USERS' SENSE OF EMPOWERMENT, COMMUNICATIVE BEHAVIOR, AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT ON INSTAGRAM: AN EXAMINATION OF THE #BLACKOUTTUESDAY CONVERSATIONS

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#BlackoutTuesday was a digital action devised by Brianna Agyemang and Jamila Thomas, two Black music executives, in the wake of George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis and the subsequent, unprecedently large Black Lives Matter protests. Agyemang and Thomas presented #BlackoutTuesday as a day for the music industry to reflect on their systematic exploitation of Black artists, however this hashtag went viral due to widespread participation by celebrities, influencers and corporate brands, and was commonly represented through posting a black square on Instagram.

Black Lives Matter has been the focus of a number of studies. For example, Mundt, Ross, and Burnett's (2018) study on #BlackLivesMatter illustrated that communicative features of social media are beneficial for building connections, mobilizing participants and resources, coalition building, and amplifying alternative narratives. Ince, Rojas, and Davis (2017) examined #BlackLivesMatter tweets and found that this hashtag was variously used to: a) express solidarity or approval of the movement, b) refer to police violence, c) mention movement tactics, d) mention Ferguson, and e) express counter-movement sentiments. We argue that the study of #BlackoutTuesday Instagram posts is a significant contribution to research on Black Lives Matter as 1) they reflect the commentary of a large community of allies who do not fit the main demographic groups of participants in BLM conversation previously identified by Freelon, McIlwain and Clark (2016), and 2) this conversation was centered around Instagram, rather than Twitter which is often considered the foundational platform of the movement.

This study has three main objectives: To test three new independent variables — race, gender, and source — in determining the demonstration of users' empowerment; to test race, gender, and source to determine users' communicative behavior on Instagram; and, to investigate the connection between source types and user engagement on Instagram.

Significance

The results of this study have significance for scholars interested in digital audience behavior, particularly users' sense of empowerment regarding social platform-centric collective action. Furthermore, this study provides empirical evidence for social movement scholars, political communication scholars, and public relations scholars on the impact of gender, race, and source types on online mobilization, as well as users' communicative behavior related to Instagram-based collective action.

Method

We conducted quantitative content analysis to address the research questions. Using CrowdTangle we collected ten thousand Instagram posts containing #BlackOutTuesday published on June 2, 2020. This study is based on 1250 posts randomly selected from the original sample.

To examine the influence of gender and race in relation to sense of empowerment and communicative behavior, we adapted studies by Mazid & Zaher (2020) and Smith et al. (2015) and developed a coding scheme for analysis. We employed a mix of deductive and inductive approaches to identify existing constructs used by previous research and explore unique practices that were not explored before. Two coders inductively analyzed 500 Instagram posts to develop 24 categories (listed in Table 2) that examined the users' sense of empowerment, communicative behavior, gender, race, message source types, message structure, and emotional tone (positive and negative). To establish intercoder reliability, two trained coders coded 10 percent of the sample. After the two rounds of coding, coders achieved the average reliability of 0.75 on all the variables, as assessed via Krippendorf's alpha.

Results

This study tested eight hypotheses. Using a series of Chi-Square tests, the results revealed that the users' gender, race, and source types were significantly associated with their sense of empowerment and communicative behavior regarding #BlackOutTuesday conversation on Instagram. This study also investigated the factors that influenced higher engagement. Employing a One-Way ANOVA, the results showed that source types, particularly celebrities and for-profit and media organizations, generated more *Likes.* We also found that negative emotions created more *Likes* and *Comments.* However, the results did not support the association of post structure with higher engagement (See Tables 1 and 2 for more detailed information).

Table 1. Information about hypotheses, variables, statistical tests, and results

Hypotheses/Research Questions	Independent Variables	Dependent Variables	Statistical Procedure	Results
H1	Gender	Users' sense of empowerment	Chi-Square	H1 Supported (*p*< .005)
H2	Race	Users' sense of empowerment	Chi-Square	H2 Supported (*p*< .005)
H3	Source Types	Users' sense of empowerment	Chi-Square	H3 Supported (*p*< .005)
H4	Gender	Communicative Behavior	Chi-Square	H4 Supported (*p*< .005)
H5	Race	Communicative Behavior	Chi-Square	H5 Supported (*p*< .005)
H6	Source Types	Communicative Behavior	Chi-Square	H6 Supported (*p*< .005)
H7	Source Types	Number of *Like* and *Comments*	One-way ANOVA	Celebrities and for-profit organizations generated more *Likes*.
H8	Emotional Tone	Number of *Like* and *Comments*	Multiple Regression	Negative emotions received more *Likes and Comments* (p<.005).

Table 2: Frequency of source, gender, race, sense of empowerment, communicative behavior, and post structure

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Source		
Celebrity	646	51.7
Black Entertainers	120	9.6
Government/Politician	3	.2
Profit Organization	345	27.6
Activist/Non-Profit	38	3.0
BLM Enthusiast	64	5.1
Other	34	2.7
Sense of Empowerment		
Enactive attainment	75	6.0
Vicarious Experience	240	19.2
Autonomy	799	63.9
Other	136	10.9
Communicative Behavior		
Solidarity	551	44.1
Self-promotion	72	5.8
Social Criticism	141	11.3
Offering a solution	45	3.6
Call to action	303	24.2
Educational	75	6.0
Inspirational	63	5.0
Post Structure		
text+album	143	11.4
text+image	1040	83.2
Infographics	25	2.0
text+video	42	3.4
Gender		
Female	486	38.9
Male	288	23.0
Non-Binary	7	.6
Organization	469	37.5
Race		
Self-identified as black	179	14.3
Other	1071	85.7

Conclusion

Preliminary findings reveal that source types and emotional valence, mostly negative emotional tone, are significantly associated with higher engagement (e.g., number of *Likes and Comments*) on Instagram. These preliminary findings will be interpreted in relation to platform (notably, the positivity bias generally associated with Instagram), the personalization of political expression encouraged by 'connective action' movements such as Black Lives Matter (Jackson et al., 2020; Bennett & Segerberg, 2013), and the relationship between #BlackoutTuesday – widely circulated by influencers and celebrities, and subject to controversy for its 'performative activism' – to the Black Lives Matter movement. Further, future studies need to look into the diffusion of social movement posts on Instagram to investigate the engagement. This topic relates to the conference theme by focusing on the ways in which users engage in racial justice discourse and movements through social media.

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