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

https://digitalcommons.hope.edu/curcp_17/12
Media Outlets and #BlackLivesMatter on Twitter

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.

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.

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 (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.

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.