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From retweets to revolution: Evaluating planned behavior within hashtag activism and #BlackLivesMatter'

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From retweets to revolution: Evaluating planned behavior within hashtag activism and #BlackLivesMatter'

by

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The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this thesis. The Graduate College will ensure this thesis is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University

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DEDICATION

I respectfully dedicate this study to my great grandmother, Selchia Cain. She was only able to achieve a third-grade education. Together, our names will share this degree, and I can only hope that she is smiling, knowing that I was her wildest dream and that her legacy lives on in me.

I dedicate this study to the founders of Black Lives Matter, Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors. These dynamic Black women have created an activist movement that has empowered the Black community and drawn international attention to the systemic racism of Black people.

Our fights against injustices are sown throughout our very existence and our history as African Americans. However in the words of Steven Biko, a South African activist within the Black Consciousness Movement during the 1960s, "Merely by describing yourself as Black you have started on a road toward emancipation, you have committed yourself to fight against all forces that seek to use your Blackness as a stamp that marks you out as a subservient being."

As a Black community, we must continue to raise awareness about police brutality and the systematic racism that has be built against us, thereby stimulating those uncomfortable yet necessary conversations with those who both look like us and those who do not. Although we may have received civil rights, there are so many human rights that we are denied but owed. Our ancestors would want us to continue their work so that their sacrifices were not in vain.

This study challenged my own beliefs in activism and has inspired me to participate in activism outside of simply engaging in the movement through social media.

This study and other research help enhance the understanding of the Black experience within activism in the 21st century, and therefore joins many other studies as yet another reason why social medias influence on activism should be further explored.

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ABSTRACT

#BlackLivesMatter is a social activist movement that has developed in response to numerous killings of unarmed African Americans. The growth of this movement developed out of hashtags and social media post but has been sustained through the ground work of protest and traditional activism. Through a combination of the digital age and physical participation, activists have continued to make the issues that #BlackLivesMatter addresses relevant. The purpose of this study is to understand the attitudes and behaviors of Black social media social media users who engage with the movement and how they decide to do more than contribute content to stay trending but to understand what influences them to protest the racial injustices of the Black community. This researcher will explore the extent that followers are influenced by social media based on two theories: the theory of planned behavior and identity theory.

CHAPTER 1.   INTRODUCTION: ACTIVISM IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Hashtags. Society has created this product of the digital age as a social networking tool that people use to archive content, generate discussions, build community, and—now thanks to #BlackLivesMatter—take social justice issues from taboo to trending. Albright (2015) explained that the media termed this phenomenon "hashtag activism." For example, statistics have shown that "58% of Americans think that tweeting or posting information online is an effective form of advocacy" (Albright, 2015, p. 20).

Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi began #BlackLivesMatter in response to the killing of Trayvon Martin and the subsequent acquittal of George Zimmerman. Since that time, leaders have developed the movement by using social media to bring racial inequality into the public narrative. Leaders of the American Dialect Society selected #BlackLivesMatter as the 2014 Word of the Year, the first hashtag selected by the society in history. In 2016, in celebration of their 10-year anniversary, Twitter published a list of the most used hashtags related to social causes. According to Twitter, two of the top three were related to issues of race. #Ferguson was the most used social-issue hashtag in the platform's 10-year history, with #BlackLivesMatter being third (Anderson & Hitlin, 2016).

Although #BlackLivesMatter started online, activists have sustained the social movement's message and influence off-line, which media defined as "Not Your Momma's Movement;" some believed the movement was like the "Civil Rights Movement of the 21st Century" (Crowder, 2015, Stockman, 2015). People have used the hashtag to flag and foster discussion about social injustice within the Black community, particularly highlighting police brutality and the frequent killings of unarmed Black men.

People have used the hashtag to build solidarity through social networks and create mobilization in the form of multiple nationwide protests. Due to this movement, I questioned the beliefs and attitudes of social media users who used #BlackLivesMatter. I questioned the traits that led to their intent of actively transitioning from being virtually engaged to becoming physically invested in the movement by attending rallies and protest.

Most applied research on the theory of planned behavior (TPB) has occurred in advertising, public relations, and health behavior research. Only recently, with the increase in influence of social networks, researchers have begun to address the ideas of persuasive strategy within social networks and using these ideas to measure intent and behavior. However, there was little to no previous research on how organizers of social justice movements used social media users to mobilize movements online and used those same social networks to sustain movements off-line through sharing information and garnering participation for upcoming protests and rallies. Researchers have also neglected to study how social media users' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behaviors have influenced their emotions and perceptions to understand the transition from being hashtag activists to physically invested protesters.

Researchers have rarely combined TPB and external social influences. Thus, I explored the links between beliefs and behavior, along with people's motivations from social influences toward moving from retweets to attending rallies. By integrating TPB and social influence theory, I addressed the above gaps and suggested modifications to the existing theoretical model (i.e., TPB). I explored the relationship between social media users engaging in activism on social media networks and their intentions to participate in protests physically.

The results indicated valuable information for both academics and social activists interested in how social organizers could understand human behavior regarding activism in the 21st century. The results from this study also showed how the model of TPB fit or had limitations within the digital age of social networks.

CHAPTER 2.   WHY BLACK LIVES MATTER

The Movement

Three Black women organizers—Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi—began #BlackLivesMatter in 2013; they created a Black-centered political will and movement. They created the movement in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman. Today, activists attend more than 40 chapters worldwide. According to the website,

> #BlackLivesMatter developed throughout 2013 and 2014, we utilized it as a platform and organizing tool. Other groups, organizations, and individuals used it to amplify anti-Black racism across the country, in all the ways it showed up. Tamir Rice, Tanisha Anderson, Mya Hall, Walter Scott, Sandra Bland—these names are inherently important. The space that #BlackLivesMatter held and continues to hold helped propel the conversation around the state-sanctioned violence they experienced. (https://Blacklivesmatter.com/)

Millennials led the movement by relying on social media; young people also led the civil rights movement through their energy and enthusiasm. Several researchers have further explored the comparisons between the two movements. Characteristics have included inclusive versus exclusive messaging, leadership styles, media coverage, and issues concerning framing. Both movements similarly experienced criticism from both Black and White people alike. For example, Clayton (2018) observed the following:

> Not unlike the college students of the 1960s, African Americans and White people are criticizing the young activists of the Black Lives Matter Movement alike as also being too militant. Author and activist in the civil rights movement Barbara Reynolds wrote that she finds it hard to get behind Black Lives Matter. She drew a contrast

between the civil rights protesters in the 1960s and the Black Lives Matter protesters of today: . . . "at protests today, it is difficult to distinguish legitimate activists from the mob actors who burn and loot. The demonstrations are peppered with hate speech, profanity, and guys with sagging pants that show their underwear. Even if the Black Lives Matter activists are not the ones participating in the boorish language and dress, neither are they condemning it." (para. 4)

Theoretical Framework

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

Ajzen (1985) created the TPB to show whether an individual's behavior could be predicted by his or her intentions. Researchers developed the concept from the theory of reasoned action to improve the predictive power of the theory by including perceived behavioral control (see Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Researchers could use TPB to link beliefs and behaviors, thereby demonstrating that humans could guide their behavior and attitudes by subjective norms and perceived behavioral controls. Through these methods, people can shape their intentions to create the desired behaviors.

Ajzen (1991) defined subjective norm as "the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior" (p. 20) in question. Subjective norm is also measured as normative belief, which is the individual's beliefs about how other people, important to them, think they should or should not perform particular behaviors. In the case of this study, these "important people" could be followers or people within the social media users' networks that frequently engaged with the content that they posted. These posts could include people liking, sharing, or commenting on social media. People could develop perceived behavioral control using self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to the individual's perception of how easy or difficult it is to perform the behavior of interest.
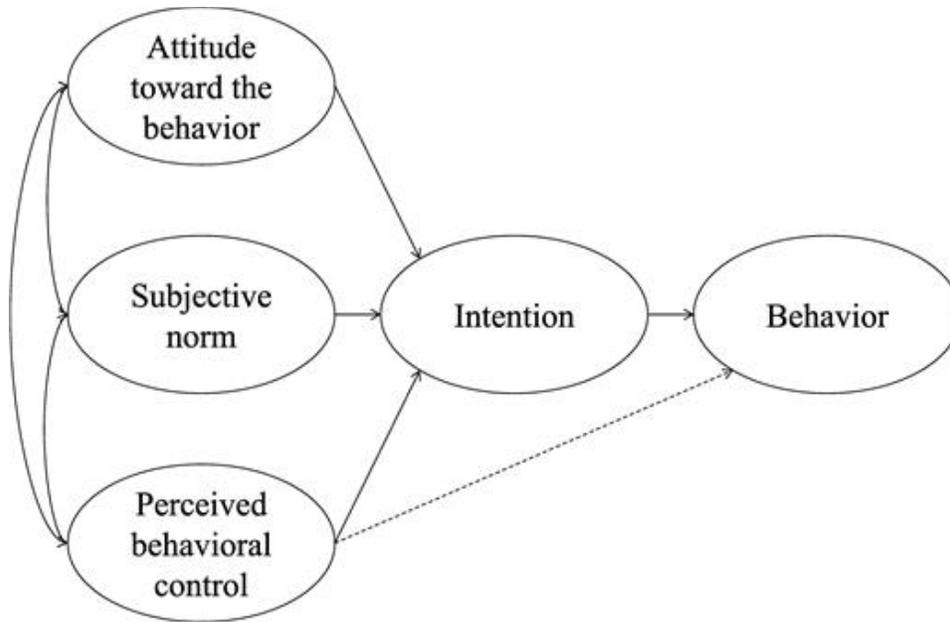
Figure 1. A diagram showing the theory of planned behavior and how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behaviors create intentions that lead to actions based on desired behaviors.

To date, researchers have successfully used TPB to understand and predict the effects of social networks on social media users behaviors, such as predicting selfie-posting behavior (Kim, Lee, Sung, & Choi, 2016), exploring social sharing of online videos (H. C. Yang & Wong, 2015), and understanding partner monitoring-behaviors (Darvell, Walsh, & White, 2011). Some researchers have also been used TPB as a framework for studying predictors of activism related to environmental issues (Fielding, McDonald, & Louis, 2008) and anti-nuclear activism (Fox-Cardamone, Hinkle, & Hogue, 2000). Therefore, I used the TPB to explore the influence of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral controls on determining the intent and behaviors of social media users who participated in hashtag activism using #BlackLivesMatter.

Although TPB was the foundational theory for the study, using the theory posed several limitations. Some limitations included that researchers based the theory on the

assumption that individuals could access opportunities and resources to be successful in preforming the desired behaviors, regardless of the intentions. In the case of this study, if individuals did intend to attend a #BlackLivesMatter protest but lived in rural Iowa where there was not any protest or rallies, they could not carry out those behaviors. Theorists also did not consider other variables that factored into behavioral intentions and motivations, such as fears, threats, moods, or past experiences. Many of those factors could be important variables to consider, especially when studying activism, such as the potential fear participants might have of being arrested during a protest, the threat of military force, or the past experience of a peaceful protest turning violent. Another limitation was that while theorists did consider normative influences, they did not consider environmental, economic, or identity factors that might influence a person's intention to perform a behavior. To strengthen the theory and specifically address the limitation within subjective norms, I added the social influence theory.

Researchers suggested that the conceptualization of the subjective norms construct was deficient, arguing that there might be other types of social influences that were more important in determining people's intentions (White, Hogg, & Terry, 2002). For behaviors based on social approval, such as social media sharing and activism, researchers posited that a measure of descriptive norms, where the perceptions of important others' own behavioral performance influenced an individual's actions, should be included within the TPB (see Rivis & Sheeran, 2003). Given that I focused on social media users who were intertwined with various social networks, social influences might be especially salient when individuals developed attitudes toward the intent to both participate in hashtag activism and physically attend protest or rallies.

Overall, activists of #BlackLivesMatter have acknowledged several centuries of slavery, civil rights, mass incarceration, and brutality. Leaders have created the movement to highlight the value of Black lives. Historically, this country has often ignored that value.

I studied this movement to understand how Black social media users engaged both on social media and physically. I combined #BlackLivesMatter with the theory of planned behavior and social identity theory to answer the research questions addressed within this thesis.

Social Influences

Social influence refers to the change in behavior that one person causes in another, intentionally or unintentionally, due to the way the changed people perceive themselves in relationship to the influencer, other people, and society. Social influence theorists provided a distinct connection to understanding an individual's social behavior regarding identity (e.g., Becker, Billings, Eveleth, & Gilbert, 1996; Kelman, 1958). Social influence theorists distinguished a variety of types and levels of social commitment: compliance, identification, and internalization.

Kelman (1958) created the theory to show how diverse commitment mechanisms could change people's attitudes toward target behaviors. For example, compliance occurs when an individual accepts influence because he or she hopes to achieve a positive reaction from another a person or group with a normative commitment. Commitment occurs when a social media user uses #BlackLivesMatter or performs the behavior of attending a rally to get a positive reaction from their social network or followers. Identification occurs when system users adopt behaviors to realize a satisfying and self-defining relationship with another person or group with an affective commitment. A social media user may choose to use the #BlackLivesMatter because they identify with who the movement serves, and they believe

they have a relationship with the Black community. Internalization occurs when system users adopt behaviors because of content, which they align with their own values based on intrinsic motivation. This process may include a social media user believing that the values and purposes of the #BlackLivesMatter movement are comparable to their own beliefs in social justice and racially equality, which then may contribute to an individual's intent to physically participate in a #BlackLivesMatter rally. These social influence factors change an individual's belief structure, causing an individual to respond to possible social status gained by participating in a certain type of behavior (Elie-Dit-Cosaque, Pallud, & Kalika, 2011; Malhotra & Galleta, 2005; Tsai & Bagozzi, 2014; Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, & Davis, 2003).

Social Identity Theory

I used social identity theory to fill in the gaps within the subjective norm component of TPB. The overarching goal of social identity theory is to explain group processes, inter-group relations, and the social self. The basic concept of social identity theory is that a person forms a unique personal identity as an individual and develops a social identity based on the groups to which he or she belongs (Tajfel, 1982). For example, social media users' content shared within their social network may be influenced by both their values and ideas of others with whom they identify with within their social network. This theory bridges the gap between the psychological perspective of individual values and behaviors and the sociological perspective of group behaviors.

Social identity theorists suggested that an individual's beliefs and attitudes were formed partly by the groups to which the individuals perceived themselves as belonging. In this study, the main groups identified included social media users, Black/African Americans, and young adults. The results of this study showed other identifying groups that were relevant to exploring how subjective norms contributed to establishing intent that led to

behavior within activism. Theorists explained that a person's group memberships defined a core part of "who" that person was—the individual's social identity—based on the defining characteristics of those affiliations (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). A person's membership in a group and emotional attachment to that group were cognitively represented in the individual's mind, thereby determining how the individual thought, felt, and behaved (Hogg & Terry, 2001; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1979).

In adding this theory, I expanded the connection of subjective norms to intent and behavior by examining the social identities of social media users. These identities were based on race, social networks, or belonging and connecting to the #BlackLivesMatter movement. These might contribute to their attitudes and beliefs of being physically invested in protests.

Research Questions

1. What are the beliefs and attitudes of social media users regarding the influence of social networks to participating in physical #BlackLivesMatter protests?

2. How do subjective norms—defined in this study as social media followers—influence social media users' intent of actively transitioning from being virtually engaged to becoming physically invested in the movement by attending rallies and protests?

CHAPTER 3.   METHODS

Within the last few years, researchers studied the #BlackLivesMatter movement within the academic arena from a variety of lenses. Some studied the movement from a historical perspective regarding the civil rights movement, while others studied it from a feminist narrative, discussing activism regarding women leadership causing change. With #BlackLivesMatter starting as a digital movement, there was not a shortage of researchers exploring the role of social media and how it not only started but also sustained the momentum of the movement. Few researchers examined the attitudes and behaviors of the participants within the movement outside of the headline making activist at the forefront of the hashtag.

I used a qualitative method to develop a deeper understanding of what motivates social media users who supported the movement to move from behind the keyboard to the front lines. I used qualitative methods to "develop concepts which enhance the understanding of social phenomena in the natural settings, giving due emphasis to the meaning, experiences, and views of all participants" (Pope & Mays, 1995, p. 43).

For that purpose, focus groups were the specific qualitative method used. Because this study was built on understanding the social norms, attitudes, and behaviors of social media users, the foundation was socialization, where people generated, shared, and expanded on ideas in an environment that engaged multiple people. Research has shown that focus groups are a useful method for collecting data to understand attitudes and behaviors. For example, Krueger (1997) stated the following:

The focus group interview works because it taps into human tendencies. Attitudes and perceptions relating to concepts, products, services or programs are developed in part

by interaction with other people. We are a product of our environment and are

influenced by people around us. (p. 20)

Selection of Participants

My target population group was participants who openly identified as Black and/or

African American, who openly identified as young adults aged 18 to 55, and who were social

media users who used or had seen people within their social networks or had personally used

#BlackLivesMatter. Each focus group had a mix of participants who attended a protest or

rally and of those who had not attended a #BlackLivesMatter protest or rally.

Participants were recruited from the Ames, Iowa area and the Des Moines, Iowa area.

The focus groups consisted of five to seven participants. Participants who were a part of the

Ames, Iowa focus group were primarily young academics and students, whereas the

participants within the Des Moines, Iowa area were a mix of professionals, academics, and

students.

Snowball Sampling

Linear snowball sampling was used to recruit participants for this study. Research

Methodology (2018) defined this form of snowball sampling as

> Formation of a sample group starts with only one subject and the subject provides
>
> only one referral. The referral is recruited into the sample group and he/she also
>
> provides only one new referral. This pattern is continued until the sample group is
>
> fully formed. (para. 5)

I used snowball sampling to recruit participants from among their social networks

who shared the identifying factors of the study listed above. I focused on using social media;

therefore, social media was used as a tool to enhance the results of the linear snowball

sampling technique. I created a digital flyer posted it on my social media and personally

messaged three individuals asking them to share my flyer to recruit participants for the study.

Figure 2. Example B digital flyer used to require participants.

This form of sampling was common in both sociology and statistics research (i.e.,

chain sampling). This form of sampling was a nonprobability technique, which was both

simple and cost efficient. For instance, Kirchherr and Charles (2018) stated, "Researchers

frequently cannot construct a sampling frame if a difficult-to-reach population is to be

studied. Difficult-to-reach-populations are also referred to as 'hard-to-reach-populations', 'hidden populations' or 'concealed populations' in the scholarly literature" (p. 20).

In this study, the population might be considered hidden. According to Data USA website (https://www.usadata.com), people who identified as Black only made up 2.9% of Ames, Iowa. In Des Moines, Iowa those who identified as Black only made up 10.7% of the population as of 2016.

I focused on how attitudes and behaviors were influenced by social interactions; therefore, snowball sampling was a strong method to use. Kirchherr and Charles (2018) stated, "Snowball sampling was originally used by researchers to study the structure of social networks" (p. 20). I used this method for the study to elevate the influence of using focus groups to help understand attitudes, intents, and behaviors within hashtag activism.

Sensitivity to the Black Experience

The subject of #BlackLivesMatter regarding social justice issues within the Black/African American community was considered a sensitive topic due to the amount of news coverage received and the polarizing views America had on the issues that the movement addressed. In response to #BlackLivesMatter efforts to address the injustices facing the Black community, the opposing hashtags were used on various social media platforms, such as #AllLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter (referring to lives of police officers). These caused controversy over the past few years.

Gathering research on sensitive topics through qualitative methods was primarily done through one-on-one interviews. As focus groups became more popular, these were used to address more sensitive topics, such as race, sex, and LGBTQ issues. Farquhar and Das (1999) stated, "Focus group research has shown that people may be more, rather than less, likely to self-disclose or share personal experiences in group rather than dyadic settings" (p.

47). Morgan and Krueger (1993) discussed "a certain thrill in the open discussion of taboo topics" (p. 19). However, the key to success in addressing sensitive issues within a focus group, such as race relations—the primary focus of this study—rested in the identity of the moderator. For example, Krueger (1997) stated, "The gender and ethnic identity of the researcher conducing the focus group can have an important impact on the success, particularly where 'sensitive topics' are being discussed" (p. 20).

Background of Primary Researcher

I never considered myself an activist; however, I grew up in a home where I was taught about the power of my Blackness, the history of its greatness, and the struggles and curses that came with my skin color. I never had issues with my identity as a Black woman. I have always proudly known myself. Although aware of the long history of Black injustices in America, I never felt called to protest. As proud as we were, I did not come from a family that used our voices in that way.

I was still an undergrad when #BlackLivesMatter began to gain momentum and started leveraging college students to support the movement. I did not inspire to do more than reshare a post of Facebook or post a compelling picture of the movement on Instagram. During the season of applying for jobs, I believed that even that was dangerous, considering the controversy concerning the movement and America's current racial divide. My fear only received negative feedback from my friends, who then challenged my Blackness and willingness to be "down for the cause."

I remember my high school friends' group text about caravanning to Ferguson, Missouri to protest the shooting of Michael Brown. We were from Kansas City, and this shooting was an injustice that happened too close to home. I personally wrestled with why I chose not to go. Did I make this choice for my safety? My reputation? Why was my retweet

not enough of a stand? Due to this personal battle between my pride and my protest, I wanted to explore the attitudes and influences of others.

Ethical Limitation

As both the researcher and moderator of the focus groups, I identify as a Black/African American female. This aspect posed the challenge of me remaining unbiased in the collection of my data. I had a committee review my focus group questions to ensure that I was not asking loaded questions or questions that would express my own attitudes or behaviors toward the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Furthermore, with participants' permissions, I recorded all the focus group sessions. Therefore, I further ensured the lack of bias and increased accuracy in my data collection and reporting.

Although I used checks and balances to minimize the challenge of me ethnically identifying with my participants, research indicated this aspect could be a positive component of my research. The debate of "insider" and "outsider" in qualitative research was not new. Ethnographers have long recognized the impact of the ethnic identities and nationalities of researchers on the behaviors of their subjects (Stanfield, 1994). Particularly, Black researchers have documented the ways a good racial and cultural match between ethnographer and subjects can create interesting intersections (Sudarkasa, 1986; Whitehead & Conaway, 1986). Therefore, I used open-ended questions to encourage respondents to speak freely about their feelings, attitudes, and behaviors regarding how their subjective norms were related to #BlackLivesMatter.

Data Collection and Analysis

I used semi-structured interviews. These required two categories of interview questions. The first set of questions posed to the focus groups was used to gauge their understandings of what they believed an activist to be and how they personally identified

with activism and the movement. I used questions to focus on participants' interpretations of what activism looked like and how they participated in different forms of activism.

I used the second category of questions to delve deeper into understanding what influenced participants to act. I also aimed to understand their attitudes toward #BlackLivesMatter. Additionally, I used these questions to explore their beliefs in how using social media influenced the movement.

With the permission of the participants, both focus groups were recorded, and I used the data for a transcript-based analysis. Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, and Zoran (2009) stated, "Transcript-based analysis represents the most rigorous and time-intensive mode of analyzing data. This mode includes the transcription of videotapes and/or audiotapes" (p. 20). Krueger (1997) stated transcription would commonly result in 50 to 70 pages of text per focus group meeting. Through this analysis, I categorized key points of the interview, as well as consistent ideas, beliefs, and attitudes that arose in both groups (see Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009).

Approval from the Iowa State University Institutional Review Board was granted. I received approval on March, 14, 2018. The IRB approval form is in Appendix A.

CHAPTER 4.   FINDINGS

The findings in this study could not be generalized to all Black social media users who engaged with the #BlackLivesMatter or who chose to participate in #BlackLivesMatter protests physically. Nevertheless, findings indicated insights into the attitudes of Black social media users regarding #BlackLivesMatter. One might use the findings to understand the intentions behind transitioning from participating in activism online to participating in the streets.

Using the theory of planned behavior, I focused on attitudes and subjective norms and their connection to intention and behavior as it relates to #BlackLivesMatter. This idea came from my own internal struggle with being "down for the cause" behind a screen and being called out by close friends for not showing interest in physically participating in the movement. I was curious to know what was holding me back.

I found it even more interesting to understand what took a movement from being born online to being sustained in person. I believed I could use TPB to help explore this mental transition best. I was hoping to not only unpack my own convictions but also to provide valuable information for both academics and social activists interested in how social organizers could understand human behaviors behind the supporters within their movement.

I examined the idea that Black social media users could be influenced to transition for hashtag activism to physical participation based on who they followed and who followed them, and this aspect could be proposed as an addition to TPB. I examined the idea that their attitudes toward the movement could also be strongly influenced by what they saw related to #BlackLivesMatter posts on their variety of social media platforms.

Within the TPB, Tajfel (1982) defined attitudes as "the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation of the behavior of interest. It entails a consideration of the outcomes of performing the behavior" (p. 20). Tajfel (1982) defined subjective norms as "the belief about whether most people approve or disapprove of the behavior. It relates to a person's beliefs about whether peers and people of importance to the person think he or she should engage in the behavior" (p. 20). Within this study, the definition of subjective norms was expanded to include not only peers but also family members and social media followers.

The results of the study were slightly unexpected. After conducting two small focus groups in different areas of Central Iowa, social media followers did not prove to have a great deal of influence on participants' intentions or behaviors in transitioning from hashtag activism to physical participation. However, several other findings came from this study that proved interesting and yet unexpected.

A Real Activist

The leading question for participants going into the study was the following: What is an activist? And do you consider yourself to be one? Because this study was built on activism, I began by understanding participants' beliefs and attitudes around not just that act but also the title. Those at *Merriam-Webster* defined an activist as " one who advocates or practices activism: a person who uses or supports strong actions (such as public protests) in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue" ("Activist," 2019, para. 1). By this simple definition, any one of my participants could have identified as an activist. However, in my intent to make the connection to social media, I included the definition of hashtag activism, which G. Yang (2016) defined as "one of the most interesting developments in digital activism in recent years is the rise of hashtag activism, meaning

discursive protest on social media united through a hashtagged word, phrase or sentence" (p. 20).

Most participants considered themselves activists but not for all the reasons listed above. The first participant within the DSM focus group completely disagreed that hashtag activism even existed. DSM P1 defined activism as the following:

> I think an activist is someone who is active in the community and someone who actively pushes against the oppressive problems. I don't personally consider Facebook activist, activist. Just because I don't think reposting or saying things online is activism but, I would consider myself a part time activist vs. a full-time activist. Because activism is tiring and time consuming and financially consuming, so I would say I'm a part time activist.

Early on within the study, I unpacked the deeper commitment level of an activist, and this was the first time that the phycological effects of activism was mentioned. However, later, I discussed the reoccurring them of "self-care" within activism with participants. Other themes that developed concerning the definition of an activist included the following: fighters, change agents, risk takers, and oppression. ISU P2 stated the following:

> Defiantly fighting for a change that is bigger than yourself but, I think also I view activist work as anything that is fighting on behalf of empowering marginalized people. You know in an oppressive system, because I don't think you can necessarily be an activist just because you might go to protest and stuff. For example, those that are Pro Trump, but I don't think that is an activist. I wouldn't consider that activism so, I think it has to be recognizing power dynamics. Fighting on behalf of those who don't have power. And I would consider myself and activist.

Within both focus groups, most participants believed that to be an activist, they had to fight for underrepresented groups or groups experiencing social injustices. Participants understood that social media now played a part in activism within the movement, but most participants did not believe that sharing or posting things about activism and #BlackLivesMatter Movement made them activists. Instead, they mentioned that type of participation was more of an advocate and not an activist.

The New Molotov Cocktail: Social Media

Social media made #BlackLivesMatter develop as a movement. Anderson, Toor, Rainie, and Smith (2018) analyzed public tweets and found that users used the hashtag BlackLivesMatter nearly 30 million times on Twitter. As of May 1, 2018, users averaged 17,002 tweets of the same hashtag per day. They found that certain groups of social media users—most notably, those who were Black or Hispanic—viewed these platforms as crucial tools for their own political engagements.

For example, researchers conducted a phone survey in 2018 (Anderson et al., 2018). They discovered that roughly half of Black social media users stated these platforms were at least somewhat personally important to them as a venue for expressing their political views or for getting involved with issues that were important to them (Anderson et al., 2018). Those shares fell to around a third among White social media users (Anderson et al., 2018).

Within both focus groups, participants highlighted the pros and cons of social media and its role within activism. For pros, DSM, P5 stated the following:

I think it gives people who would not always be immediately affected by situations a feeling a sense of connectedness. Social media also gives us that instant eye to situations that 10 years ago you had to wait on the news. Now half the time we get a

live feed. We don't have to question what happened. We can see it, and there isn't as much of a filter.

For pros, ISU, P4 shared, "I thought it would create a discussion. Like seeing the hashtag or whatever, it would create a space of having the discussion with a person, whether it's on social media or just casual in life."

For cons, ISU, P2 stated, "I think it allows people to really take a backseat when it comes to actually putting down the ground work to create movements. Because there's a lot of safety, and it is low risk activism." Moreover, many participants viewed resharing videos of Black unarmed men and women being killed by White police officers on social media a con. For example, ISU, P6 stated, "I choose not to share or even view those types of videos because I know that can be really triggering for me."

Anderson et al. (2018) also found that 64% of Americans believed that the statement "social media help give a voice to underrepresented groups" (p. 20) described these sites *very* or *somewhat well*. However, a larger share stated social networking sites distracted people from issues that were truly important (77% feel this way), and 71% agreed with the assertion that "social media makes people believe they're making a difference when they really aren't" (Anderson et al., 2018, p. 20). Blacks and Whites alike offer mixed assessments of the benefits and costs of activism on social media. However, larger majorities of Black Americans stated these sites promoted important issues or gave voice to underrepresented groups, while smaller shares of Blacks believed that political engagement on social media produced significant downsides in the form of a distracted public or "slacktivism" (Anderson et al., 2018).

In ways, social media provided people with instant access and involvement within the #BlackLivesMatter movement. The movement "broke" the Internet with a saturation of videos showing police brutality through social media circulations on news feeds, which created another issue. #BlackLivesMatter had not only exposed the racial injustices of Blacks but had also highlighted other topics in the Black community that one would otherwise bot discuss or support.

Attitudes: Cleaning House

Black and trans, Black and gay, and Black and choosing to date someone who is White are all taboo topics within the Black community. However, according to the About page on the #BlackLivesMatter website, "We affirm the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, undocumented folks, folks with records, women, and all Black lives along the gender spectrum. Our network centers those who have been marginalized within Black liberation movements" (https://blacklivesmatter.com/). The movement rallies support around the entire Black experience even the parts that the Black community struggles to embrace and discuss.

Overall, most participants had positive attitudes toward the #BlackLivesMatter movement. ISU, P2 posited, "I think has brought to light especially since the # turned into a political movement that I think has follow through over a couple years." However, participants discussed a level of inconsistency regarding the Black community supporting the entire movement. For example, Stephon Clark was mentioned. He was yet another unarmed Black man who was shot 20 times and killed by police officers in his grandmother's backyard. Although #BlackLivesMatter supporters protested after his death, there was a divide within the Black community. When Stephon was alive, he claimed not to be interested

in dating Black women; at the time of his death, he had a White girlfriend. DSM P4 stated the following:

> I think there is a divide still . . . when trans women were getting attacked or being killed it was like, Blacks ain't for that. So, when is it, when we are all going to say this and stick to, when are we going to include everyone in that? Instead of just picking and choosing. Like you said with Stephon Clark, it was like well he don't like Black women so I don't like him. However, this man died for no reason period at the end of the day. And I could care less who he liked, I didn't know him but, I know he didn't deserve to die like that.

Some participants believed that overall credibility within the movement could be lost due to the inconsistency of support within the Black community. The idea showed "cherry-picking" the part of the Black experience that Blacks deemed worth supporting through protests. DSM, P5 posited the following:

> Where do we put your fight or where do you put your voice? And not be criticized for not fighting for one side. You almost lose credibility. So, when I was looking at that feed about stuff on Clark, I was like, but if you were just posting BLM [referring to #BlackLivesMatter] for someone else that now makes the movement situational. So, depending on the situation, are we going to add that to the hashtag too?

DSM, P1 addressed the theme of the loss of credibility and believed that #BlackLivesMatter had almost become a "caricature for protesting." The participant believed that people could use the #BlackLivesMatter with anything they deemed as a protest, even if the protest had nothing to do with the movement. DSM, P1 stated, "As long as I'm protesting, I can say BLM. I can use that as a way to somehow legitimize my protest."

The movement was not only exposing racial injustices within the Black community but also forcing the community to take a hard look at issues it tried to cover up for years. This idea was best explained by a participant in Des Moines. DSM, P1 explained the attitude toward the movement:

> I don't think it has created division I think it has essentially has brought to light the division that was already there . . . However, with this movement we have to talk about the things we have tried to sweep under the rug because now we are standing in front of the world saying hey this is what we think, and this is what we believe. And the world is saying ok. Well then what about so and so and now we have to address it.

For the purpose of this study, I must note that these attitudes that participants had about the #BlackLivesMatter movement did not completely develop from what they saw on news or discussions with their peers. Instead, their attitudes about the movement were strongly driven by what they had seen of #BlackLivesMatter within multiple social media platforms that they used, mainly Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.

Overall, the participants attitudes did not lean toward extremely positive or negative, but the concept of "cleaning house" was a reoccurring attitude for most participants. They shared in the attitude that #BlackLivesMatter was a positive outlet for elevating the injustices facing the Black community; however, they also shared also the Black community and leaders of the movement needed to look deeper and work on fixing issues within to strengthen the support and purpose of the movement.

Despite their attitudes toward, the movement the next section focuses on why participants still made the choice to protest in person. Many of their intentions were driven from the subjective norm of family.

Subjective Norms: Family Matters

Within the TPB, Ajzen and Fishbein (1977) stated, "Together, beliefs, attitudes and subjective norms are linked to intentions and subsequent behaviors" (p. 20). With this study having a focus on social media influence within activism, I hypothesized that the strongest subjective norm that would drive the intention to go from hashtag activism to physical protest would be the beliefs or values of their followers or those who they followed. However, Foxall, Goldsmith, and Brown (1998) posited the following:

Any individual or collection of people whom the individual uses as a source of attitudes, beliefs, values, or behavior . . . and whose social perspectives are assumed by the individual as a frame of reference for his or her own actions. (p. 124)

In this study, findings indicated that family subjective norms and identities were the greatest influences. DSM, P3 recalled a first interaction with protesting:

My first protest was when I was 12 or 13. It was for wages for workers in the state of IL. Who were working for the state but had their wages cut because of budgeting and IL corruptness. However, I learned at a young age that you have to stand for what you believe in.

I could have easily stayed at home. And my mom told me I could come or stay. And so being out there with her, wearing that button and doing the chats. I realize that this might make a difference.

This reoccurring theme of family was presented in how it influenced participants' to participate physically in protests in both negative and positive ways. Some of their families had negative beliefs about them choosing to protest, specifically regarding #BlackLivesMatter because they feared for their safety as young Black people. ISU, P7's

mother had negative beliefs about the movement; thus, ISU P7's intent to attend a #BlackLivesMatter protest in Chicago changed:

> It was around the time of spring break, so I was at home and I told my mom I wanted to go. And she straight up said "hell naw" She just didn't want me going down there. And I ended up not going, it is hard for me to against what mom says even though I'm an adult still. And she was just adamantly against it and because of that I didn't go.

Participants also mentioned that their families' negative or positive beliefs varied at times depending on the locations where they would be protesting. Some of their family members believed that physically participating in #BlackLivesMatter protest was safer in states and cities with more diverse populations. It was a unanimous belief that Iowa, Iowa City, and Des Moines did not make that list. ISU, P3 stated, "If I'm at home I'm encouraged. However, when I'm here, I'm discouraged." Both focus groups showed that although a participant's intent might have been to participate in a #BlackLivesMatter protest physically, family influenced them before they could carry out the behavior.

Subjective Norms: When I Look at You

Another subjective norm that guided participant's attitudes and behaviors regarding #BlackLivesMatter was identity. This variable emerged as an additional determinant of behavior as identity (Chacón, Vecina, & Dávila, 2007; Terry, Hogg, & White, 1999). Social identity theorists believed that how a person came to this sense of self was significantly determined by the social groups to which he or she belonged (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). When I thought about social groups within this study, I considered that participants identified with the Black community, social media users, and followers as social groups. When an individual identified with being a member of a group, the group could be an influential force in how that

individual viewed his or herself, perceived his or her surroundings, and made decisions (Hogg & Terry, 2001).

During both focus groups, identity was a driving factor for participants' decisions to participate in #BlackLivesMatter protests physically. Participants identified specifically with Black people. Participants stated that the reason that they chose to participate in protests physically was to be supportive. For example, DSM, P2 stated he wanted to "show support to my Black people here and what we go through."

Some participants explained that their intentions to participate in #BlackLivesMatter protests physically developed from identifying with their people and the love that they had for them. They believed that to sit silently and not physically participate was not making that love clear and felt. DSM, P1 stated the following:

> So, for me as a person to say I love Black people, if I know that something is happening to Black people that is wrong, I have to go out there and do something. So, for me that was always my inspiration to tell myself that I had time so go show your love for your people.

Others believed that they added to the numbers protesting. For example, ISU, P7 shared, "You see that hundreds and even maybe thousands of Black people where [*sic*] in the march to the capital in Des Moines . . . so one reason I go is to contribute to the numbers of people to add to the magnitude."

Participants talked about how not only they were influenced by their identities to participate physically in the protest but also the planning process. For example, ISU, P2 recalled the following:

I felt it was important for my presence to be there as a person of color especially since, White people take up space in these places. And if we are trying to build a movement, they have to take a back seat.

Other factors were highlighted within this study to discover what caused social media users to transition from hashtag activism to protest physically. However, these findings highlighted what participants saw within their social networks regarding their identities and what inspired them to move from behind the keyboard to join others physically. They gave examples of planning meetings that they were invited to attend on Facebook or seeing pictures of people who looked like them gathering at the capital. Identity was a clear variable that shaped these social media users' intents.

Self-Care and Activism

This theme was by far the most interesting finding that came out of the study. When understanding the beliefs and attitudes of social media users regarding the influence of social networks to participating in physical #BlackLivesMatter protest, I was not expecting the concept of "self-care" to surface. ISU, P5 stated, "I had to stop watching them." ISU, P5 referred to the videos of unarmed Black people being murdered that saturated the timelines of several social media accounts.

In both focus groups, social media users mentioned how they believed that the constant sharing of violent killings of Black people by White police officers was toxic and damaging to them physiologically. There was a point within the #BlackLivesMatter movement that these videos were consistently surfacing on social media. Participants felt like every week there was new footage of a police officer killing someone Black and unarmed, and this new footage was trending on timelines. Participants mentioned that after a while,

they had to practice self-care by stopping the sharing or viewing of such videos. ISU, P6

stated the following:

> If you keep on seeing an image over, and over and over again. It is going to leave an
>
> imprint in your mind, and you are going to constantly think about that. I choose not to
>
> share or even view those types of videos, because I know that can be really triggering
>
> for me.

At first, ISU, P2 believed sharing was for educational purposes to spread the word

about police brutality that the Black community was enduring. However, after consistency

seeing the same videos being circulated, ISU, P2's beliefs changed:

> I think if anything it desensitizes people watching video after video that same video.
>
> We have shared enough videos over the past years to know this is happening, and I
>
> really do think at this point it is for White consumption and White pleasure to see
>
> Black bodies being brutalized to be violently murdered.

Originally, several participants shared the belief and agreed that when they first saw

and started sharing the videos on social media, they thought it was educational. They

believed that the videos helped #BlackLivesMatter gain momentum and increased visibility

of the movement. DSM, P5 stated the following:

> Initially, I think a lot of us were reposting. Whatever we saw and whatever incident
>
> that we saw. One of my friends was like, we have to make sure to protect ourselves
>
> rather than resharing this video of this video of someone getting beat or murdered.

Others claimed to not share the videos or to have stopped sharing altogether. They

stopped not just for the mental wellness of themselves but also for others and their beliefs

about respecting their families and not continuing the cycle of trauma triggered by social media. ISU, P1 shared the following:

> I don't usually watch or share them on my social media. One for my own selfcare, I really don't like the word self-care, but for my own care and mental wellness I don't watch them. And, also for the people and families that are affected by these shootings. I don't know anyone personally that has been murdered by the police. However, out of respect for their families and their dignity of them. Why would I circulate such a tragic death? And for a lot of people's view and pleasure.

In conclusion, these findings did not generalize to the attitudes and beliefs of all who identified as African Americans or Black social media users regarding the influence of social networks to participating in physical #BlackLivesMatter protest. However, these findings did highlight a variety of subjective norms that influenced social media users' intent of actively transitioning from being virtually engaged to becoming physically invested in the movement by attending rallies and protests. Social media followers were not the largest factor the influence of what their followers shared, and their decisions to share as social media users were shaped by different attitudes and beliefs toward the movement. In this study, the saturated data collected showed that those attitudes and beliefs were driven by family, identity, and self-care. These factors had the greatest influence on determining if the social media users in this study would transition from being hashtag activists to participating physically within the #BlackLivesMatter movement. These findings set the stage for other opportunities to expand this type of research.

CHAPTER 5.   DISCUSSION AND FURTHER EXPLORATION

Discussion

The original purpose of this study was to focus on the subjective norms within the theory of planned behavior and add to the theory by using this study to prove that social media should be included in how individuals created intention, which then led to the action of the individuals desired behavior. I would still argue that including the influence of social media should be added to the theory of planned behavior to update the theory within the digital age; however, I did not make a strong case for this argument in this study. Instead of feeling completely influenced to censor their content due to their followers, participants expressed other solutions. For example, ISU, P2 shared the following:

> I have two Facebooks. So, I mean within that, one is my professional Facebook where lately I've been posting more social justice stuff, but it is very academic social justice stuff so even when I connect with people at conferences and stuff like that, they might be working on the same initiatives. I tend not to post anything #BLM, and I've been really lowkey with anything on there and so on my other Facebook, it's mostly memes but honestly I'm friends with people that are sharing the same views as me as far as like social justice work, and so I'm more ready to share those links on there because I know I'm not going to have to fight with someone from High School about All lives matter, you know. It's now [*sic*] worth my emotional labor.

Other participants suggested that instead of censoring their content, they censor their followers, accepting or not accepting friends or follower requests based on their knowledge of the followers' beliefs or views and if they were controversial with their own.

There was a small influence by social media users' followers encouraging them to participate physically in the movement through Facebook invites to attend local protests; however, those played a small role in stimulating the overall behavioral intent. The attitudes that social media users had toward the #BlackLivesMatter movement were strongly influenced by what they had seen related to the hashtag on social media. However, social media had power when influencing society's attitudes.

Although the TPB did still seem to fit within the digital age, there remained some limitations to consider, specifically two that came up in this study. The first was that while the TPB did explore normative influences, it does consider how environmental factors might influence an individual's intention to perform a behavior. Within both the ISU and the Des Moines focus groups, work environment and home environment influenced participants' intentions to participate in a #BlackLivesMatter protest physically.

Several participants stated they would rather avoid discussing or participating in #BlackLivesMatter protest or posting things on social media due to their work environment. One participant discussed a concern of losing clients over a post about #BlackLivesMatter. Others discussed how they might have coworkers who followed them on social media who could see their #BlackLivesMatter posts, and then challenge their beliefs that next day around the water cooler. ISU P8 stated the following:

> I would say that I kind of censor mind [*sic*] due to my career. In my line of work, there are a lot of stipulations of what we can and cannot share. So, you can share them, but my coworkers most of them older and being in Iowa most of them are White, so they are kind of good for being very close to my parents age, so they won't say anything on Facebook, but when you come into the office, they will bring it up.

When considering home environment, the influences went deeper than just family. One participant from Des Moines was originally from the St. Louis area and experienced the effect that several of the #Ferguson protest had on his community. DSM P1 recalled a conversation with his mother about his intentions of attending a protest:

> And I remember talking to my mom before I went to my first protest and she said, "I already know what you are about to do, but, why?" I told her that because if it was Kayden, I would be doing the same thing. And Kayden is my little cousin, he was born that year. And for her that was legit. Kayden is a little Black boy and he has a little brother, I'm a Black man, I have a bunch of family full of Black boys and men. If it was them, I would do the same thing and they still have to grow up in this place. So, if I'm not our here trying to make it better for them. That is equal to me condoning it. And I can't sleep with myself if I condone that, I'm going to beat myself up about it.

The second limitation that appeared in this study was that the TPB did not consider other variables that factored into behavioral intention, such as fear, threat, mood, or experience. A few of the participants were mothers, and they expressed that the reason that they physically participated in protests, instead of just using the hashtag on social media to support the movement, was because of their Black sons. They were fearful that if they did not get involved in raising awareness, their sons could be on the news next. Some participants made the choice to protest physically because of past experiences where they had attended protests with their parents at youthful ages and that influenced their intentions to participate in #BlackLivesMatter physically.

I exposed some limitations to the theory, and some evidence was provided; however, I did not fully reach the goal of proposing modifications to the existing theoretical model (TPB) for exploring the relationship between social media users engaging in activism on social media networks and their intentions to participate in protests physically. Instead, the findings indicated that with activism, family was still the strongest subjective norm in creating the intention and desired behavior for physically participating within activism regarding the #BlackLivesMatter movement.

The findings showed factors within Black activism that I did not expect. For example, participants discussed the need for self-care as individuals continued to share and reshare videos of Black men and women experiencing police brutality or being killed because of this brutality. This saturation of news stories of Black lives being taken with a person hardly ever charged for the crimes caused some participants stress. The conversation and controversy included the argument of life and defending Black people. This oversaturation of shocking news was mentally exhausting for participants, as they explained how they had to fight and defend their existence and the existence of others who looked like them.

Within both focus groups, this issue came up. Activism was often thought of a sacrifice of self, a selfless act for a cause for the betterment of the community, or a personal investment to ensuring change. However, participants wanted it to be known that when it comes to this movement of #BlackLivesMatter, there was a psychological effect that the movement had on Black people that required that they practiced self-care. Repeatedly seeing such violence occur to their own people could cause mental damage to their identities. When discussing #BlackLivesMatter, one might find connections in the Black experience and history, which could manifest in Black people's intentions and behaviors of today.

Further Exploration

For those scholars interested in contributing to the field of knowledge of the Black experience regarding activism, I advise them to consider the importance of family influence. Even in the digital age, the largest influencer is not followers but family. When discussing #BlackLivesMatter, I noticed people's connection to activism was connected to the Black narrative of family and ancestral history.

Two findings that are equally interesting to expand on based off this research are the ideas of self-care in the struggle of activism. A person must learn where to draw the line in being "down for the cause" to avoid bringing a person down and influencing phycological health specifically within the Black community. There is already a great deal of research being done on social media and its phycological effects, so I argue that this type of study only contributes and adds diversity to that body of research. Exploring the effects of virally sharing traumatizing police brutality images and videos among the masses could be a study that contributes to the field of phycology.

The second idea for further exploration is for future researchers to study 21st century boycotting within the Black community. This topic came up within the Des Moines, Iowa focus group. I did not have the time within this thesis to dive deeper into understanding the structure of how the Black community preformed activism in this way. However, I believe it worth analyzing. I only answered a fraction of the questions about activism and the Black experience in the digital age. Therefore, a variety of questions remain to be answered.

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APPENDIX IRB APPROVAL

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board
Office for Responsible Research
Vice President for Research
2420 Lincoln Way, Suite 202
Ames, Iowa 50014
515 294-4566

Date: 3/14/2018

To: Selchia Cain   **CC:** Joel Geske
301 South 5th St Apt 383   209 Hamilton Hall
Ames, IA 50010   Tracy Lucht
                                   111 Hamilton Hall

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: From Re-Tweets to Revolution: Evaluating Planned Behavior Within Hashtag Activism & BlackLivesMatter

IRB ID: 18-149

Study Review Date: 3/13/2018

The project referenced above has been declared exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b) because it meets the following federal requirements for exemption:

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey or interview procedures with adults or observation of public behavior where
  - Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects cannot be identified directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; or
  - Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could not reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to their financial standing, employability, or reputation.

The determination of exemption means that:

- **You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.**

- **You must carry out the research as described in the IRB application.** Review by IRB staff is required prior to implementing modifications that may change the exempt status of the research. In general, review is required for any modifications to the research procedures (e.g., method of data collection, nature or scope of information to be collected, changes in confidentiality measures, etc.), modifications that result in the inclusion of participants from vulnerable populations, and/or any change that may increase the risk or discomfort to participants. Changes to key personnel must also be approved. The purpose of review is to determine if the project still meets the federal criteria for exemption.

  Non-exempt research is subject to many regulatory requirements that must be addressed prior to implementation of the study. Conducting non-exempt research without IRB review and approval may constitute non-compliance with federal regulations and/or academic misconduct according to ISU policy.

  Detailed information about requirements for submission of modifications can be found on the Exempt Study Modification Form. A Personnel Change Form may be submitted when the only modification involves changes in study staff. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an Application for Approval of Research Involving Humans Form will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review. **Only the IRB or designees may make the determination of exemption,** even if you conduct a study in the future that is exactly like this study.

Please be aware that **approval from other entities may also be needed.** For example, access to data from private records (e.g. student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. **An IRB determination of exemption in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.**

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Opening Question:

a. How many physical protests in general have you attended in the last two years? If
   any.

b. What is your definition of an activist? Do you believe you are one?

Introductory Questions:

a. How do you feel social media has changed the way people choose to participate in
   activism?

b. What were some of your first thoughts when you heard about or saw
   #BlackLivesMatter?

c. Describe to me how you believe your social network feels about issues facing the
   Black/African American community

d. In your own words what do you believe #BlackLivesMatter stands for?

Transitioning Questions:

a. How do you usually hear about #BlackLivesMatter issues or protest?

b. Why do you choose to use #BlackLivesMatter on things that you post?

c. What do you like best about being able to participate in hashtag activism?

Key Questions:

a. Why do you attend or not attend #BlackLivesMatter protest?

b. In what ways do you feel influenced by family, friends, or peers to participate in
   either using the hashtag or attending protest?

c. How does being Black help you identify with the issues of #BlackLivesMatter?

d. What are the positive and negative ideas associated with attending a protest vs. just using the hashtag?

e. How has the impact of social media influenced you to be involved with #BlackLivesMatter?

f. In what ways do you feel social media has allowed #BlackLivesMatter to grow both online and offline?

Ending Questions:

a. Have we missed anything?

b. What do you think the biggest factor is for determining if people will choose to attend a #BlackLivesMatter protest or rally?

c. What factors prevented you from physical protest participation?