are meant to be redeemed through physical, present social activism. Sixteen-year-old climate change activist Greta Thunberg has mobilized youth to take action by skipping classes in order to show their fear of the legitimacy of climate change, and the government's overall denial of the science behind the concept (Smith-Schoenwalder). In 2018, Thunberg, a student from Sweden was able to connect youth through their social media presence but took activism beyond technologically mediated conversation by beginning this movement that spread into New York City, Boston,

Seattle, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Miami, Minneapolis, and Washington, D.C. (Smith-Schoenwalder). These protests were referred to as a "new era of the climate change movement" (Smith-Schoenwalder) with youth taking steps on the ground to promote change they believe in.

As Thunberg utilized social media to amplify their voice, a portion of the success found can be attributed to their timely emergence into the conversation surrounding climate change. Thunberg's approach was unique, and their target audience of students situated them within the conversation, but a platform had already been created by journalist and climate change activist Bill McKibben to propel forward with established legitimacy surrounding the goals of the movement. In the 1980's McKibben began to create his foundation of climate change activism by using his work as a journalist to warn of the future if climate change persisted. In 1989, McKibben published *The End of Nature*, the first popular book surrounding the topic of climate change, increasing support and momentum behind the spread of the message (Nisbet). After establishing this audience, McKibben continued to gain support and educate society, and while some believe his solutions "failed to offer pragmatic and achievable policy ideas", the role he played in setting the stage for the movement not only gave Thunberg an audience but also, an air of legitimacy (Nisbet). Media coverage then acted to further Thunberg's message from being spread primarily by social media and youth, to being promoted by mass media with established loyal audiences, through a discourse that was mainly adult oriented. Appearing on The Ellen Show, speaking at the United Nations, and giving Ted Talks allowed Thunberg not only to speak to a large number of people, but to do so with the stamp of approval from larger, established forces.

While there are strengths and weaknesses that exist alongside social media as a vessel for advocacy, the overall utopian air of participation that exists among social media platforms is valuable in cultivating discourse among youth as collective culture is critical for enacting change (Jenkins, et al.). An identified core mission within advocacy in general is to "raise awareness and shape attitudes" (Thackeray). With a desire to change the thinking of those they come in contact with, youth mobilized by social media can easily engage in discussions surrounding controversial topics and hold debates with peers surrounding their facet of desired change.

Youth, and individuals of all ages, participating in activism can be defined as participating in the grassroots effort of citizen journalism which "encompasses reporting of news, investigative blogging, hyperlocal journalism, and digital storytelling by the lay public" (Rheingold). Social media gives advocates, including these youth, the ability to continue to spread these pieces thereby promoting discourse beyond the singular article, creating conversations to increase the potential spread of these messages. "Making deliberate efforts to combine technology and youth advocacy will give youth a voice, increase their personal efficacy for participating in advocacy" and allow them a space to utilize their skills in a way that sets their message apart from others (Rheingold). The use of social media is a choice made by youth to participate in conversation in a way that is comfortable and accessible to them.

As youth take part in social media-based activism, the subculture(s) they belong to are said to "take shape around the distinctive activities and 'focal concerns' of [the] group" (Hall and Jefferson 15). Within the subculture of youth there are various other groups that exist as well, but they are all united under this similar title, occupying a

particular place within the larger community (Hall and Jefferson 15). As these individuals

have their own qualities that may place them within smaller groupings, their experiences

and conditions keep them connected. Historically, as mass communication, mass

entertainment, mass art, and mass culture rose in societal prevalence, a mass socialization

process was formed, leading to the "political enfranchisement" of the masses (Hall and

Jefferson, 18). Previous generations had experienced thought and communication with

less of an impact on the vast majority of individuals, but the youth generation in Post-

War Britain identified by Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson in their book, *Resistance*

through Rituals, were considered to be at the "forefront of every aspect of social change."

(Hall and Jefferson, 22). This led to a "teenage market" with a dialect forming

specifically between youth and the markets looking to engage them. Creating this

particular environment provided a ground of comfort for youth within the facets of life

specifically tailored to their use, similar to the environment that exists within social

media platforms.

Gun Violence

One issue that affects youth, in the United States particularly, is gun violence. As

a "leading cause of death for individuals 10-24 years old" the issue of violence by a

firearm is a public health crisis with 37% of deaths caused by firearms being deemed

homicide (Strong, et al.). With research into these mass homicides, a variety of

information is available on school shootings within the United States. These shootings,

occurring with greater frequency as years pass (Melgar), act as a direct cause of concern

for students that has resulted in youth becoming increasingly active participants in

conversations surrounding the topic of gun control in particular. An early incident of gun

violence within a school, and at the time what was considered the deadliest school

shooting, occurred in Littleton, Colorado at Columbine High School. Resulting in the

death of 12 students and one teacher, the 1999 tragedy has been called a blueprint for

future school shootings as the coverage of the incident from both the point of view of the

shooters and the media has inspired "copycat" incidents (Strauss). Research shows that

these incidents spark a form of social contagion as vulnerable individuals see and identify

with the events through media coverage detailing the tragedy and deaths while placing

notoriety on the shooter themself ("Mass Shootings Can Be Contagious, Research

Shows").

Although the Columbine shooting acted as a blueprint for school shootings in

general, it also acted as a pivotal moment in activism as well. The film *Bowling for

Columbine* by Michael Moore was created studying the circumstances surrounding the

Columbine shooting as well as the political and societal factors that exist surrounding gun

control ("Bowling for Columbine"). Moore approaches the tragedy at Columbine from a

unique position as an activist, entertainer, and journalist (Hynes). Identifying a corporate

culture surrounding gun ownership, Moore propels the conversation forward with focus

on individuals who own guns in their homes and the driving factors behind the ease of

gun accessibility. Making claims against the NRA, complicit government officials, and

the collective cultural tolerance for the current state of the nation, the film, and topics

brought up are pertinent to future activism surrounding gun control and school shootings.

Moore's tone throughout the film is noteworthy as he creates a balance between anger,

sincerity, and mockery (Hynes). By providing images of himself as a child growing up

around guns, Moore is able to create a seemingly open environment while also pointing out the direct flaws seen within the circumstances through which individuals can purchase guns and the ways in which firearms are viewed within society. His sardonic tone mocks situations while simultaneously pointing out the flaws, in a balance that is beneficial to the audience's perception of the events creating a timeless documentary to reference as systemic issues persist.

About thirty minutes into the film, Moore shows footage of what was the largest one day bombing by the U.S. in the Kosovo War. The bombing is seen, with sirens and explosions occurring as background noise. Dead bodies are shown on the ground and the smoking city is visible. The film then cuts to show the president at the time, Bill Clinton, explaining that the troops were "making an effort to minimize the harm to innocent people", which is then juxtaposed by a news narrator explaining that a hospital was impacted by the bombing, filled with innocent civilians. Just an hour after this, the shooting at Columbine took place.

Having set the stage with this sequence, Moore then proceeds to paint a picture of Columbine High School moments prior to the shooting in 1999. The sequence is kicked off with a statement again by President Clinton informing the public of the shooting, asking for thoughts and prayers, and stating that as the events unfold there will be more details. Light guitar music plays as the camera begins to show the school, empty and peaceful. The camera takes the point of view of someone walking the halls with a somewhat shaky, almost eye level positioning. Heard over the footage, alongside the guitar, is a series of phone calls. Teachers are heard calling in, speaking about a pipe bomb, reporting the shooting, explaining the presence of automatic weapons, and asking

for assistance with injured students. As the camera continues to show the school, the audio then shifts to calls with news sources as they look for information surrounding the event, asking if they can patch calls through immediately for coverage. The calls shift back to teachers, increasing in panic as the visual scenes shift from shots of the empty school to security footage of students hiding under tables in the cafeteria in a panic. Phone audio from a teacher is heard explaining that there is a shooting while simultaneously directing students to get under the tables and keep their hands under the tables as well. Her breathing increases as she speaks, and her tone gradually gets more urgent. Shots are heard in the background, multiple security camera feeds are shown at once as students all throughout the school hide and flee, with obvious panic. One piece of the security footage shows a student diving through the cafeteria as the camera shakes and a bomb goes off in the distance, with the ceiling shedding dust. Shooters enter the cafeteria and a few students who have not fled are shown hiding. The shooters are seen drinking from cups and slowly moving around, throwing explosives into the space. The cafeteria begins to light on fire as a thrown bomb explodes. The Shooters continue moving around slowly and tactfully. These scenes are followed by clips of crying parents, police officers, and the destruction left in the school, showing the aftermath of the shooting that killed 12 individuals ("Bowling for Columbine").

Figure 4: Inside Columbine High School from *Bowling for Columbine* ("Documentary-Bowling for Columbine")

Understanding these scenes shows not only the power of raw footage showcasing an event, but also provides the audience with this seemingly first-hand feeling of the trauma experienced by individuals within the school. This portrayal of the events right at the beginning of the film immediately grabs the audience's attention. Viewers are moved from the position of bystanders looking to be educated through the documentary to viewers who are disturbed and personally involved, with a feeling of having seen too much. It's these moments and tools that create a shift within an audience, prompting them to continue watching, and become personally invested in the unfolding of the film and its message.

These moments edited together by Moore acted alongside discourse controlled specifically by students that promoted change as well. Columbine students and parents organized and held protests against the National Rifle Association on May 1st, 1999, in Downtown Denver, Colorado. These efforts received national press coverage by the Today Show and Dateline, further spreading the message (Sakas). A group called Sane Alternatives to the Firearms Epidemic (SAFE) formed in wake of the tragedy as well seeking to pass legislation surrounding firearms and to close gaps within existing legislation that had allowed the Columbine shooters the loophole to buy their firearms in the first place (Brito).

While SAFE was created by a parent whose child was lost within the shooting, the relationship between youth activism and adult mediation is shown as youth voices are utilized under the umbrella of the adults at the helm of the discourse. With each incident comes a new "tipping point" of activism within the conversation surrounding gun violence but as years progress the technology available creates uniquely participatory landscapes. "Copycat" shootings occurring over the years following Columbine, led to a growth in the number of students and school faculty lost to homicide. On February 14th, 2018, in Parkland, Florida at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School while many students were looking forward to Valentine's Day at school, 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz, who had previously been expelled from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School for "disciplinary reasons", called an uber and with a legally purchased AR-15 set off for the school with plans to open fire. In just less than 4 minutes Cruz had killed 17 students and faculty members, leaving many others wounded. He then placed his gun in a stairwell, and fled the scene alongside students evacuating his actions, only to be arrested later by

local police ("Teen Gunman"). Shots fired in these four minutes sent the school into a frenzy with students and faculty both fleeing and trying to find a way to alleviate the situation in order to protect one another in this time of panic and fear.

As the events took place, individuals within the school acted in the same way they would within any other event, they documented it. Taking videos and livestreaming the events, these four minutes changed the lives of many forever and continue to show exactly what happened that day. Those impacted now look to continue to enact large-scale change in hopes of preventing future instances of gun violence within schools, seeing it as their duty to protect future students nationally from the tragedy they had to endure. As information surrounding the Parkland Shooting came to light by students, faculty, and major media, there became a sea of information available on not only the incident but also the individual who caused it. A quick Google search on the shooting reveals Cruz's family history, the love letters he writes from prison, and his potential mental illnesses and disabilities that may have played a factor in his actions on the day of this tragedy. As local and national news sources place their focus on the information swirling surrounding the shooting and the person who caused it, the individuals affected directly by the events that occurred on February 14th, 2018, began by speaking out on their own. Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School students have taken to social media since the tragedy to host their own conversation around the issue, reframing the tragedy from the eyes of the individuals who had to live it and will relive it forever in their memories. By connecting their faces, names, and voices to the tragedy through discourse efforts beginning on social media, Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School students are

creating a shift in conversation for youth with social media as one of the main tools of mobilization.

Considering this footage in comparison to what was seen in *Bowling for Columbine*, stark differences stand out. Both live streams, and the edited footage within the documentary are powerful in immersing the audience within the situation. What is oftentimes described as an "unthinkable tragedy" is given reality through this documentation. But, while the *Bowling for Columbine* footage is paired with music and overlaid audio tracks, creating a powerful yet sentimentalized memory of the events, livestream footage from Stoneman Douglas shows more brutal, raw, reality. The exact audio of screams is heard as students run. A look into the precise events is shown in a way that is eerie because of how seemingly stripped down and almost underdone it is, in comparison to Moore's sequence. Furthermore, while Moore controls the conversation surrounding the Columbine shooting through his film and this sequence, the analysis of live stream footage from students at Stoneman Douglas provides a narrative controlled by the individuals who experienced the event firsthand, with raw, timely emotions shown, rather than carefully planned and juxtaposed audio and video clips.

The youth advocates emerging from Stoneman Douglas High School were not just advocating for awareness but for concrete, systemic change. Organizing movements surrounding the topic of gun violence and prevention, these students input themselves into political discourse in a way that was less possible in years prior. Students banned together in the wake of the Parkland shooting calling for direct political action beginning with political officials. The March for Our Lives website details the specific action plan created by Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School students, referred to as "A Peace

Plan for a Safer America" ("A Peace Plan for a Safer America"). This plan calls out

future political officials directly as the students have identified a need for a commitment

to be made "to holding an unpatriotic gun lobby and gun industry accountable not just for

weakening our nation's gun laws, but also for illegal behavior in self-dealing that offends

and contradicts America's vast majority of responsible gun owners" ("A Peace Plan").

Having lost classmates to gun violence and identifying that "gun violence has become a

top cause of death, second only to drug overdoses" ("A Peace Plan"), the student

advocates from Stoneman Douglas High School are propelled by their clear mission and

plan of action to begin utilizing their movement fueled by social media to reach those at

the top of the government, with the primary goal of fueling legislative change and

increasing public awareness. Student activists state "this isn't red and blue. This isn't

generation versus generation. This is the 97% of people who believe that we need to take

steps here together" (TheEllenShow). Uniting divided voices through social media,

students are creating a unified front against gun violence with supporters of all

demographics. The drive within students to advocate for change within the systems that

currently govern their lives and livelihoods, specifically those surrounding gun violence

in schools, can be explained by the desire to prevent further threats similar to those these

students experienced during the Stoneman Douglas school shooting.

  These students engaging in this way, can be compared to Columbine students in

Moore's film *Bowling For Columbine* once again. While March for Our Lives shows

students seemingly at the forefront of discourse, leading the conversation, Moore's film

shows youth a bit differently. Youth are seen discussing their ability to build bombs,

speaking about knowing the shooters, and even laughing in discomfort when discussing

violence in schools. Upon learning that Kmart sold bullets to the students who caused the violence at Columbine High School, Moore held a protest at the store, joined by two other students. These students, who are involved in the protest, do so following Moore's lead rather than creating their own. While their presence brings a shock value to the protest by showing the faces of those that were affected, Moore is at the forefront of the efforts. Comparatively, the Stoneman Douglas Students make a point to be the leaders of their discourse right from the beginning of their efforts ("Bowling for Columbine").

Activism in the Wake of Tragedy

In order to grasp the mobilization of these youth advocates, it is necessary to understand the potential motivating factors behind their advocacy. Each individual affected by the Stoneman Douglas shooting, in some capacity, has endured trauma. Understanding this trauma aids in understanding the mobilizing forces behind the youth advocates born from tragedy. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network lists both community violence and terrorism as potential types of traumas that can occur in individuals and shift their interactions with the world. In response to trauma, individuals respond in a variety of ways (Oseldman). With many impacted by the events of the shooting at Stoneman Douglas, there are various trauma responses that could be attributed to the advocates decision to take action. Post- traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) refers to "a mental health condition that's triggered by a terrifying event — either experiencing it or witnessing it. Symptoms may include flashbacks, nightmares and severe anxiety, as well as uncontrollable thoughts about the event" ("Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder"). Following a trauma inducing experience, such as a school shooting,

PTSD is extremely common. Individuals with PTSD are considered to have a neurobiological shift in their brains, oftentimes resulting in a "fight or flight" response to perceived threats (Sherin and Nemeroff).

The drive within students to advocate for systemic change surrounding gun violence in schools can be explained by the desire to prevent further threats similar to those these students experienced during the Stoneman Douglas school shooting. Research on high school student's relationship with social media has shown that "teens felt empowered and excited when they shared important aspects of their identities with others", likely causing the Stoneman Douglas student's response to document the events via video and livestream (Shafer). Taking the conversation into their own hands and acting to put a stop to the violence they had to endure, so others will not have to, acts as a mode of empowerment and a grieving mechanism for the students in response to the event and the feelings the event triggered within them. Studies into victim advocates emerging from situations of sexual assault further demonstrate the shift from powerlessness to power that occurs when a victim of tragedy becomes an advocate for change (McCaffrey). In response to tragedy, individuals are shifted into the role of a victim which then assigns them to the weakness and passivity of someone who was wronged. By shifting into a role of advocacy instead these individuals are then in charge of writing their own narratives and controlling their own representation. The exercising of one's voice through advocacy assigns an individual the power to then cope with the trauma they feel.

Grasping the topic of gun violence historically, the participatory culture that activism mediated by social media relies on, and the trauma felt by individuals in wake of

a tragedy aids in understanding the driving factors behind students at Marjory Stoneman

Douglas High School and creates a platform to then understand the elements of this

movement that make it a true moment in history for youth activism.

CHAPTER 2: WHAT'S TRENDING? HOW IS MSD DIFFERENT?

Activist-propelled movements emerge continually as situations occur around the world that garner audience attention and influence mainstream discourse. While these movements exist and each hold validity in their own right, some gain more attention than others granting them a larger domain within public discourse. This attention can grant a perceived importance and legitimacy to a movement but is not simply acquired through the passion, drive, and purpose of the activists. The role of mass media in the spread of awareness surrounding an event can make a large impact in the movement's perceived legitimacy. As attention is drawn to a singular movement or the trending movements of a certain time, growth is indefinite, with a message spread through individuals into their own personal networks. Movements have been promoted in the past through word of mouth, press, protests, and film (among other efforts). These practices have worked alongside one another to aid in the spread of a narrative while gaining public attention as conversations surrounding the topic at hand occur with increased frequency as the concept of the movement spreads.

Activism based communication mediated by media has occurred long before the emergence of social media. Indymedia, kicking off in 1999, was a publishing center open to activist communication focusing on political and social issues (Robé, Wilson). By providing a secure space and website domain for activists to create with their identities protected, while uniting like-minded individuals, and establishing support behind a cause, Indymedia played a large role within the establishment and spread of movements, via

media, prior to the existence of social media. Similar to social media, Indymedia allowed varying degrees of open publishing, meaning that if any individual had access to the internet, they were able to participate and engage. This welcoming of diverse voices led to the creation of discourse beyond what was included within commercialized media, that typically did not focus on marginalized voices (Robé, Wilson). These platforms reached their height in 2006 and continued to influence activists and the way in which they participate. While an inability to keep up with evolving technological advancements played a role in Indymedia's downfall, the foundations set within this open network communication and rallying model led to an ideal, and more open, space for social media-based activism to occur (Robé, Wilson).

These roots then functioned alongside listservs, or electronic mailing lists, and created an environment in which activists could educate and rally others through their media, and then mobilize them via collected emails. Those looking to participate in activism in this time had to seek it out more intentionally than those participating in social media activism today but, this created engaged audiences and powerful communities within the rallying and spread of a message. Diverse voices on Indymedia collected under similar causes and circumstances and listservs acted as a streamlined means of communication between the activist leaders and the activist civilians looking to bring their presence to the cause physically.

Social media has worked off of these foundations of communication, providing further engagement and speed to the systems in place within Indymedia and listservs. Connecting individuals to one another in unique ways, social media has provided a platform for activists to engage with one another and increase awareness just from their

devices, providing another method of civic engagement beyond traditional media. In the

United States and internationally, movements such as Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives

Matter, #MeToo, and many more have spread through social media action (Fisher). The

ability to hashtag or share a post and reach an indefinite number of individuals creates a

space within which activists can spread their message with increased speed and ease. As

movements become trending topics on social media, engagement can be noted, and the

effectiveness of social media can be judged. Beyond the systems themselves, devices

such as hashtags and live stream videos have given the activists emerging from Stoneman

Douglas High school a unique setting to create conversations and share their narratives.

Understanding these tools through the lens of the movement allows a look into what

makes the youth activists of Stoneman Douglas different from other youth advocating for

similar policy reform following violence in schools.

Hashtags Creating Meaning

The impact of social media on activism lies deeper than the accessibility of the

platforms themselves to individuals with smartphones and, in this case, youth

specifically. Influence lies in the mechanisms at work within the actual systems as well.

Utilizing algorithmic recommendation, an "encoded procedure for transforming input

data into a desired output, based on specified calculations", a "followers" list, and

hashtags, social media has the perceived ability to connect users and pieces of

information around the world (Trere). Research into the importance of digital activism

connected to hashtags, searchable words used behind a pound symbol, has provided

information on this key force at play when analyzing the use of social media in the spread

of a movement. It is through this research that the significance of the activism of the students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School is evident as social media is one way in which their voices are mobilized. The book *#Hashtag Activism: Networks of Race and Gender Justice* looks at the impact of hashtag-based activism in the growth of movements, placing digital activists as the main characters in advocacy surrounding race and gender on Twitter. Looking at the use of Twitter for these facets of social change, the role of hashtags has grown increasingly obvious as these word-based tools act as a means of networking like-minded individuals and the discourse they are creating. Sarah Jackson, Moya Bailey, and Brooke Foucault Welles have identified a shift within digital activism beginning with the use of the hashtag #IranElection which was a tool utilized in 2011 for organizing Iranian citizens in protesting a disputed election (Jackson, S., et al.). Doing this provided Iranians the ability to connect with one another while also controlling the narrative that got out to the rest of the World surrounding their country's political unrest. By identifying the "permeability between the mainstream public sphere and counter publics on the Twitter platform" (Jackson, S., et al.) the authors of *#Hashtag Activism* found the vast potential that lies in the use of social media platforms in a contemporary democracy. Hashtags, while most effective on Twitter, are available on most popular social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. Situating hashtags alongside narratives on each of these platforms allows continuity between the conversation occurring in each space. As *#Hashtag Activism* is centered around activism focused on race and gender, the noted connection of marginalized groups and the ability for social media to provide a platform for these groups to speak applies directly to youth activists emerging in the wake of a tragedy. With youth being a group whose voices are

historically deemed of lesser importance, the students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School are provided with similar tools through social media when partaking in activism. By utilizing social media, students are granted the ability to speak to others beyond their age, connecting with users around the world looking to engage in conversation surrounding gun control and its link to school shootings.

Although the authors of *#Hashtag Activism* provide a basis for understanding social media's role within social movements such as #IranianElection, #MeToo, and #BlackLivesMatter with a central focus on race and gender, it is important to note that attaching a hashtag operates on a fundamental level applicable to movements of all purposes. These tags operate in a sense that is deeper than simply the connection of stories to one another. Expanding on this notion further, Paul Dawson explores the role narrative plays in the cultivation and efficacy of a strong hashtag. Dawson defines narrative in a way that strays from the existing notion of it being an "authorless or collective cultural script that can be rhetorically deployed by individual users or groups to contest existing dominant narratives" and instead identifies it to be the interaction between various agents within technology working together to form a collective identity surrounding a particular topic. The #MeToo is utilized by Dawson as a clear example of the politicization of terminology situated within a certain context. Given meaning by individuals who shared personal stories of their experiences with sexual assault, the #MeToo became a tool that functioned without any context beyond the words themselves (Dawson). Eventually users were able to post solely the #MeToo and be understood for having an experience with sexual assault or standing with sexual assault victims, without having to give any clear details. The use of these hashtags then created a balance and

relationship between personal and collective experiences as stories were shared by individuals to then be webbed together under the hashtag.

Narrative storytelling is evident and effective in creating a sustained meaning around a hashtag as the act of participatory storytelling, defined as "a collective activity in which individuals and groups contribute to the telling, retelling, and remixing of stories (or narratives) through various media platforms", bringing a voice and opportunity for individuals to express themselves through the sharing of their experiences (Shresthova). While the sharing of stories can dilute a message through competing ideas or goals, this empowerment that aligns with an individual's potential role in the creation of a narrative is key to the mobilization of a movement as the stories not only aid in defining the group's collective identity and voice but also in the emergence of key actors and figures (Polletta). By providing representation of a situation without explaining it, a narrative acts as a way to define a movement and the tone of that movement through it's "canonical nature", as audience members interpret meanings through structures they already know (Polletta).

Analyzing the way in which the #MeToo, for example, operates in the creation of meaning through various narratives and helps to understand the levels at which hashtags then act to form meaning. As the two words are strung together throughout the platform alongside the individual's stories, a singular event is sparked. This hashtag is then spread by other users signaling yet another event, the beginning of a movement. The words #MeToo are given a connotation by social media platform users and even then, these posts are not a piece of a movement until they are spread and interacted with by many.

The words then become a message in themselves, to tell a story without any personal anecdotes or experiences present.

The structures in place via social media in creating a movement rely on algorithmically spread interactions that are systematically based, just as they rely on the actual information that is promoted. Without the platform's fundamental systems, technology would not be beneficial within the creation and perpetuation of a movement. Understanding these systematic components and their impact on the spread of a message via technology allows a deeper understanding into some of the momentum building strategies behind the movements that have grown through their related stories and hashtags. The ambivalent nature that exists within various storytellers, narratives, and actors in a movement require readers to interact with stories, pivoting between narratives and interpreting arising information for themselves, making these interpretations and decisions a critical aspect of this process (Polletta). It is through this "high degree of interactivity" that social media engages users and provides easy access to join conversations. Through this interactivity, the listeners become producers with an easy access point into participation within a movement (Gerbaudo). Strong decentralized bonds created surrounding narrative create autonomy (Gerbaudo). These attributes mixed with the ability for growth and awareness build strong forms of mobilization and entry level participation, especially for individuals who feel comfortable participating in discourse on these platforms.

While there is no power in the words utilized for a hashtag on a purely objective level, there is power that is given to the words through their arrangement within content, alongside narratives and information. Langdon Winner's article *Do Artifacts Have*

Politics? discusses the qualities that are attributed to artifacts when they are situated within certain contexts. The way in which artifacts interact with their context aids in their overall effect. Certain artifacts hold meaning based on the contexts they have been situated in, these contexts can grant the object value or power. For example, while technology is seen as a neutral tool, with both the ability to do harm or good, its existence holds underlying power and authority as it has the potential to reproduce relative privilege and hierarchies within a community (Winner). The use of technology creates these waves of impact in communities beyond what they were conceptually intended to. This can be compared to what occurs when employing certain words as a hashtag. Through their situation, the words that are paired with one another and the message they are posted alongside develops meaning beyond the simple dictionary definition of the words themselves, creating a relationship between language and the technology involved within hashtags and their spread through algorithms.

Following the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, specific hashtags emerged that allowed social media users the ability to actively engage one another and participate in the discourse surrounding the event while also branding words to coincide with their message, similar to what occurred with aforementioned movements. Utilizing hashtags such as #NeverAgain, #MSDStrong, and #MarchForOurLives (Millstein) alongside videos from the shooting, personal narratives of the events, or statistics calling for gun control created new meaning for these words. On February 28th, 2018, Twitter user @AlbertMacGloan tweeted "Not that we needed verification that an AR (ASSAULT RIFLE) was meant to be a military weapon, but there you have it #GunControlNow #GunReformNow #NeverAgain

#BanAssaultWeaponsNow". Following this tweet was the link to a [Time Magazine](#) [article](#) discussing the nature of an AR- 15, the gun Nikolas Cruz had used in Parkland just 10 days prior. Months later, on May 30th, 2018, @jih8yrx tweeted "The fact that Nikolas Cruz said, 'with the power of my A-R you will all know who I am' is the reason we need gun control #nikolascruz #MSDStrong #GunReformNow #GunControlNow #GunControl". These tweets, and others similar, acted to brand the hashtags and words to coincide with the Parkland message. Following the initial posting of these hashtags alongside various pieces of information, social media users could then utilize just the branded hashtags to show their support for the movement and partake in the conversation without even adding anything other than their solidarity and support, which holds an important message in itself. By just posting the hashtag #GunControlNow or #NeverAgain, social media users showed their support. Viewing the profiles that populate when searching MSD Strong on Twitter in 2021, those that show up all have written MSD strong briefly in their bios alongside other personal anecdotes. User @briwhut's profile bio reads "spread love + good vibes only || FAMU'22 || #neveragain #msdstrong #blacklivesmatter". Including this in their bio, the user has associated themself with the Stoneman Douglas movement to anyone who stumbles upon their profile, as a shorthand demonstration of continual support.

Furthermore, these hashtags have the ability to act as a search tool for individuals seeking more information pertaining to the event and the conversations it has sparked on various platforms. Users unfamiliar with the hashtags could interact with them in order to learn more, allowing the spread of the movement and the understanding of the meaning of the hashtags to continue to grow exponentially. By just looking up a popular hashtag

affiliated with the activism surrounding gun violence and the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, internet users can educate themselves on various narratives coinciding with the event and choose a stance to take themselves. When searching #GunControlNow, for example, a slew of tweets can be seen, some tagging articles, others just mentioning personal opinions. These hashtags allowed individuals to share footage from the events and plan future events, including a nationwide student walk out, garnering support from other students and individuals of all ages around the world. While the students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas utilized social media as it is a tool that is extremely accessible to them as activists, it is also a tool that some students across the country have as well, allowing them to connect with one another within a familiar space, even if this space is virtual. The accessibility of information that social media systems and hashtags provide to activists allows the conversation to grow beyond what would occur if the spread of information was solely occurring within physical publics. While hashtags and conversations mediated by social media may not be considered enough to enact change, their uniting characteristics allow them to bring together a diverse community of individuals in support of an issue who are willing to bring change to their physical communities across the country.

Bringing the Event to the Audience

Live streaming brings depth to the established hashtags associated with a movement. As hashtags operate in a way that is able to create meaning within a movement, activists, including the students of Stoneman Douglas, are able to take this a step further and utilize live streaming to bring a new level to the narrative. At all hours of

the day social media users have the option to go "live" on their account. In this process, an individual can open their Instagram or Facebook and begin an ongoing, unedited video recording that is streamed in real time to their followers. This option, while preexisting on livestream specific applications like Periscope, opened to social media users on Facebook in 2015 (Doffman) and Instagram users as of 2016 (Langford). While Snapchat allows video recording, these videos have to stay under one minute and are then posted by the user, seen by only those who have subscribed to that user's specific messages. On Facebook and Instagram, live videos have the ability to be saved onto the user's feeds forever, acting as not only an account of the current situation but also an archive. By doing this, individual users have the ability to show their followers and viewers their point of view through the camera. This gives a personal narrative through the commentary and viewpoint of the individual filming. Doing this shows a glimpse into the reality of what that user is doing or seeing at the chosen moment, situated through their lens and position as a storyteller. While some live stream feeds show users doing their makeup or preparing a meal, others can show much more shocking imagery, placing audience members directly into an event that they are not physically present for. These videos are then public to be saved and spread throughout social media, further growing the number of individuals able to transport themselves into the event and get a sense of the feelings of those physically present. By sharing a live stream, other social media users are brought into the event itself, activists can then employ the warranted emotional response in order to persuade the audience to support the movement taking place, and subsequently the goals of the movement at large. Activists involved in producing content

surrounding their mission are able to seek out imagery and voices that support their goals, posting narratives that are strategic in order to promote their motives.

Parkland students were not the first to utilize live stream features for awareness either. While the Occupy movement popularized live streaming in 2011, one notable, more recent, event, marked by the livestreaming of a traumatic incident occurred in Minnesota two year s before the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas. On July 6th, 2016, when braking at a traffic stop, 32-year-old African American Philando Castile was fatally shot ("Killing of Philando Castile"). He was not alone though. As Castile bled on the ground, his girlfriend Diamond Reynolds used her cell phone to share what was happening on Facebook Live (Ritchin). With her 4-year-old daughter in the car, Reynolds broadcasted for 10 minutes as other users watched and heard her repeat "stay with me" to Castile as he bled, and eventually died. Upon realizing his death, the video shows Reynolds addressing the audience directly pleading, "Y'all please pray for us, Jesus, please y'all. I ask everybody on Facebook, everybody that's watching, everybody that's tuned in please pray for us. Sister I know I just dropped you off, but I need you to pick me up…" (Ritchin). Users watching the stream, both at the time of the events and after, explain viewing the video as feeling "horrified and somehow complicit. We have intruded on a scene of utter agony, and from such distance, that it feels like we must do something. But what can be done?" (Ritchin). Given the view into the events but not knowing what exactly unfolded outside of camera view, or after those 10 minutes, users are left with the disturbing image and an unsettling feeling that promotes action. Watching individuals be traumatized in this way through a live stream can be traumatizing to viewers as well, placing them within the situation. While anti-black

violence and violence within schools are not comparable in nature, the impact the live streaming of these events leaves on viewers is powerful, nonetheless.

With live streaming such as this, accidental eyewitnesses can unintentionally become activists in just moments with no prior intentions of participating in conversation (Pandell). Users selecting to view a live stream open it without a clear idea of what they are going to be seeing. By coming into contact with the information through their news feed, searched hashtags, or recommendations, the user is placed in a pivotal position to make up their own mind and form a first impression of the information with just the images at hand. Since livestreaming is already a popular tool for individuals wishing to share components of their everyday lives, when situations in which activism-based conversations are sparked, the urge for individuals to grab their phones and document the event is almost a sixth sense reaction. Creating documentation from a moment such as this shifts an individual, who may have once been just a regular social media user, into the role of an individual participating in activism-based discourse, oftentimes without even realizing it.

The 2020 strides forward for the #BlackLivesMatter movement protesting police brutality and systemic oppression against black individuals, mentioned in Chapter 1, attest to the power of social media and livestream videos as a driver for ideological change. Studies by the Pew Research Center show that in 2020 "roughly a quarter of adult social media users in the United States - and 17% of adults overall - say they have changed their views about a political or social issue because of something they saw on social media in the past year" (Perrin). The research states many of these individuals mentioned either Black Lives Matter or police brutality, both topics that had been brought

to new light by injustices and videos showing the everyday, discriminatory nature of occurrences of violence against black individuals. The movement is considered to be experiencing a large shift, if even for a short period of time, in public opinion since its beginning in 2013 (Buchanan, et al.) with protests emerging across the United States. Repeat instances of police brutality against black individuals, similar to the murder of Philando Castille, have brought the movement to a head. Hashtags allowing for framing surrounding an event provide social media users with the opportunity to interact with the hashtag by promoting their personal ties to the cause or by reading through other's testimonies, finding passion and a will to act through the stories of others. The ability for live stream videos to show the realness and persistence of police brutality and injustice allows the Black Lives Matter Movement to bring the issue up to individuals who may even be opposed to its legitimacy, as a means of proving that the activist's claims are well-founded and rooted in truth and experience.

In the case of the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, the tool of live streaming was utilized by many students from within the school. Live streaming the event and posting videos including the sounds of close gunshots and the images of running students, individuals within the school were able to document and post footage of the reality of an event many people cannot even bear to imagine. This acted as a means of transporting those who were not present for the event into the shoes of those that were, showing the proximity of students to the violence and the emotions that were felt by those in the school. Videos by students and recordings of phone calls to parents and emergency personnel were later reshared by news outlets covering the event, utilizing the videos and audio messages as first-hand accounts of what had happened in the moments

of the shooting. Instead of showing the aftermath of the event, news outlets were able to show the actual event repeatedly through the use of previously recorded videos.

One video, shared by large news outlets such as the Miami Herald, shows a 30 second look into a Stoneman Douglas classroom during the shooting. It begins with the viewer seeing scattered desks, backpacks, and only a few students in sight. An individual is heard crying and then being carried by a classmate and escorted by a police officer out of the classroom. The frame then pans to two other students, one of which is on their phone showing the other something that is too blurry to make out from the audience's perspective. What stands out in this moment though is the image of someone's legs laying on the floor in the background. More crying is heard and the camera pans to the students walking out of the classroom. The camera is extremely shaky throughout the entirety of the video. One student is seen walking quickly away from the body on the ground as another clutches their chest, all while screams and cries are heard in the background. The camera pans back to the body surrounded by a pool of blood as the students frantically leave the classroom. The video ends with the students running down the hallway towards a pair of double doors as screams and police officers yelling "let's go" repeat in the background (Cohen).

Beyond this video, and others similar in nature circulated by media outlets, were unique systems at play. Twitter employed a news stream feature just in time for the coverage of the event. This, at the time, newly opened live streaming feature showed breaking news beside users' timelines. Not only was the feature showing coverage of the event while it occurred garnering audience attention, but it also was never used before the event, gaining shock value from its novelty. Creating the feature in hopes of showcasing

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reputable news sources to their users, Twitter broadcast "hours of footage from Miami's WSVN 7 next to the timelines of US users as the news station covered the shooting at Broward County's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida" (Kantrowitz). Gaining audience attention, individuals who clicked the news piece were brought to similar articles and pieces of information, with the live stream of the news being viewed at one point by 50,000 concurrent users (Kantrowitz). Doing this showed not only a live stream of videos covering the event but also of conversations occurring surrounding the event. Aidan Minoff, a student at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas, who was just 14 at the time, live-tweeted the events (Dzhanova). With periodic tweets going out throughout the entire lockdown of the school, Aidan provided a window into the school to outsiders through his words (Dzhanova). His tweets were as follows:

- 2:59 PM "I am in a school shooting right now…"

- 3:01 PM "My school is being shot up and I am locked inside. I'm f***ing scared right now"

- 3:10 PM: "Still locked in. I checked the local news and there is 20 victims. Long live Marjory Stoneman Douglas High."

- 3:45 PM: "Hello, Twitter. I am closing my DM's but I appreciate everyone contacting me. I am still locked in the school but remember I'm only a freshman. Please don't just send your love to me but pray for the victims' families too. Love you all."

- 4:25PM: "We have been liberated. God bless, America."

- 4:56PM: "Love each other. You may never know when it may be the last day you meet someone."

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Figure 5: Tweets from Aidan Minoff During the Stoneman Douglas Shooting (Griggs, Brandon)

These tweets showed users going about their everyday lives a look into the unfolding of the shooting in real time, keeping them updated, engaged, and informed through the eyes of someone who was living through it.

On Twitter, when searching keywords such as "Stoneman Douglas Shooting", the platform shows all public assets housed on twitter that include those words, categorized by the top posts with the most interactions, most recent posts, people, photos, and videos. As Minkoff mentioned, there was no absence of support following his tweets. As tweets gain attention, the systems through which twitter operates, continue to place these

messages in the eyes of viewers, growing exponentially and reaching a variety of audiences.

Similarly, students shared videos to their Snapchat accounts of the events. Snapchat accounts connect individuals to networks of their friends or followers rather than the direct broad public. A video from one user that has since been saved and circulated, shows students sitting closely together behind a barricade of desks. The one student visible within the video is wide eyed with knees to chest, covering their mouth with their hand. The video is mostly silent as students are hiding, with only a muffled "Oh my god" heard followed by five gunshots, one after the other, in the background (Dzhanova).

Snapchat videos such as this were highlighted on the platform as a "featured" story specifically set up to showcase the shooting in Parkland, showing users everywhere a slew of first-hand accounts and a look into the school (Ruiz). These videos were also available when zooming in to the geotag on the platform's Snap Map feature, which allows users to see public photos and videos shared across the world just by choosing a location (Dzhanova). At this time, when zooming into the Stoneman Douglas area, photos and videos of police officers outside the school and students fearful inside the school were all being broadcast (Dzhanova). Each of these videos acted as a way for students to inform the public while also creating a platform and narrative.

Previous tragedies within schools around the country have experienced a quick spike and loss of news coverage, but the situation at Stoneman Douglas proved to be different with sustained news coverage for weeks following the event (Siegel). This, in part, was due to the youth's call for direct policy change. The hashtag #BoycottNRA

began trending following the events with companies in the United States cutting discount programs and perks available to NRA members (Siegel). With such a direct motive and purpose for their conversation as well as an economic impact being made from the beginning, the students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School were able to shift news coverage from showing a singular problematic event to instead proposing a solution and a means to achieve a world in which these events do not occur with such frequency or lethality. Calling out officials by proposing plans calling for policy change, the students directly placed the responsibility for the incident into the hands of individuals who could hold an impact on the policies being identified as enabling those looking to commit similar crimes as Nikolas Cruz. While the immediacy and hashtagging surrounding an event creates for participatory cultures spreading activist based information, it also creates a network of information for extreme media access that could cause further violence. High school aged students, identified to hold social media presence, had the tools in their hands to advocate, learn, and come in contact with new information that individuals even just a few years prior would not have. Furthermore, their age, while marginalizing, granted them the knowledge needed to hold a level of legitimacy in policy-based conversation mediated by social platforms. This knowledge, while beneficial, was not just granted by age itself. Understanding the race and class of the individuals residing within the Parkland area is also necessary when considering the space the students were granted within conversation.

Although youth have been identified previously as a marginalized group, the youth of Stoneman Douglas hold a unique place within society that grants them greater opportunity to harness their ability to advocate for change and share their viewpoints. The

existence of individuals within multiple marginalized communities has placed them at the very edges of conversation, with their voices systemically silenced. While the youth of Stoneman Douglas High School are in a position in which they must prove their importance within political discourse because of their age, the socioeconomic status and race of the Parkland area in general removes obstacles that could come alongside various races and classes. Individuals are able to push past their age and hold authority within public discourse due to affluence and whiteness. Affluent students are considered to have access to stronger teachers, advanced resources, and tutors in order to hone in their academic skills and gain confidence and entitlement within an academic setting (Camera). While the socioeconomic status of an individual can grant them a larger platform from which their voices can be heard, a student's socioeconomic status is determined by their parents and can influence the person in which they grow up to be through the opportunities and situations they become faced with. Having access to technology to be utilized for advocacy is a luxury that can cost individuals a large sum of money. Their ability to then take the time to create a post and furthermore, believe that their opinion matters, are both societally granted benefits of wealth on youth activism. With greater finances to afford technology and a greater drive to speak, students from wealthier areas control a large amount of space within the technological sphere.

Parkland, Florida, home to Stoneman Douglas High School, is a predominantly non-Hispanic white area with a median household income of $146,094 (Parkland, FL) while the nation median household income is only $68,703 (Income and Poverty). The age and race of the students in Parkland as well as their socioeconomic status grants the student a sphere for advocacy where their obstacle is truly their age. These advantages

are not just evident within a student's academic behaviors but within their social

behaviors as well. Students and parents from wealthy families are known to have the

social capital and confidence to confront teachers regarding grades and policies in the

first place, with dedicated supportive parents and a drive to challenge the system

(Camera). This social capital and confidence can translate into activism. As students

within Parkland, Florida advocate they are doing so from a vastly different economic

standpoint than the average American student, in a way that arguably grants them more

confidence and support to speak out against policy makers. A student faced with trauma

may behave in a variety of ways but as students who are empowered to speak out in

general, the individuals from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School of Parkland

reacting in a way in which they utilize their voices is fitting. Young individuals who had

come from privileged backgrounds before social media found entry positions into

political conversation through popular culture rather than consciousness raising and

identity politics. This occurred similarly with these affluent student's use of social media

as their entry point (Jenkins). These students spoke out on various social media platforms

in order to share their opinions following the event and to promote their activist groups to

the public from their particular position.

Student-led Discourse

The coined term for the movement central to gun control following the tragedy

that occurred at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School is known as "March for Our

Lives" (MFOL). Gathering under this common goal, student activists of all levels of

exposure have risen to the challenge of promoting their "Peace Plan" through the sharing

of their narratives. Attaching their faces, their lives, and their stories to the overall message of gun control through the use of narrative creation on social media in order to enact systemic change has allowed for these students to gain traction within mainstream discourse. As social media usage holds prevalence in the lives of the youth and the means in which they communicate, the potential found within media to mobilize previously excluded voices is essentially untapped on this level. Even those involved in the March for Our Lives movement seem to understand that, taking to social media as a means of expressing themselves while also informing other users of their ability to speak out and participate in creating change as well. Social media accounts on platforms like YouTube and Instagram have been utilized by activists. By analyzing the activists' use of these specific platforms as well as the comments that the posts provide, an understanding of the MFOL movement and its growth can be understood, furthering insight into the role of social media in activism of youth subcultures in general.

The "March for Our Lives" YouTube account was created on March 19th, 2018, just a little over a month after the shooting. With 8.55k subscribers and counting, this account and its periodic posting of videos reaches a wide variety of individuals. Their posting began with a kickoff series identified by two videos surrounding the movement's calls to action and two videos titled #WhatIf. In this series, 4 students give quick insight into the foundations of the MFOL movement and the trajectory for the page. The four videos in the beginning series are all under a minute long but each show a different high school aged student, with front lighting against a black background, the camera is still as the students each speak, shown from mid chest and up, providing information and their perspective to the public.

The first video posted not only on the account, but also in this series, features a student named Alex Wind. The video is only 30 seconds long and begins with Wind introducing himself as a member of the Never Again movement. Wind tells viewers what the best ways to help propel the movement forward are. Listing these quickly and matter-of-factly, Wind does not give much room for questioning. He calls viewers to make their voices heard by registering to vote, visiting the March for Our Lives website to RSVP for the DC march, and signing petitions to urge congress to pass gun legislation in order to "protect the lives of the innocent youth". Wind's message begins in a monotone, somber voice, he becomes audibly more passionate as he begins listing the action items while still remaining serious throughout the entire video. He makes eye contact with the camera the whole video, creating the feeling that he is speaking directly to the viewer.

The second video features student Diego Pfeiffer, who takes a different approach at communicating the same message. Right as the 29 second video begins, Pfeiffer states loudly and confidently, "The big question on everyone's minds: what can I do to help? Here it is America" (March for Our Lives). He proceeds to list the same action items as Wind but in a very different way. Rather than taking a somber tone, Pfeiffer seems extremely energetic, almost taking on the tone of a news reporter. Utilizing his word choice, hand gestures, and his body language to convey energy, Pfeiffer's tone is eager. Each action item given to the audience is numbered by Pfeiffer as he turns around to look at the camera with his hand up and fingers being used to note the number corresponding with the action he is speaking about, while also clearly stating the number verbally. Furthermore, Pfeiffer's word choice includes loaded language that Wind's "to the point" message did not. Rather than simply urging individuals to RSVP and attend a march,

Pfeiffer passionately and loudly states "Vote those out of office who do not deserve to be representing us, the people" (March for Our Lives, Pfeiffer). Bringing energy with each word, Pfeiffer's populist approach rallies people rather than pulling at their emotions.

Student Jaclyn Corin speaks in the [third video](). Rather than stating the three action items mentioned by Wind and Pfeiffer, Corin begins with narrow eyes and a targeted tone stating a list of "what if" questions, beginning with "What if leading politicians valued your children's lives over dollars?" (March For Our Lives, Corin). After this is stated, the video continues in montage fashion, cutting between her questions and various clips of examples. After her first question, the video cuts to a clip of Republican senator, Marco Rubio stating "I will always agree with anyone who agrees with my agenda", with the words #WHATIF written over the video. She continues asking "what if questions", followed by black and white clips covered by the hashtag, creating clear viral comparisons. Corin asks, "what if 19 year old's didn't have access to weapons of war?" followed by a clip of a child shooting a gun, "what if before someone buys a gun an extensive background check and mental health screening is performed?", followed by a video of President Donald Trump stating that if he shot someone in a public area he would not lose votes; "what if all people of age register to vote and got rid of those taking money from the NRA?", cutting to a clip of a student calling on Marco Rubio about accepting NRA money; and, finally, Corin asks "what if the children of America become more powerful than our politicians?" followed by a video of students protesting (March For Our Lives, Corin). The video ends with the image of a flyer for the DC march. Her message was likely tailored to target individuals looking to assist in creating change as

well as individuals who are in opposition to her opinion, pointing out percieved flaws in logic through the jump cut comparisons.

Finally, the fourth video in the #WhatIf series features student David Hogg, who had become a known face for the movement through television interviews directly following the tragedy. He takes the same approach as Corin, posing questions edited together in montage style with example videos shown of issues relating to the question at hand. While his questions are similar in nature to Corin's, his first takes a bold stance through the use of profanity as Hogg asks, "what if politicians weren't the bitch of the NRA?" (March For Our Lives, Hogg). Similarly to Corin, throughout Hogg's video the jump cuts continually show republican politicians, situating the Never Again movement as primarily liberal in a two party system. Politicizing the movement in this way from the beginning, opens the students up for scrutiny as they are in direct opposition of other individuals.

As each video differs in style and purpose, there is a clear strategy occurring within the students. "Clicktivist" nature suggests that students participate in activism-based discourse performatively, or in hopes of appearing a certain way without any actual action, but, through these efforts, the students from Stoneman Douglas come online making statements against gun violence and politicians, while also showing their rivals that their communication is thought-out and tactful. Utilizing film strategies such as montage alongside this strategy, legitimacy in the student's efforts begins to be established, creating a strong foundation for the message to be built.

By providing viewers with these specific calls to action from the beginning of the YouTube channel's existence and with their exact stance and approach, the "March for

Our Lives" channel leaves little up to misconceptions. These videos act as a symbol of the foundation that had been created by students, a foundation that had successfully and while the movement's purpose, goals, and credibility are established from this beginning video, individuals in the comments section seem to be focused on their individual liberties at stake if the group's proposed legislation were to be passed. As the movement's goal to "protect the lives of the innocent youth" is clearly stated by Wind, commenters see the efforts as an attack on gun ownership in general. While the "gun legislation" they reference does not equate to the complete removal of gun ownership from society, out of the 10 total comments on this first video, 9 are negative or in opposition to the activists. One user who's comment garnered 14 likes of support from other individuals states, "I can't wait to see the liberal tears flow when the republicans win by a landslide. Nobody is about to give up the right to bear arms for a few whiny kids who like to bully kids to drive them to kill themselves or somebody else." Similar comments of varying degrees of negativity are found on each video posted by the group, categorized in the table below. While social media mobilizes the voices of those who choose to be activists for an issue, it also mobilizes those who are in opposition to the activist's goal.

Each video posted in this kickoff series received loaded comments in response to the student's messages. Categorization of 3 comments of negative nature across the four videos based off of their root subject matter can be seen below in Table 1 with the video number (1-4) noted next to the comment quote. Following this table are graphs in Image 2 to show the proportion of positive to negative comments on each video:

Table 1: March For Our Lives YouTube Comment Analysis

Political/ Gun Control Oriented	Age Based	General Disbelief
"Never again you will take guns away" (1)	"Learn2Act, pawn." (2)	"Great message, next we should march to free the aliens from Area 51!" (1)
"Good message, but now I have whiplash in addition to my uncurable liberalism" (2)	"You don't represent the people, kid." (2)	Where do we buy our tinfoil hats? I get mine from marchforNSA'slives.com they have the best" (1)
"What if you take away the free in a free country" (3)	"Go to your room, ur grounded" (3)	
"The AR 15 is in no way a weapon of war" (3)		
"How can you fight for freedom if you can't own guns?" (4)		
"Anyone know where you can buy those Nazi- style arm		

bands they were promoting? The Jews didn't have the NRA, so Reichkristalnacht happened. Dictators and fascists hate armed citizens, no politician will give up their armed guards, but law abiding citizens should?" (4)		
"David Hogg is Democratic Propaganda" (4)		

Table 2: March For Our Lives YouTube Comment Classification

Video 3

Positive 10.0%

Negative 90.0%

Video 4

16.7%

83.3%
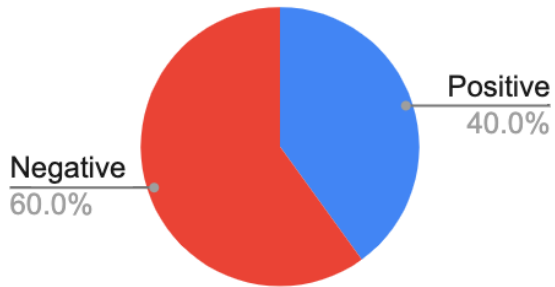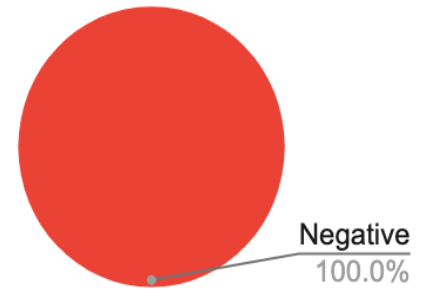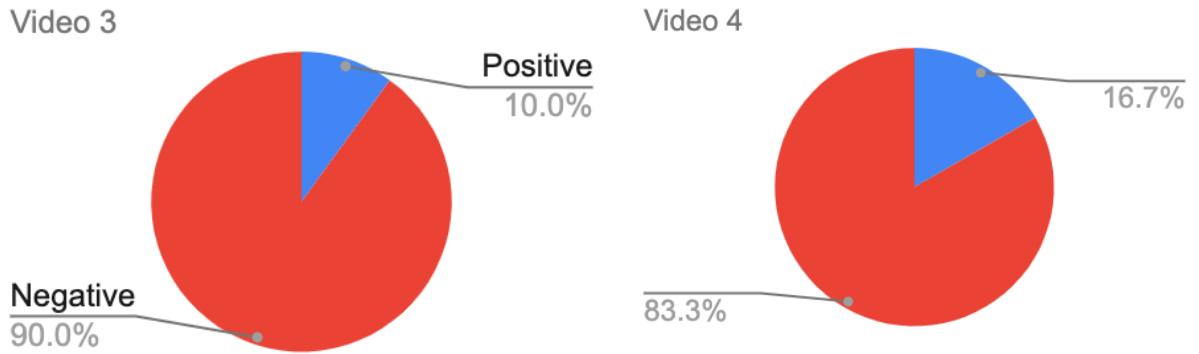
The videos, bringing about more negative attention than positive, did at the very least spread the word and create a foundation for individuals to educate themselves on the movement. It is possible that negative comments feed off of each other or that individuals with a negative response to content are more likely to comment, but with 2,000 to almost 5,000 views on each video the message was spread on a large scale and on this large of a scale scrutiny is expected. These are just 4 out of the 75 videos on the channel, but as the first message spread by this movement via YouTube, they stand out for the tone and action the activists were seeking to set, while also acting as a documentation of the opposition against the students right from the beginning. Those banding together take the student's message as an attack on their rights politically. Although the students never say they want to remove guns entirely, that is how the audience appears to perceive the message, making negative comments out of fear and disbelief of this policy change. Commenters who mention the student's age or their own personal disbelief in the message seem to not see credibility within the students or their motives. As some disbelief stems from the student's age, some may also come from just the general argument or direct political statements made by the students. Seeing the way that individuals who are led to comment view these student activists gives a glimpse into the obstacles faced when youth participate in political discourse in such a direct way.

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When studying the nature of negative comments, context collapse is an important concept to note. Context collapse refers to the "flattening out of multiple distinct audiences in one's social network" (Vitak). This causes the spread of information across entire networks sparking conversation amongst individuals who would be unlikely to interact without the circumstances (Vitak). With self-presentation in mind, users can decide which parts of their personas to reveal online at any given moment. In the case of negative comments and context collapse when viewing a video, if a user then is motivated to add a public comment seeing a slew of negative ones already, they are likely to interact and comment back with what is the norm within the section. It is unlikely that a video with thousands of views receives thousands of comments. The portion of the audience that does not interact is considered to be "invisible" and with that, gaining information to potentially participate in the future but not at the current time, on the present platform (Vitak). Social media's fundamental system has the potential to combine audiences of all types under the same content, welcoming various viewpoints. Due to the tendencies of algorithmic recommendation, platforms such as YouTube guide people from video to video, auto playing content the user might be interested in after the content they initially choose. Users seeking out information either in support or opposition to gun control, the NRA, or the students of Stoneman Douglas are guided to videos similar to the aforementioned, causing various opinions to meet when viewing the same topical content. Social media lacks "temporal, spatial, and social boundaries" containing a variety of people under the same metaphorical roof (Vitak).

Another series of videos posted on the channel were recordings of student's speeches at the March for Our Lives march in Washington, DC. Through these speeches,

students remember not only the tragedy but also the lives of their classmates and friends that were lost to the gun violence that took place on their campus. This event held on March 24th, 2018, in the nation's capital drew large crowds in support of the students and their overall mission. As this main event took place, hundreds of "sibling protests" were organized throughout the country in various other cities, showing unification and support nationally (Heim and Jamison) for the overall mission of MFOL even beyond the main, focal event. Through these events, the movement was further legitimized, and prominent figures showed their support, creating a backing for the movement. These videos were then able to be recirculated to larger audiences via social media platforms and link sharing, spreading the message with a broader scope of people by their existence on the internet forever.

The march in DC, although funded by celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey and George Clooney, among others, was led and spearheaded by the student activists. Putting their faces to the issue as the individuals living daily with the impacts of the shooting at their school, the speaker's each contributed to spreading the word of their movement's goals. Although this assembly took place in-person on this singular date, the recording and posting of the speeches that took place onto the March for Our Lives YouTube channel allow the events of this day to be replayed over and over again, reaching more and more people as time goes on and conversation ramps up pertaining to the event. Videos from this event have not only been posted by the movement's specific YouTube page but also by news outlets and other groups seeing importance in the overall message being shared by the students. The ability social media provides for the resharing of

messages allows for platforms to grow as they support one another and utilize their

individual following to promote messages from outside of their network specifically.

Social, economic, and technological systems have clearly acted to provide the

students of Stoneman Douglas with the environment in which their voices are heard

despite their age and its marginalizing qualities. While the effect of their voices alone has

been impactful, clearly receiving feedback of both support and opposition from audience

members and with "Where is Parkland, FL?" being a trending Google search in 2018

following the Stoneman Douglas Shooting (Google's Year in Search, 2018), the students

were not left to act and continue in their activism alone. As the student-led discourse

gained momentum, individuals of much broader influence were drawn to the topic,

providing yet another key layer to the sustainability of the movement. Exploring this

support and further commercialization of the movement will further explain the power of

social media in the mobilizing of these youth voices as well as the importance of steps

beyond social media in sustaining activism for years to come

CHAPTER 3: THE MARCH FOR OUR LIVES MOVEMENT AND

COMMERCIALIZATION

Pieces of media that have cultivated the discourse surrounding the events at

Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School have acted to create a narrative about what

occurred that day as well as the student's desire for sustainable change. While it has been

discussed that media footage, live stream recordings, and social media postings have

gained audience attention, this attention often is known to fizzle being what Parkland

student Cameron Kasky considers another "dog and pony show" that gains fast audience

attention and fades out of the public's eye quickly (Jones). News reports from the past

have entered the public eye for a short while, to then be replaced by the next happening

that shifts the eyes and attention of viewers. As media consumers in a constantly

changing world, individuals replace their curiosity for one piece of news by the next that

captures their specific attention. In 2018, a study conducted by Google Trends, Schema,

and Axios found that news events remained in the American consciousness for a median

length of seven days (Owen). Events that brought this median up were those with

sustained media coverage surrounding an ongoing trial in court or natural disaster

aftermath but instances such as the Capitol Gazette shooting were seen to peter out more

quickly as the novelty of the situation grabbed audience attention with little follow up

(Owen). The ability for students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School to hold

audience attention stems from their creation of the March for Our Lives (MFOL)

movement. This movement, the student's relationship with social media, and the large

entities involved in promoting the information all took on a role in propelling the movement into the eyes of larger audiences. While these forces are credited in the success of the movement, the student's privilege and microaggressions have contributed to the creation of their movement and narrative as well.

Understanding March for Our Lives

Following the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, it has been established that the school's youth were empowered by their life experiences and upbringings to advocate for change. These youth were familiar with previous shootings that had occurred in schools across the country and wanted to advocate for reform that kept students of all ages safe from this happening ever again. Choosing to utilize the fight response from the trauma they experienced in a way that advocated for increased public knowledge of the crisis with a mission for reforms surrounding gun laws, students formed the March for Our Lives (MFOL) movement which at the time was made up entirely of students. While the event was followed with many prompted, organic conversations, the MFOL movement worked to streamline conversations around clear goals and band together individuals in order to maintain momentum and continue the conversation beyond the fizzle of the news coverage. With an analysis of the MFOL website as well as further discourse that surrounds the movement from online users, an understanding of the movement as a whole can be gained.

The shooting occurred on February 14th, 2018, and just three days later, by the 17th, students had given speeches shown on national news, were visited by the president, and had begun demanding action and raising funds to utilize in order to achieve their

goals ("Florida student Emma Gonzalez to lawmakers and gun advocates: 'We call BS'")

(Liptak et al.) (Andone). Each of these components acted as building blocks in the

foundation for the movement's largest goal at the time, a national march on Washington,

D.C. Taking place quickly, this growth relied on key factors from various entities, both

planned and unplanned.

One of the first key players in the creation of the MFOL movement, alongside

social media, was the news. Following the event, news outlets around the country were

broadcasting coverage of the tragedy and aforementioned live stream video recordings,

giving the public a look into the events of that day from the lenses of those who recorded

it inside the school by responding to the content available from social media posts within

the event. These stories and emerging information of the shooter, Nikolas Cruz, became

increasingly available as detectives and officials studied the happenings further and

became aware of even the smallest details from that day. The public was shown the story

of how Cruz rode in an uber to the school to then kill students and teachers alike, trapping

individuals inside the school, to then leave and get a subway sandwich (Pearce et al.)

These details coming available through the news paint an eerily calm narrative from the

perspective of Cruz. Viewing these stories alongside the live stream footage and student

narratives, creates a stark comparison. Videos taken inside the school during the event

show students running down hallways, hiding under desks, and screaming as shots occur

within even the same room (Kitching et al.). As these details emerged, the conversation

began to focus on mental health and the mindset a student must be in to open fire on their

peers rather than on the topic of guns and the fact that Cruz was able to obtain an assault

rifle as a teenager (Khazan).

In the beginning, the narrative and storytelling were controlled almost entirely by the media utilizing the student's reactions and content from the event, creating their own story. As students and families from the school processed the fear and loss they experienced on this day, being constantly challenged to come to terms with the reality of the event, the news told their story. During this process, empowered students seemingly woke up to the reality of the narrative, and the fact that what they considered to be at fault for the situation was being brushed over completely: the concept of gun control. This then led to students banding together and attending an Anti-gun rally as speakers ("Florida student Emma Gonzalez to lawmakers and gun advocates: 'We call BS'"). How they accessed this rally and gained the platform to speak is not understood, but it would be interesting to hear if and how their affluence and community ties played a role in this public access. While large news sources and the president at the time, Donald Trump, discussed the need for a grieving period before any political change was discussed, in order to silence critics, students gave speeches to re-narrativize the discourse surrounding the events, appearing strong, united, and passionate rather than as victims. X Gonzalez, previously known as Emma Gonzalez, a student from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, showed this strength and identified themself as a key player within the activism early on. Their speech calling "BS" on the discourse surrounding the event utilized strong language, not typically associated with an affluent high school aged student speaking to a crowd. Their raw emotions were utilized throughout speeches humanizing the events and putting a face to the trauma the public had been hearing about and imagining.

A recording of Gonzalez's speech shared by CNN via YouTube documents the moment, with more than three million views. The speech begins with Gonzalez holding

up their notes stating, "I know this looks like a lot, but these are my AP gov notes". This moment alone reminds the audience of Gonzalez's age and situation within the tragedy. They begin speaking through tears, with anxiety as their breathing takes place in quick, short inhales. Their first line upon beginning the speech is "I know they haven't already had a moment of silence within the house of representatives, so I would like to have another one" ("Florida student Emma Gonzalez to lawmakers and gun advocates: 'We call BS'"). Followed by silence and Gonzalez closing their eyes, wiping away tears. An individual behind Gonzalez provides comfort by rubbing their back. The speech then continues following the moment of silence as Gonzalez speaks for the youth of Stoneman Douglas High school, stating that while the individuals should be grieving, they are instead standing at this rally against the NRA, knowing that someone has to do something. Their voice becomes increasingly passionate and confident as they speak. They speak about gun laws and restrictions and the ease of possessing a gun, looking down at their notes throughout the entire first half of the speech. Creating comparisons between the laws of other countries and the United States, Gonzalez speaks of the need for the United States government to get involved. As they speak, Gonzalez yells towards the end of statements and increases eye contact throughout their speech. The audience is heard clapping and cheering in the background in support, eventually beginning to chant "shame on you" to government officials gaining money from the NRA. This chanting makes Gonzalez uncomfortable at first as they itch their back and begin to move their arms and avoid eye contact but then brings them to tears. The speech ends with Gonzalez listing promises made by government officials and superiors defending gun laws, following each by yelling "We call BS", stating the falsity found within the words and

commitments of officials ("Florida student Emma Gonzalez to lawmakers and gun advocates: 'We call BS'").

Figure 6: X Gonzalez Speaking Out After the Shooting at Stoneman Douglas (Turkewitz, Julie, et al.)

Through this speech, and this anti-gun rally as a whole, the students showed their overall intentions and introduced their movement as well as their role as activists. First, the narrative was set showing the student's passion for gun control as well as their desire to participate in the conversation firsthand. Second, key youth activists were identified as students quickly engaged in conversations surrounding the movement. Students emerged that would later become familiar faces to the movement, giving the public and the news something to hold on to and a story to follow through the students' lives and efforts. Finally, speeches were given that called out officials in a very public way, demanding

recognition from the president and therefore seeking legitimacy and attention on a large scale.

At 3PM on the afternoon of the shooting in Parkland the White House sent out a statement reading, "The President has been made aware of the school shooting in Florida. We are monitoring the situation. Our thoughts and prayers are with those affected" (Miller). Following this announcement with no direct acknowledgement of the situation from the president at the time, Donald Trump, twitter users began showing their distaste for the apathy. Gonzalez stated directly in their speech at the anti-gun rally, "if all our government and President can do is send thoughts and prayers, then it's time for victims to be the change that we need to see. Since the time of the Founding Fathers and since they added the Second Amendment to the Constitution, our guns have developed at a rate that leaves me dizzy. The guns have changed but our laws have not". ("Florida student Emma Gonzalez to lawmakers and gun advocates: 'We call BS'"). Shifting the perspective in this way onto politicians and referencing the apathy of individuals in power, Gonzalez makes obvious to the public the students' concerns and focus while also demanding national attention to the issue. This attention was then received through a direct address and visit from Trump to Broward County, sustaining the focus put on this event as his action was prompted by the student's direct address of his prior inaction.

Each of these moments that occurred in wake of the shooting created an outpouring of public reactions with individuals reaching out to students, families, and teachers in Parkland wanting to show support for their mission of gun control. Through this and the raising of funds, within weeks of the shooting two main demonstrations were put on. Firstly, students across the country walked out of their schools on March 16th,

2018, for 17 minutes, to symbolize and honor the 17 individuals killed in Parkland just a month prior (Grinberg and Yan). While students from some schools walked out of class and read the names of each victim, others stood in silence reflecting on the events and the fact that this tragedy seemingly could have occurred anywhere. These events were not planned by the MFOL activists but rather by the Women's March youth branch, showing that allyship aided in the MFOL movement's initial deployment. Their demands surrounding the ban of assault weapons, the requirement of background checks of gun sales, and the gun violence restraining order demanding courts to disarm individuals who show potential for behaving violently all align with the desires later put forth by the MFOL campaign, granting this emerging group a firm foundation and audience to leverage for growth in the spread of their mission (Grinberg and Yan).

Building off this platform of attention, the MFOL's first event, a march on Washington, D.C., was promoted. With sister marches planned across the globe and the large event set to occur in Washington, more than 1.2 million people marched for gun control, making this the largest protest in gun violence history and one of the biggest single-day protests in D.C. 's history (Lopez). At this event X Gonzalez, who identified themself as a key figure at the previous anti-gun rally spoke once more, as well as other classmates and youth activists. Famous singers such as Ariana Grande and Demi Lovato performed, drawing further attention and making this an event on the radar of many (Kreps). The presence of celebrities, while attention-grabbing, gives a large platform to individuals who already have it, rather than taking an opportunity to highlight those who don't. These individuals brought attention to the event but also shifted the focus of the event from being a grassroots activist effort, such as the walkout that had previously

taken place, into more of a concert feeling like a commercialized affair (Radde). Kaitlyn

Radde, a student inspired by the activism who attended the march with classmates, found

the march to be unfulfilling as it showed a divergence from the primary establishment of

the activism. Time spent between performers was described as feeling "like a waste of

political capital and momentum and a distraction from the purpose and aims of March for

Our Lives, which in turn undermined further grassroots action" (Radde). The previous

raw passion seen within the activists, while remaining, had been commercialized,

something that did not solely occur at the march on D.C. itself.

Figure 7: The Stage at the March For Our Lives March on Washington D.C. (Leary, Alex)

This spectacle-based activism plays an interesting role in the March for Our Lives

movement and the March on Washington event as they gain an audience's attention, but

at a theoretical location that is not directly associated with the cause at hand. While youth

activism has been defined as performative through "clicktivism" and the youth of

Stoneman Douglas strive to break outside of this mold, holding valuable conversations to spark political change, the performative nature of spectacle within their march does not support their efforts (Kershaw). If grandeur creates spectacle in general, and the presence of celebrities furthers this notion, then performance seems to be the main theme within the March on Washington (Kershaw). As changes of stage set up are left silent, key influential students speak, and celebrities appear, while the message is being promoted to the general public, the organization of the March as an event, rather than a rally, seems to leave the audience engaged but not further educated or mobilized to continue action. The march acted as a symbol to government officials portraying a singular moment of unity, rather than a force that drove individuals to continue engaging.

The privilege granted to these students throughout their gestures should not be lost on the general public as identification of it aids in the understanding of this movement and its unique qualities. Students who have experienced violent settings and gun violence within their schools, typically existing within minority groups or poor communities, have been unable to achieve what the students of Parkland have. While they likely set the stage for Gonzalez and their peers, it is necessary to pinpoint the underlying rights that have granted students in Parkland a unique climate for activism. Raising 3.7 million dollars to host a march on Washington D.C. is not an easy feat for disadvantaged individuals, and furthermore the ability for this march to be kept peaceful without the use of police force is noteworthy as well (Andone). The student's ability to give speeches at all shows their upbringing and society's empowerment of their thoughts and ideas. While it does not delegitimize the Parkland students or their experiences, it is necessary to note that violence within schools is much more likely to occur within

predominantly black areas and that these areas are not receiving the attention, funding, or public support that the students of Parkland received in wake of the shooting at their school (Anderson). The trauma of police state has trickled down into corporal punishment within black schools creating an air of violence that is perpetuated by teachers and learned by black students (Anderson). Teaching activism and empowerment in environments such as these, to students with no real systemic support, is extremely different from empowering students from Parkland who have been raised with the real belief that their voices can enact change. While some have argued that those in privileged positions should take a stand and utilize their privilege for those who are not systemically granted it, this act can further marginalize individuals whose voices are already being silenced and perpetuate the divide by once more allowing privileged voices the platform to speak for the masses.

Advocates with MFOL have addressed this privilege three years after the shooting by claiming that within their organization there was observable gatekeeping that occurred from "students and adults alike [that] did not give Black Parkland students and other BIPOC activists from across the nation a fair opportunity to build an inclusive movement based on lived experience and solidarity" ("Open Letter from March for Our Lives"). Furthermore, the group claimed their inclusion efforts were done in a way that tokenized black voices rather than involving them without ulterior motives. In this recognition there is accountability but through years of tokenization and gatekeeping, marginalized voices have been further disenfranchised and promoted as lesser inadvertently through the popularization of the movement. While the MFOL group has intentionally promoted discussions surrounding furthering gun control, they have unintentionally also promoted

systemic racism. Within the letter, the group recognizes their responsibility to create more meaningful conversations and add depth to their movement, stating that they would be dedicating the beginning of 2021 to doing so. While the timing of this statement is too soon to see any change or clear surrounding conversation, future research regarding the response of the community and the MFOL group following this statement would allow for a glimpse into their perceived social responsibility as well as their actionable means of growing and moving forward.

Alongside the March on Washington, the students sought to continue their efforts through various participatory devices visible on their website. While the website hosts information about the movement as a whole and the individuals responsible for the current efforts there are also many attempts visible to get any passersby involved. The website opens on a location in which individuals can enter their contact information to "join the movement", available directly on the right hand side of the home page, other information hosted is also shown alongside links to donate, details about joining chapters around the country, and pledges to sign in order to show support. Information pertaining to the organization is readily available, but it is interesting to note the group's efforts in gaining individual's participation and vows of support. The website is set up to be very user friendly, organized with headings that read: volunteer, 2021 programs, info, merch, contact, and our impact. There are also links on the left-hand side of the home page, directing visitors to the March for Our Lives official Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Through the website's general collection of data and the means needed to contact individuals further about the movement, places MFOL in not only a position of power but in control of the spread of information pertaining to their movement to a large

audience. Chapters around the country control discourse within their territories, with each chapter falling under the broad MFOL scope, therefore acting as a continuation of this conversation within niches of communities. The MFOL movement webs out with tendrils that bring the information and purpose throughout the country with the center point perceivably being the students in charge.

Parkland students who have spoken at various events have become social media influencers, acting as activists for many different messages with gun control being their primary foundation. As each student took to social media in order to promote the MFOL message, they grew in popularity and gained traction with their audiences. Students such as X Gonzalez, Delaney Tarr, Cameron Kasky, David Hogg, and Jackie Corin, who are notably all white or white passing, are verified on Instagram placing them alongside the likes of the most famous and influential individuals within pop culture. A popular social media blog, ShipStation, notes that the verification feature is one that is granted to individuals and companies that are at risk for impersonation, as Instagram seeks to provide clarity to users who are looking to follow popular, influential individuals (Fisher). This verification is said to lead to an increased sense of trustworthiness from the individual, increased awareness of the individual, and greater access to new features of the platform. Achieving this status grants the students a larger platform to share their message from and further places them hierarchically above other students within a society and culture that is dictated by influence and voice.

The youth did not act alone either in creating and perpetuating their message. The MFOL movement, while organized around the concept of youth activism, was aided by adults ranging from a therapist, publicist, and event planner who were all running

logistics and aiding the students in their plans (Jones). With the face of the activism being students, the movement gained audience attention. But without the experience of these key adults, financial support from adults, and connections likely stemming from the Parkland community and beyond, the movement would not be what it has become at this point. David Hogg, who was a senior at the time of the shooting and later became identified as a MFOL spokesperson, spoke of the adults joining them in their travels saying, "Anyone over 20 works for us...they are our interns" (Jones). Obvious empowerment and passion within the students is inspiring but the arrogance visible within that statement speaks to the power these students felt as they advocated. Their existence as seemingly the top of the hierarchy is reliant on these individuals acting as the foundation, creating a false sense of superiority.

X Gonzalez's speech attests to this as well. With their time on the stage at the MFOL march in D.C, Gonzalez spent almost 6 minutes in silence. This speech begins as Gonzalez walks confidently up to the podium on the stage, with a large audience visible. After a few seconds of silence, collecting their thoughts, Gonzalez opens the speech stating matter-of-factly, with little emotion in their voice, "Six minutes and about twenty seconds. In a little over six minutes, 17 of our friends were taken from us, 15 were injured, and everyone, absolutely everyone, in the Douglas community was forever altered" (Guardianwires). They spoke of the feeling of misunderstanding that exists within those affected, detailing their trauma and the thoughts that immediately followed the tragedy. Explaining that bodies had laid lifeless in the school before students even knew their friends had been killed in the shooting, Gonzalez begins to state the names of students who passed in the tragedy, followed by things these individuals would never be

able to do again. The camera shows both Gonzalez's speech and clips of the audience as some stand crying, others film. Two young, school aged girls are even shown talking about something and laughing, seemingly not listening to or understanding the speech or direct relevance and threat of the topic at hand. Following this list of "nevers" begins a long silence. Gonzalez says nothing in this time, instead looking directly at the crowd. Their breathing is heavy, but it is visible that they are trying to slow themselves down at this moment, taking more conscientious breaths. The silence lasts around six minutes, aligning their time on stage with the length of the shooting, signifying how fast all of these lives were lost. While the audience is silent and seemingly confused at first, they begin to rally and understand, giving unified cheers throughout. Gonzalez holds a strong presence for the entirety of the silence, tearing up at moments when the crowd cheers. The silence ends with Gonzalez explaining all that the silence represented, creating a lasting impact on the audience both physically present and virtually able to access the video indefinitely.

The power this speech had was considerable as it has been called the "wordless act that moved a nation", at first confusing audience members and then representing to them the confusion and feelings of waiting that the students felt inside the school when it was attacked (Conti). Analysis of the speech points out the "myriad ableist and privileged uses of silence—and *silencing*—to subjugate, violate, and erase the disenfranchised throughout history" (Conti). While oppressed individuals have had to fight for a platform to use their voices, the silent nature of Gonzalez's speech, while powerful in its own right, points out the privilege felt to use the time in mutual silence rather than bringing up new points or looking to shift public opinion. Using this as activism, on a platform that

many disenfranchised individuals would not get the chance to speak on, attests to Gonzalez's empowerment and perception alongside their freedom of speech (Conti). Furthermore, "Leonardo da Vinci is said to have cautioned that "[n]othing strengthens authority as much as silence."" (Conti), and being called the movements "unofficial face" and representation it seems Gonzalez has harnessed that power and is utilizing it experimentally for effect on a large scale. These prime moments for raw, moving political discourse being replaced by silence is a luxury many marginalized groups cannot even access and attests to the privilege in the Parkland students. While the silence was moving, it was a risky choice with clear deep-rooted issues.

Commercialization of the Message

Picking up steam, students from Parkland and the MFOL movement gained attention from entities and news outlets. Popular talk shows such as *The View, The Late Late Show with James Corden, Jimmy Kimmel Live,* and *The Ellen Show* shared information regarding the events and the students involved. Each show put their own spin on the information at hand, showing the event through various lenses. Within *The View* a section called "Hot Topics" features the female hosts consistently addressing controversial topics in order to give their takes on various issues affecting modern-day society. Discussing these shootings, the panel of racially diverse but affluent women take a firm stance in support of the 2nd amendment discussing the importance of the NRA and the respect for individuals who responsibly own firearms. They touch on gun control and its potential for solving the issue while also mentioning the concept of mental health and student's safety within their homes that could lead them to behave violently in large

group settings ("How Do We Fix America's Gun Control Problem? | The View."). While the women seem to be seeking a solution for the topic at hand, their opposing viewpoints being discussed as if they are all in agreement with one another keeps from any solidified idea being promoted to the roughly 400,000 viewers that streamed the video on YouTube. While host Meghan McCain stands strong by the NRA, Whoopi Goldberg discusses her understanding for the NRA but the need for slight adjustments to policies. The women accurately symbolize the United States ideological divide on the topic of gun control and the second amendment but do not leave the audience with any lasting impression.

Comments by viewers range from stating ""Shall not be Infringed" END of Discussion." in reference to second amendment rights to "Do they realize how absurd these arguments are to European viewers? What is wrong about gun registration? Hunting with semi-automatic weapons - really?!! And those "rights" are more important than the innocent people that get killed again and again?" ("How Do We Fix America's Gun Control Problem? | The View."). Individuals stating their own take on the women's discourse only hold one similarity, a similar air of distaste for the show's host Meghan McCain as well as differing opinions surrounding gun control and its place within American society.

Differing from this, *The Late Late Show with James Corden* and *Jimmy Kimmel Live* both took clear stances in favor of gun control via their public recognition of the event. James Corden showed statistics that proved a correlation between heightened gun control policies and lessened lives lost to mass shootings. He then compared this data with America and the high amount of mass shootings seen historically relating directly to

the number of guns available in the country (Performance by James Corden). In a similar somber tone, Jimmy Kimmel has tears in his eyes as he discusses gun control, showing a speech by the president at the time, Donald Trump, agreeing with Trump's statements of horror surrounding the event but taking it a step further by pointing out that Trump has not made any concrete strides towards finding a solution at the time instead emptily offering his "thoughts and prayers" (Performance by Jimmy Kimmel). Kimmel ends the segment by showing pieced together news clips all stating following the shooting that it was "too soon to take political action". Kimmel responded simply stating, "no it's not" (Performance by Jimmy Kimmel). Comparing James Corden and Jimmy Kimmel with the women on *The View* shows a distinct difference in the message being spread to the public on very large-scale platforms as the public is met with various ideas from those who are to influence them. These conversations were sparked by the students of Stoneman Douglas High School but were given a platform by these larger entities. No matter what the opinion being shared was though, the discussion of this topic on each of these platforms showed its legitimacy and helped to earn it a place within discourse. As key, perceivably trustworthy individuals spoke about their thoughts on the topic, ideas were prompted in viewers.

Ellen DeGeneres took another completely different approach. Rather than speaking on the topic of gun violence and the Parkland shooting, DeGeneres waited until soon before the MFOL march on Washington and invited the students to share their thoughts on the matter for themselves, resulting in more than 3 million views between the two posted videos featuring X Gonzalez, Cameron Kasky, and Jaclyn Korin. The students' behaviors within the videos are interesting to note as well as DeGeneres'

interactions with them. From the opening of the video, each student is shown with their hands in their laps all dressed fairly conservatively with Gonzalez in a sweater and pants, Kasky in a button down and pants, and Korin in a dress. While Kasky and Korin's legs are sitting in front of them, Gonzalez has her legs and black shoes crossed up on the white couch they are all sharing. Kasky and Korin do not shift their body language throughout the interview at all, but Gonzalez is seen shifting between having their hands in their lap to propping their head up on their fist. Upon receiving a gift of $50,000 towards the march from DeGeneres and her partnering company Shutterfly, each student looks at one another in shock and Gonzalez begins to tear up. Each of the students hold hands in support of one another. While it can be argued that Gonzalez's behavior stems from the sheer knowledge and anxious feelings of being on live television, or from the emotions felt discussing the shooting, it is clear that they are not dulling their emotions or sense of individuality, standing out from Kasky and Korin in style, behavior, and overall presence. DeGeneres herself, allows the students to lead the conversation prompting them to share their beliefs surrounding gun violence and therefore negating the comments referenced by Kimmel claiming that it is "too soon to discuss it", instead leaving that decision in the hands of those who experienced the event. Each of the students seemed humble by their presence on the show and the gift received. Comparing the videos seen

previously of events within the school to the overall composure seen within the students

provides an eerie look into their processing of the event.
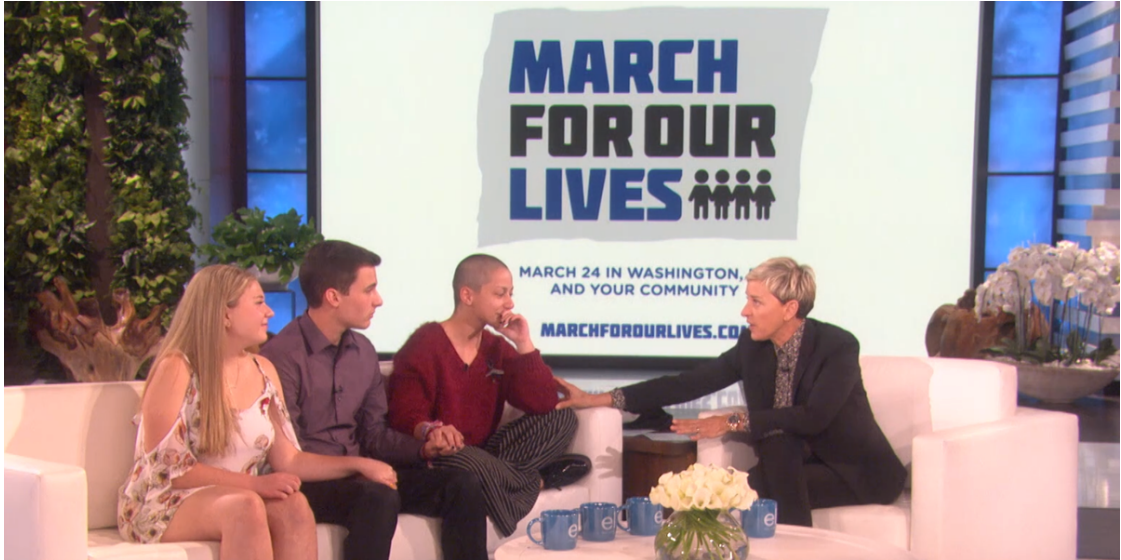
Figure 8: March For Our Lives Students on *The Ellen Show* (Feller, Madison)

The Role of Commercialization

The sharing of this message on television talk shows that were then made

accessible and easily searchable through clips featuring keywords via YouTube promoted

the message to a large number of viewers all over the world. Individuals with access to

the internet could then familiarize themselves with the content at their own leisure. The

recommendation services embedded within social media that act to connect information

and posts to users who would be potentially interested in it spread the videos even further

reaching potential supporters constantly. The ability for privileged talk show hosts with

large platforms to promote the activism of privileged youth with platforms sustains

hierarchies and marginalization in America and grants a perception of legitimacy based

on race and class as they control discourse that affects individuals beyond themselves.

Overcoming marginalization that occurs for youth desiring to partake in political action is

a feat in itself but the ability to do this in a way that does not perpetuate racism and classism is a quality that would provide further legitimacy and depth to the MFOL movement. The organization's recognition of the flaws is a strong step in growing towards this representation but does not solve the damage that has been done.

Appearances on television and the selling of merchandise are just two ways in which MFOL looked to commercialize their message. *From Protest to Product: Strategic Frame Brokerage in a Commercial Social Movement Organization* discusses the ways in which activist groups frame their message upon seeking commercialization. Commercialization can be a tempting means of spreading a message quickly but the way in which the organization and the large actors at play frame the message is both responsible for the movement's accessibility and narrative. As the individual activists form a narrative, so do the larger actors participating. These narratives then emerge and compete and "the collective action frames must reconcile how their activists are interpreted by the social movement and its activists on the one hand and industry actors on the other. Past research suggests that it may be difficult to gain favor from both groups simultaneously" (Lee, et al.). Through various emerging narratives, it has been found that a sense of community may be lost as activists seek continual validation from larger commercial entities rather than from the internal passion felt by activists feeling directed towards sharing their message and enacting social change.

In the MFOL movement, the sense of community within the Parkland community seems strong overall as individuals band together under the hashtag and key phrase #MSDStrong. Individuals utilizing this tool to show support for Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School have put signs portraying these words in their yards and have the

hashtag present on their social media pages. This community is seen on a meso-level but lacks presence on the micro and macro levels. Within the micro level, the MFOL movement, as previously mentioned, has touched on the fact that they have left out students from the Marjory Stoneman Douglas school community when participating in activism, instead commercializing a few key individuals in order to promote the message. As X Gonzalez, Cameron Kasky, and Jacqueline Korin become verified on Instagram and appear on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, other students from the school, especially BIPOC students, have been marginalized from the discourse, perpetuating disenfranchisement and the harmful narrative that their voices are less necessary within activism. Similarly, on the macro level, the sense of community has been seen to weaken within students from other schools looking to support the MFOL mission.

What began as a nationwide student walk out, with young people banding together around the country, quickly shifted to become key privileged students from Stoneman Douglas High School holding a commercialized march and touring the country to speak to others and promote their message with other students available as support but key identified students from Stoneman Douglas being the spokespeople for all (Chan). The localization of the message with these students is potentially helpful in continuing and streamlining a narrative but harmful in the growth and sense of community within an organization that was founded on grassroots activist techniques. As grassroots activism has foundations in collective action, the specificity found within the commercialization and those who are able to permeate the commercialized conversation have transformed MFOL into a movement that is very different than its origins once seemed. It is possible that while social media provided individuals the ability to participate in this movement,

the Parkland activist's reliance on these platforms as a mediator created obstacles when bringing the public in to the efforts physically.

The After Effects & Conclusion

A strong narrative, privilege, social media, and commercialization all came together to make for a moment in which this movement was able to gain serious momentum. Appearances on national television that were possible in part by the student's privilege paired with social media posts that promoted the discourse further worked to spread the information across the globe. While there are flaws that exist in activism that further marginalize disenfranchised people, the MFOL objectively has achieved many of their primary goals and has created new ones that coincide with the changing world. Looking at the concrete success of the MFOL group there are many wins evident. Firstly, the students were able to garner a place within political discourse. Although privilege played a role in this, their ability to harness social media and develop a global presence is noteworthy and can aid in drawing conclusions about the nature of social media in alignment with activism as well as the factors that are included within activism for youth. Furthermore, a sustained conversation was created. While the fizzle effect oftentimes occurs with news coverage, the "median length of seven days" (Owen) worth of news coverage of a current event was challenged as students held public attention for months with their public displays of continual activism.

The policy-based change that has occurred since the movement's beginning has been apparent as well. Within just six months of the shooting at least 50 new laws were passed across the United States (Vasilogambros). Bump stocks, a tool utilized in order to

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continuously fire shots from a semi-automatic gun, were banned in order to potentially keep harmful individuals from being able to fire off a mass number of shots in a short period of time ("What Is a Bump Stock and How Does It Work?"). While policy changes vary by state with no federal legislature made, the MFOL movement has aided in bringing change to the country. Mental health is being considered when an individual purchases a gun and an impact has been seen on the accessibility of firearms (Melendez). Students with MFOL have continued their "A Peace Plan for a Safer America" demanding further action until there are no more mass shootings within schools with the largest focus being on, not removing guns entirely, but establishing a national gun and ammunition licensing system ("A Peace Plan for a Safer America").

Seeing the strides MFOL has made in creating activism surrounding the topic of gun control, it is clear that their efforts have resonated with individuals around the globe through the support in events and policy-based changes made. Utilizing their privilege, at the cost of perpetuating systematic marginalization, the key youth from Stoneman Douglas have acted in a way that is meant to benefit a collective youth identity. While policies have shifted within various states, there seems to be no real change in the frequency of school shootings directly correlated to MFOL activism. The coronavirus pandemic that has removed most students from schools keeps traumatic events from taking place in these locations but upon returning to school, the MFOL students will have new obstacles to overcome in the advocacy as they recognize their microaggressions and are required to adapt to the changing world and hopefully a changed narrative surrounding the achievement of their goals. With that being said, their activism based communication via social media is likely far from finished.

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