

4-13-2018

Media Outlets and Black Lives Matter on Twitter

Madeleine Zimmerman

Cherish Joe

Carolyn Wetzel

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.hope.edu/curcp_17

Recommended Citation

Repository citation: Zimmerman, Madeleine; Joe, Cherish; and Wetzel, Carolyn, "Media Outlets and Black Lives Matter on Twitter" (2018). *17th Annual Celebration of Undergraduate Research and Creative Performance (2018)*. Paper 12.
https://digitalcommons.hope.edu/curcp_17/12
April 13, 2018. Copyright © 2018 Hope College, Holland, Michigan.

This Poster is brought to you for free and open access by the Celebration of Undergraduate Research and Creative Performance at Digital Commons @ Hope College. It has been accepted for inclusion in 17th Annual Celebration of Undergraduate Research and Creative Performance (2018) by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Hope College. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@hope.edu.

Cherish Joe, Maddie Zimmerman, Carolyn Wetzel
Mellon Scholars, Hope College

Abstract

The Black Lives Matter movement was started in 2013 in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin’s killer, George Zimmerman. The movement has gained a lot of momentum through social media outlets, such as Twitter, using the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. This project looks at the portrayal of the movement through the usage of the hashtag on Twitter, specifically from 2015 to 2017 by two major news source accounts, CNN and Fox News. We chose these two news sources in order to gain perspective from both sides of the political spectrum, as CNN is, from our perspective, more left-leaning, and Fox News is conservative. We chose a percentage of tweets from each account pertaining to Black Lives Matter and looked at retweets, likes, and responses for each tweet. Our group created operational definitions for the various themes that stood out in the original tweets and the responses by the news sources in order to gauge a general understanding of the representation of the Black Lives Matter movement by the public on Twitter. Based on the operational definitions that we assigned to the content of each tweet for both CNN and Fox News, this project aims to determine sentiment responses from these news sources pertaining to Black Lives Matter in order to critique the fact that the difference in the presentation of opinions affect viewer opinion and response.

Media Context Overview

Twitter: an online news and social networking service on which users post and interact with messages known as “tweets”.

CNN: an American news channel that sees it as their job to give facts first. We believe it is more left-leaning in its news production.

Fox News: an American news channel that sees their job as to deliver breaking news, give insightful analysis, and share must-see videos. We believe it is right-leaning in its news sharing.

Black Lives Matter: an international activist movement, originating in the African American community, that campaigns against violence and systematic racism towards black people.



Introduction

The Black Lives Matter movement was started in 2013 in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin’s killer, George Zimmerman. The movement has gained a lot of momentum through social media outlets, such as Twitter, using the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. This project looks at the portrayal of the movement through the usage of the hashtag on Twitter, specifically from 2015 to 2017 by two major news source accounts, CNN and Fox News. We chose these two news sources in order to gain perspective from both sides of the political spectrum, as CNN is, from our perspective, more moderate or left-leaning, and Fox News is more conservative. By running sentiment analysis on specific tweets from each account, this project aims to determine if and how the difference in the presentation of news affects viewer opinion and response.



Conclusions

We anticipated with this project that people’s responses to the tweeted material from CNN and Fox News would reflect the political leanings of the news outlets. In other words, we chose these two news outlets using our perspective on their sides of the political spectrum: CNN being more liberal and Fox being more conservative. We expected that the replies to CNN’s tweets would be more supportive of the Black Lives Matter movement and the replies to Fox News’ tweets would question and criticize the movement. However, the replies to CNN’s tweets were just as overwhelmingly critical of the Black Lives Matter movement as the replies to Fox’s tweets. Our attempt to understand why there are so many negative responses to tweets from both accounts could be potentially attributed to support being demonstrated through likes and retweets rather than replies to the tweets. We believe that people who disagree are more likely to comment their opinions rather than show their opposition through liking or retweeting.



Methodology

Because this project has evolved so much since its beginnings, we started out with some simple data collection on Twitter. Using the Advanced Search option on Twitter, we sorted out all tweets from 2015-2017 that mentioned the hashtag “Black Lives Matter” for both CNN and Fox News. With these tweets, each group member took a year and entered the date of the tweet, the article title that was linked in the tweet (if there was an article tweeted out), the content of tweet, the number of likes, responses, and retweets, the link in the tweet, and the link to the tweet in a spreadsheet for the two different news outlets. Our group chose to do sentiment analysis with case studies; that is, because of the large number of tweets and responses and the fact that we manually entered a lot of our data, it would have taken a very long time to run sentiment analysis on all responses for all tweets. So, we chose a topic from each year (2015-2017) that both CNN and Fox News tweeted and took the responses from those tweets. We ran the sentiment analysis through a Google Sheets add-on powered by AYLIEN Text Analysis API. The add-on determined whether each response was subjective or objective and the confidence with which it assigned that value in addition to the polarity (i.e. negative, neutral, or positive) and the confidence with which it assigned that value. However, after looking through the values from the sentiment analysis, we found that we did not agree with some of the values. Our group went through each response for our given year and assigned subjectivity and polarity values manually to give a comparative look at the sentiment analysis. Before doing so, we defined subjectivity as the quality of being based on or influenced by personal feelings, tastes, or opinions and assumptions, not facts. We also defined objectivity as the quality of being impartial or open-minded that would lead to a neutral polarity.

Date of Tweet	Content of Tweet	# of likes	# of retweets	# of responses	Subjectivity	Confidence	Polarity	Confidence	Subjectivity	Polarity
12/22/15	people have the right to protest the systematic murder of their fellow men & women! how peaceful would you feel if your family & friends were being murdered in cold blood? have some understanding man	0	0	1	subjective	0.9859643308	negative	0.5242383352	subjective	negative
12/22/15	brainless statement	1	0	0	subjective	0.9999999999	neutral	0.7400301306	subjective	negative
12/22/15	These are not protesters, just thugs...	0	0	0	objective	0.9996315824	neutral	0.729032116	subjective	negative
12/22/15	Everything blacks run from organizations to countries are corrupt and or disasters. Face the truth.	0	0	0	subjective	0.847843467	neutral	0.680292336	subjective	negative
12/22/15	No way! #AllLivesMatter	0	1	0	subjective	0.9996286311	negative	0.438703364	subjective	negative
12/22/15	I say Let @BlackLivesMatter protest at @CNN for a few weeks and see what they think then. #Dumbshits	2	2	0	subjective	1	neutral	0.7904995818	subjective	negative
12/22/15	uhhhhh why??	0	0	0	objective	0.9999999999	neutral	0.6042981798	subjective	negative
12/23/15	could not disagree more. Private property rights matter as well	0	0	0	subjective	0.9998865626	negative	0.5403489926	subjective	negative
12/23/15	Until the Black Lives Matter movement tackles black on black crime especially in Chicago, they	0	0	0	subjective	0.9998865626	negative	0.5403489926	subjective	negative