ACHIEVING NECESSARY SOCIAL CHANGE: THE IMPORTANCE OF GREATER VISIBILITY FOR #BLACKONCAMPUS AND SIMILAR MOVEMENTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract: This study examines the marginalization of the Black identity at predominantly white college campuses through the analysis of Twitter messages related to the #BlackOnCampus movement that emerged in 2015. Using qualitative research and textual analysis, the study identifies two primary themes: the challenging of Black excellence and the misrepresentation of diversity. The identity negotiation theory is applied to analyze the correlation between the Twitter conversations and their impact on racial representation in society. In addition, the study explores the intersection of race and classism and how it affects social media usage. The findings reveal the harsh realities faced by Black students on predominantly white college campuses and emphasize the need for continued visibility of social justice movements to achieve necessary social change and improvements in society. This research contributes to a better understanding of how social media platforms can amplify the voices of marginalized communities and highlight issues of social injustice.

Keywords: #BlackOnCampus, marginalized identity, racial representation, social media, identity negotiation theory, diversity, classism.

Introduction

It is hard to believe that in our current times, individuals are still fighting to be heard, to be seen and to be treated as an equal. We live in a society where on paper it is stated that we all have equal rights, however, once released into the free world it is discovered that such legalities become jaded and somewhat non-existent. Because of this, social justice movements are more impactful than ever before and with current technologies, the world of digital social movements have taken our society by storm. These particular groups of people work to "challenge, resist, or make demands upon authorities, power holders and/or cultural beliefs and practices" (Goodwin & Jasper, 2012, p. 3). Social justice movements are unique in many ways and have aided in fighting for various justices that involve race, religion, sexuality, environmental causes, and animal rights (Carty, 2015). There is a great deal of research on such movements and how they have impacted society, however, there have been very few studies that look into the context of the messages that are sent through social media that charge these movements in today"s society. The messages and conversations that occur within the realms

of social media can reveal the many realities that exist in regards to how individuals not only see the world, but how members of society realistically see one another.

1. Background

On November 10, 2015 "the #BlackOnCampus hashtag was created by Mizzou's ConcernedStudent1950 organization, which has "represented every black student at the university since 1950, when the first black student was admitted" (Tan, 2015).The movement initially started in response to the blatant disregard for the Black student body of Mizzou and their main focus was to get the attention of Mizzou administrators. There was a continuous uprising of racial insensitivity and injustice that had remained unaddressed by staff and administration for many years. Over the course of a year, several racially charged incidents had occurred on campus. The most egregious incident involving someone turning the lawn of the Black Culture Center into a cotton field. The school was also struggling to control the backlash in response to a campus protest, that included mostly Black students, speaking out against the recent police involved shootings, and numerous other instances involving the use of racial slurs by their white counterparts (Chasmar, 2016). Members of the Black student body banned together in search of justice and finding valuable solutions to the issues that were continuously being wholeheartedly disregarded.

As news of the movement began to gain more momentum through Twitter and mainstream media, there was an immediate call for the resignation of then president, Tim Wolfe. Black students recounted troubling reports of reporting these incidents to Wolfe. One student, in particular, recalls that Wolfe simply "laughed in their faces" when they approached him and asked to speak out against hate, seek out and discipline those students involved in the wrong doing, and help reach reconciliation among students attending the University. (Chung, 2015). Within days of the movement, Wolfe was asked to step down. This was the first triumph for the movement and in turn sparked an influx of students at universities around the country using the hashtag to speak out against racial injustices that they have faced throughout the duration of their college career.

2. Problem Statement

Hundreds of social movements have been established through Twitter allowing a broader audience reach. In recent months, Black issues have become some of the most highlighted social movements and have sparked debate, support, and in some unfortunate instances opposition. There are numerous studies that focus on the purpose and progression of Black social movements, however, there has been little focus on the impact of the conversations that occur between users of Twitter during the course of the movement. The #BlackOnCampus movement uncovered the harsh realities that plagued thousands of Black students that attend some of the most prestigious colleges and universities across the county. Necessary social change and improvements to society are not realized as voices to movements like #BlackOnCampus are overshadowed or downplayed by others. Greater visibility is imperative for such movements as they seek to level the societal playing field and bring awareness to issues that continue to impair Black communities. With this in mind, this research seeks to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What was the impact of racialized messages on the #BlackOnCampus movement?

RQ2: What are the limitations that impeded the visibility and mobilization of the #BlackOnCampus movement on Twitter?

3. Theoretical Framework

Understanding how identity shapes opinions and beliefs is imperative to research involving social media. The identity negotiation theory (INT) will be used to support this study and used as a means to further understand the correlation between the conversations that are shared on Twitter and the impact these conversations have race and how specifically the Black race is portrayed in our society.

Identity negotiation theory was developed and extensively researched by Stella Ting-Toomey. The theory, which is rooted in intercultural communications, "emphasizes the process of communicating one"s own desired identities while reinforcing or resisting others identities" (Martin &Nakayma, 2013, p. 174). In other words, if an individual has a clear understanding of their own identity, they are more likely to have positive interactions and relationships with associates of other ethnic backgrounds. This, however, has the possibility of being challenged. In a publication edited by Gudykunst (2005) the theory "stressed the importance of validating both group membership identity salience and personal identity salience issues to develop quality relationships and not to the exclusion of emphasizing personal-based identity issues alone" (Ting-Toomey, 2015, p. 2). With regards to the theory, it is important to understand exactly what identity means and how such identities are negotiated. TingToomey defines identity "as an individual"s multifaceted identities of cultural, ethnic, religious, social class, gender, sexual orientation, professional, family/relational role, and personal image(s) based on self-reflection and other categorization social construction processes" (Ting-Toomey, 2015, p.2). Identities can fall into many categories that can range from prescribed characteristics such as ethnicity and social class to personal attributes. Negotiation "refers to the exchange of verbal and nonverbal messages between the two or more communicators in maintaining, threatening, or uplifting the various socio-cultural group based or unique personal-based identity images of the others" (Ting-Toomey, 2015, p.3). Identity negotiation theory can be viewed from two perspectives: interpretive or critical. The interpretive perspective is used when considering identity through messaging. Furthermore, identity formation through this perspective suggests that "identities are negotiated, co-created, reinforced and challenged" through the exchanging of messages (Martin et al., 2013, p.174). This perspective, speaks to the complexity and often difficulties that are faced when communication occurs. Martin et al. (2013) explains this further by using the concept of avowal, which explains how one identifies themselves and ascription, which explains how one perceives the identity of others. Differences that exist within these concepts are what researchers believe leads to individuals adopting opinions and generalizations that express biased views and opinions of other cultures. The critical perspective of the theory expands upon the interpretive perspective but also "emphasizes the contextual and often conflictual elements of identity development" (Martin et al., 2013, p.175).

Additionally, this perspective is ideal to use when dealing with situations that speak to injustice and oppression among various ethnic groups. Providing additional support and understanding of the perspective, Martin et al. (2013) reference the various levels of identity that exist within the critical perspective and include contextual identity formation, resisting ascribed identities and the dynamic nature of identities.

4.   Key Definitions

4.1   Race & Social Media

Studying the link between race and social media is not just focusing on how Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, and other races use social media. Instead, it is as equally important to understand how race is perceived and discussed on social media. Conversations about race are often seen as a heavy and in some cases even controversial. Such conversations can make one uncomfortable or erupt feelings of frustration and anger. A study conducted by Pew Research Center further explored social media use among Blacks and Whites and found that Black social media users approached issues of race head on. The study further found that:

Black social media users (68%) are roughly twice as likely as whites (35%) to say that at least some of the posts they see on social networking sites are about race or race relations. When it comes to their own postings, a similar racial gap exists. Among black social media users, 28% say most or some of what they post is about race or race relations; 8% of whites say the same. On the other hand, roughly two-thirds (67%) of whites who use social media say that none of things they post or share pertain to race (Pew Research Center, 2016).

Two-thirds of black social media users say that most or some of the posts they see on social media are about race

% of social media users who say that _____ of the posts they see on social networking sites are about race or race relations

■ Most ■ Some ■ Only a few ■ None

	Most	Some	Only a few	None
All social media users	9	34	41	14
Whites	6	29	48	16
Blacks	24	44	27	5

Ten most active days on Twitter discussing race from Jan. 1, 2015 to March 31, 2016

# of Twitter posts mentioning race

Rank	Date	Approximate # of tweets in millions	Events
1	6/18/15	4.3	Day following church shooting in Charleston, S.C.
2	4/28/15	3.4	Unrest in Baltimore following death of Freddie Gray
3	7/22/15	3.3	Details are released about the death of Sandra Bland while in police custody in Texas
4	7/29/15	3	Protests organized by #BlackLivesMatter movement in response to death of Sandra Bland
5	7/23/15	3	Day after details are released about the death of Sandra Bland
6	2/16/16	2.9	Day following 2016 Grammy Awards and Kendrick Lamar's provocative performance
7	11/11/15	2.9	Missouri University of Science and Technology student is arrested after racially charged threats were posted on social media
8	6/19/15	2.9	Two days following church shooting in Charleston
9	2/29/16	2.9	Day following 2016 Oscars amid controversy over the lack of minority nominees
10	6/29/15	2.9	Day following BET Awards

Information presented in this study along with the graphical representation in Figure 1, provides further justification as to why social justice movements that involve issues regarding Black communities are quick to gain momentum within a short amount of time on social media and in many instances make the transition to traditional media sources (i.e. television and newspapers)

Figure 1 : Black social media users post or see mostly race Related post on social media

Figure 2: Top race related content on social media in a 15 month period (Pew Research

In recent years, several situations involving race have occurred and have gained coverage in mainstream media. The popularity and accessibility of social media has often allowed these events to spill into the world of social media evoking conversation and much debate. Another focus of the Pew Research study and survey was on news events that involved race and occurred January 1, 2015 – March 31, 2016. The study, shown in Figure 2, identified that most popular hashtags that involved race and led to discussions on Twitter. The results also revealed the amount of tweets in millions that were associated with each news event. The report goes on to state:

This analysis determined that during those 15 months, there were a total of about 995 million tweets about race posted on Twitter. (A tweet was considered to be "about race" if it included an explicit reference to blacks, whites or the concept of race in general). That works out to an average of 66 million tweets per month and 2.1 million tweets per day. Indeed, no single day over that time had fewer than 1.5 million tweets mentioning racial issues (Pew Research Center, 2016).

Providing support to the information revealed by the Pew Research study, Danah Boyd (2011) takes a look at race and how it impacts the usage of social media platforms. She focuses her study in teenagers and conducts interviews on how they use Facebook and MySpace. At the time of her research, MySpace and Facebook were major competitors in the social media world however, it was very clear that each platform attracted a specific group of users. Boyd hoped that her research would reveal why this shift occurred.

Through her interviews, Boyd received candid yet hesitant responses as to how certain users viewed MySpace. She noted that one student uncomfortably expressed that "MySpace is ghetto" (2011). Through her study Boyd had discovered that the demographics of MySpace had changed and was mostly frequented by African-American users. She also notes the concept of "white flight," and uses this along with the information obtained from the interviews to make some conclusions about these particular users and their social media usage (Boyd, 2011). She describes the ascribing to a particular social media platform is similar to reverse gentrification that happens in neighborhoods. When the "aesthetics start to change," it is no longer deemed as a reasonable place to live. In the world of social media, there are similarities in how one decides what social media platform will be their main focus (Boyd, 2011).

5.2 Classism & Social Media

When a person or a group choose to react or behave under the terms of classism, they are doing so under various thoughts, attitudes, and practices that impose a system of inequality that often negatively affects those of different race, color, creed, or class. To further understand social media and its impact on social justice movements, it is important to include a discussion on classism. Classism is defined as "the systematic oppression of one group by another based on economic distinctions based on one"s position within the system of production and distribution" (Brantely, Frost, Pfeffer, Buccigrossi, & Robinson, 2003). Classism exists in many realms of society and is highly present in our everyday lives.

Class affects people not only on an economic level, but also on an emotional level. „Classist" attitudes have caused great pain by dividing subordinated group members from one another and suppressing individual means for personal fulfillment or survival. It is not unusual to find a level of collusion between subordinated group members and dominant group members as a means of survival by gaining access to some of the privilege retained by the dominant group. There is also a fair amount of internalized oppression experienced by some subordinated group members, i.e., a disdain or shame about traditional patterns of class in onesfamily and a denial of heritage (Brantley et al., 2003).

There is belief that our society tries to deny that there is a distinct divide in class, however it does exist and many "are often reminded that their communications styles and lifestyle choices are not the norm" (Martin, et al, 2013, p.200). Currently the debate of white privilege is the most relevant example of classism in America. White privilege is defined as "the level of societal advantage that comes with being seen as the norm in America, automatically conferred irrespective of wealth, gender or other factors" (Emba, 2016).The ideology of white privilege is a currently a very raw and sensitive topic in our society. Many believe that white privilege is real and is a harsh reality within our society. Furthermore, those that share this belief understand that much work needs to be done to break through this stigma and create an equal playing field for all, no matter their race, ethnicity, or creed. On the other side of this debate is also a group that grossly opposes the idea of white privilege and believe that this is simply a term that was created to further the gap between whites and other races. The conversation of white privilege has been addressed on social media several times over the last few years and there have been many insightful op-eds and journalistic contributions made to the idea of white privilege.
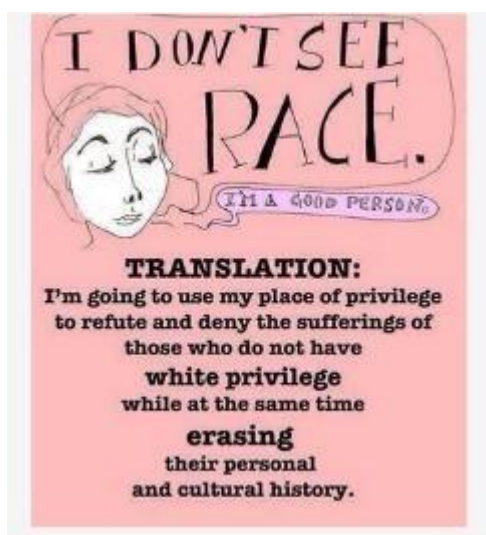
<u>Figure 3:</u> Illustration of #WhiteProverbs Twitter meme (Petray& Collin, 2017)

Petray and Collin (2017) look at a trending image that was passed around social media the involved racism and satire. The #WhiteProverbs was an image of a white face on a pink back ground and in black script was a dialogue that included a proposed statement of someone that was denying their white privilege. The image was popular by Australian Twitter users and sparked a much headed debate within the social media platform. Petry and Collin used the depiction of the image to "understand how these particular users confront their whiteness. (2017). While the use of satire and racism may have not seemed to be an appropriate mix to some, the researchers believed that this was a way to open the door for a discussion of racism and classism and how society views these issues.

Joy Wood (2016) shares her opinion of the portrayal of white privilege through social media platforms by referencing the conversations that were shared among users about the #BlackLivesMatter movement. The debate over the mistreatment of Black citizen by white police officers continues to be one that continuously ignites debate within the realms of social media and within other areas of society. She notes the many post that she saw displaying the good deeds of police officers engaged in community policing in predominantly Black communities. And while this is a good, Wood notes that these events should not overshadow the realities and the fact that the lives of young Black women were taken in vain and to date there has been no indictment in their cases. Woods continues on by blatantly pointing out that this in fact is a clear display of the white privilege that exist and it is the same white privilege that many don"t want to admit that they have.

This is what happens when the only news we're exposed to is events like this. We hear about horrific occurrences but encounter far more evidence of the "positives" to the point where we assume the negatives must be exaggerated or even instigated. And when the negatives are finally brought to light, we comb through them for justification that makes us feel better and rids us of guilt (Woods, 2016).

5.3 Twitter vs. Black Twitter

One of the most unique and impactful features of Twitter is the informal formation of "Black Twitter." It is not an independent social media platform, however it is best explained as a network within Twitter that allows a "linked group of connectors that share culture, language, and interest in specific issues and talking about specific topics with a black frame of reference" (Clark, 2012). It is important to note that individuals that choose to engage and interact through the confines of Black Twitter do not have to be Black. They are instead people of any race, color, or creed that want to raise awareness of the success, struggles, and injustices that occur within the Black communities around the country. Most recently, Black Twitter has been responsible for

birthing some of the most shattering and prolific social justice movements within the Black community. They include: #OscarsSoWhite, #BlackGirlMagic, #HandsUpDontShoot, #SayHerName, #and BlackLivesMatter. The conversations that take place on Black Twitter are more than often the same conversations that are had in black hair salons, barbershops, churches, and HBCU campuses (Guo, 2015). These are the conversations that outsiders rarely hear and involve the uncensored thoughts and emotions about issues that have challenged the Black community. Andre Brock explains how online communications dedicated to Black has worked to create awareness of black culture and black identity.

The Internet, as an avatar of public culture, has changed discourses on Black identity on Black-oriented websites in part because of the writers" awareness of the Web as a public space open to all. This visibility affects the presentation of racial identity in differing ways: some authors chose to employ arguments, metaphors, and attitudes toward mainstream society that are common to Black cultural experiences. Others moderated their discourse in recognition that outsiders would inevitably visit and interject their own perspectives on Black identity. The net affect of these discursive choices, however, works to increase understandings of racial identity as a constellation of knowledge, behavior, and beliefs for those site visitors interested in learning more about Blackness (Brock, 2009)

Black Twitter has allowed those that once felt alone in their plight of social activism, be joined by thousands supporting and fighting with them from all over the world through a virtual platform. In the same notion, the platform has also garnered its fair share of criticism. Some believe that while activism on Black Twitter has made strides in the community, it is also "clear that media giants still prefer to pontificate on it from a distance without investing in that influence directly" (Williams, 2015). The inability to make a feasible transition across media lines (i.e. Twitter to television) can limit the level of positive influence, notability, and overall awareness of the issues that are plaguing the Black community. It is as equally important to realize the significance of the hashtag and its relevance to Black Twitter. As previously defined, the hashtag is used as a link to label and link conversations. Users that choose to voice their concerns through Black Twitter run the risk of using hashtags that possibly distort the meaning of the movement and also a limited perspective (Bonnillia& Rosa, p.6).

This often happens if the hashtag is originated within the Black Twitter community and is transposed into the traditional Twitter community. The original tweets containing the hashtag direct other users to real life perspectives that include live media and pictures, however, a Twitter user may notice that the hashtag is popular and use it in association with their own tweet that contains loosely related information. Situations like this are what lead to the gradual disappearance of a hashtag and ultimately the marginalization of the movement.

5.   Research Method

The researcher will use qualitative methods to conduct research for the study. The „hashtag" #BlackonCampus digital social movement was searched on Twitter and the derived results were used to assist in understanding and uncovering the marginalization of the Black student attending a PWI. Additionally, the researcher will seek to further uncover the issues that challenge the identity of the Black student.

6.   Instrumentation

For this study, the researcher will use narrative method of textual analysis, which is the final method of rhetorical criticism described by Foss (2017). The narrative method involves the researcher using the stories that are created by an individual or group to create meaning out of the experiences that are being communicated. The researcher will analyze the messages shared on Twitter attached to the hashtag "BlackOnCampus" and will document the specific information that is being communicated through the tweets.

In addition, the researcher will identify the commonalities that exist among the sample that was pulled from Twitter. To keep track of the information that is derived from the study, the researcher will take a screenshot of the tweets that are being used and maintain them in an electronic file. The researcher will conduct a search of archived posts on Twitter in order to find the most relevant conversation to the study.

7. Sample and Sampling Methods

For the sample, the researcher used Twitter to pull tweets that were specific to the #BlackOnCampus digital social movement. For purposes of this research, it was imperative that the researcher utilized the „hashtag" along with the respective movements in order to avoid including irrelevant information in the study. Since most tweets are archived by the platform, the researcher was able to find some the first tweets that were shared by students. By using this specific group of tweets, the researcher is able to maintain the originality of the information and find the tweets that were most relevant to the movement at that time. It is also important to note that users have the ability to set privacy settings for their profile. If a user chooses to not have a public profile, their tweets to not appear in a general search. Due to this, it is highly likely so assume that not all tweets that include the hashtag „BlackOnCampus" are present in the search. However, the researcher believes that this does not affect the integrity of the sample.

8. Demographic Descriptions

For the study of #BlackOnCampus, Twitter was used to conduct an extensive search for tweets that specifically spoke to the movement. Twitter has a search feature that allows users to search for specific users and hashtags. Two searches were conducted, the first using #BlackOnCampus and another using #Mizzou. The #BlackOnCampus search generated thousands of tweets that dated back to November 11, 2015, the first day the movement was established. The search of #Mizzou generated just as many tweets, however many of them were irrelevant to the study causing the researcher to reject this group of tweets. To preserve the transparency of the study, the first 30 tweets were used and grouped together according to themes. The tweets that did not fit into any of the groups were categorized as miscellaneous.

Figure 4: First call to action from students of Mizzou (Twitter, 2015)

The original postings under #BlackOnCampus spoke solely of the frustrations of students that were attending Mizzou, however, a call to action from the creators of the hashtag urged Black students that also attended PWIs to share their experiences. This is what caused the movement to expand its reach on Twitter. Figure 4 shows the original call to action tweet sent by Mizzou students.

The users that engaged in conversation through Twitter identified themselves as current or former students of Mizzou or another PWI. It is important to note that it is not possible to fully validate such information via Twitter due to the user having full authority of the information they share on their page or voluntarily. Due to the sensitivity of the topic that is being discussed, the researcher is confident that majority of the conversations shared through Twitter along with the use of the associated hashtag are genuine and depict real life experience.

9.   Findings

Similar to the discussion of demographics, the discussion of what the sample generated will be modeled after the study that was conducted by Kulasiewicz. As previously mentioned, there were themes generated from the sample that speak to race and identity. Discussions surrounding these issues are imperative to the #BlackOnCampus movement and shed a much brighter light on the issues that existed at Mizzou and similar universities across the country. The terminology that was used to identify these themes was generated by the researcher based on the language that was used in the sample that was selected. Further explanation of the meaning is provided with each identified theme.

The first theme that is present is what the researcher describes as the consistent challenging of black excellence. Black excellence is a popular term used to describe some of the most powerful and positive attributes of Blacks. For years, Blacks were seen as inferior and as previously mentioned in the discussion of historical context, were for many years not afforded the ability to acquire an education. However, over time Blacks have made some of the greatest accomplishments in American history. The use of the term Black excellence not only pays homage to these accomplishments but it is also used as a means to motivate Blacks to strive for greatness and work hard for anything they wish to achieve. Analysis of the sampled tweets showed that "black" is strongly associated with "lack of knowledge." This in turn lead to question as to why Black students are attending the university or to strictly assume that they are taking classes that are not as challenging as their white counterparts.
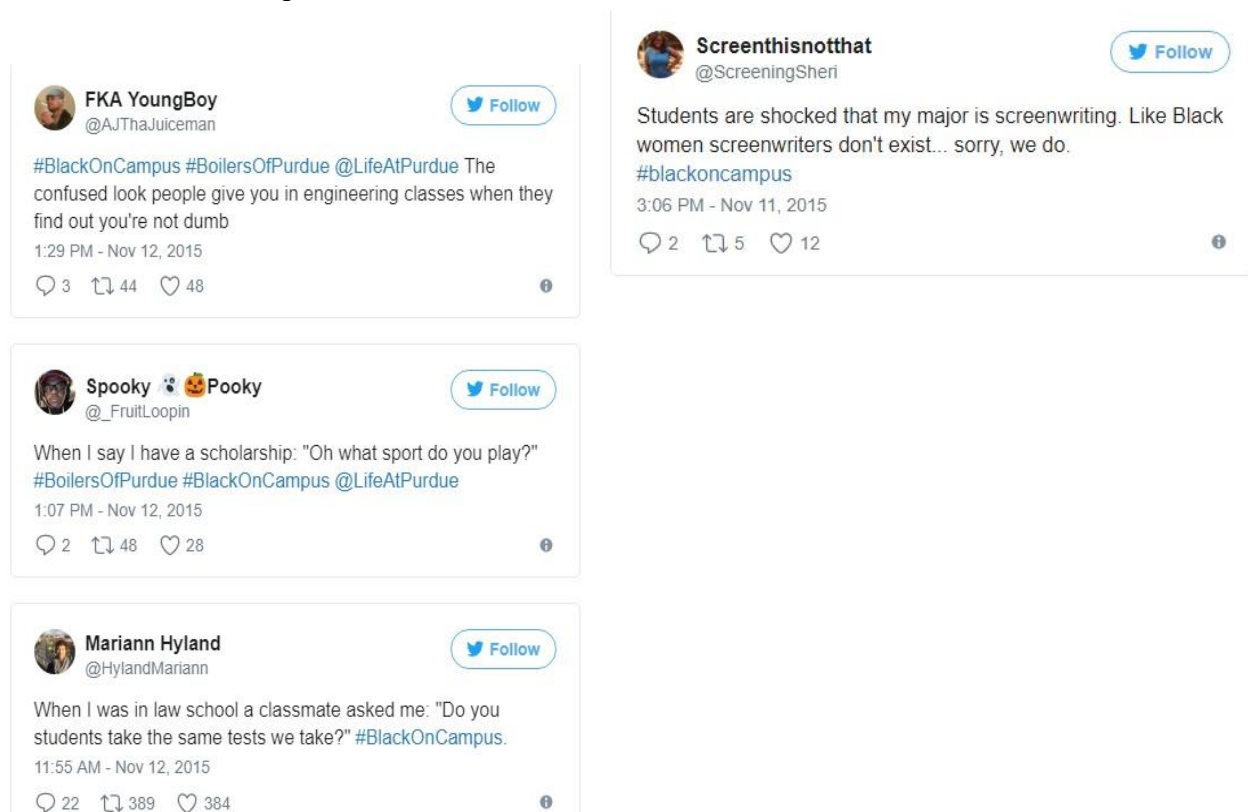
Figure 5: Tweets highlighting the challenge of Black excellence (Twitter, 2015)

Figures 5 and 6 show a series of tweets revealing the questions and conversations that were had within the confines of classrooms at PWIs. The tweets shared by these individuals show a snapshot of how they are constantly questioned about how they are evaluated in the classroom. The assumption that the only way an Black student can be at this particular school on scholarship is to play sports reveals a strong racial stereotype

that exist within the environment of the university. It can be assumed that past history would reveal that majority of Black students attending the university, did so under an athletic scholarship. This has led to the stigma that most if not all Black students attend college based on their athletic ability rather than their academic abilities.
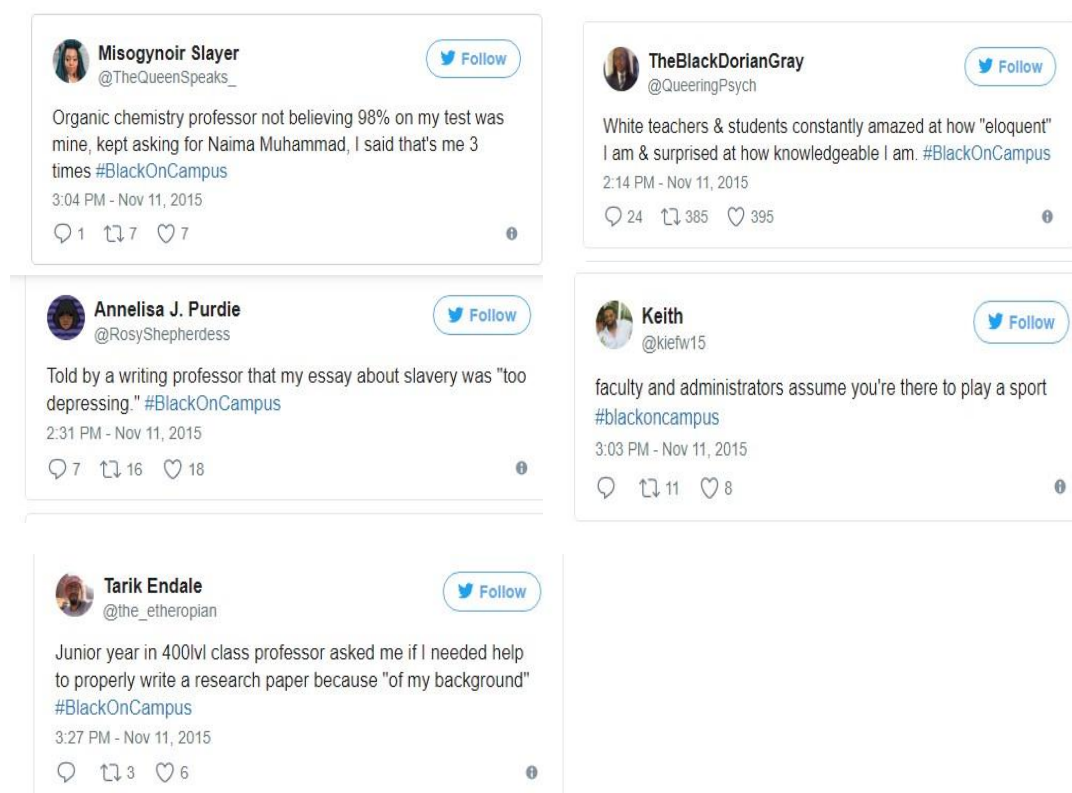

Figure 6 :Tweets highlighting the challenge of Black excellence – Continued. (Twitter, 2015)

The recollections of the student experiences further show that the racial stereotyping isn''t only experienced by their peers in fact, they are also facing worse criticism from professors. Through a series of tweets, it is revealed that professors assumed that Black students in their class could only be at a PWI to play football or basketball. Students also recall professors believing that their work is too challenging for Black students and will need additional assistance outside the classroom and in other instances publically questioning their mental capacity to obtain high scores test scores. Black students experiencing this level of criticism from professors evokes a strong feeling of frustration mainly because professors are seen as mentors and role models for students and are seen as the source of reconciliation if problems exist within the student body. If Black students are battling the same racial stereotypes from their professors as they are from white students, they have no place to seek solace and in turn are left feeling violated, confined, and helpless.

Figure 7: Tweets highlighting the lack of diversity on PWI campuses (Twitter, 2015) [See Appendix]

The second theme has to do with diversity and the miscommunication of how diversity is viewed at PWIs. In recent years, many PWI''s have increased their efforts to promote diversity and will make an effort to include students of diverse backgrounds on their marketing material. However, universities like Mizzou fail to implement additional programs to make such diversity programs a reality. A Black student attending Mizzou and other PWIs feel like the promotion of diversity is only done out of obligation and have little or no intentions to strengthen current diversity programs. Based on the information communicated by students through Twitter messages (shown in Figure 7) the administration at these institutions are doing an outstanding

job of promoting inclusiveness and diversity on paper, however, students are having a negative experience once they arrive on campus. Selecting a college is one of the biggest decisions one will make as a young adult. They are selecting and institutions of higher education that will nurture their talents and one that will help them build a solid foundation for a successful future. Aside from this, attending a university that has students of different races, cultures, and background further enriches that college experience and can allow for an easier adjustment for new students coming into the college or university. Having a PWI proclaim they were voted the best in diversity and inclusion and minority students experience the results of a lackluster effort is not only misleading but it is also contributing to the negative connotations that surround PWIs. Such institutions of higher learning need to realize that diversity goes beyond advertisements and instead require a strong plan of action and implementation.

Figure 8: Images illustrated by Black students depicting the lack of diversity on PWI campuses (Twitter, 2015) [See Appendix]

Students were also found to have a strong discussion about diversity as it relates to the classroom. Figure 8 shows a picture that depicts a very harsh but realistic reality that Black students are experiencing at PWIs: being the one of few if not the only Black student in class. Non-minority students and educators often do not understand the difficulties of this situation. As the only Black student (or any minority) in the classroom, there are times that can lead to being uncomfortable and challenged by others in the classroom. For instance, when a discussion about slavery is being discussed in a history class, non-minority students are more than likely going to address the only Black student in class. They may ask questions that to them may be valid but may offend or seem trivial to the student being asked these questions. In a sense, the Black student becomes the poster child.

Figure 9: [See Appendix]

Figure 9 depicts another side of the struggles of diversity in the classroom in regards to the representation of minority professors. Through their tweets, students question the lack of minority representation in the classroom at PWIs. Once again, these are the same institutions that, on paper, promote diversity and an environment that is inclusive of all beliefs and ideas. Having a diverse group of professors in the classroom not only enriches that learning environment, but it also allows students and professors to have a better opportunity to relate to one another.

Interpretations and Recommendations

RQ1: What was the impact of racialized messages on the #BlackOnCampus movement?

The researcher"s analysis of the sample brought to light many revelations about the state of race relations and higher education in our country. This study sought to provide a further understanding to the #BlackOnCampus movement by looking beyond the surface and uncovering the struggles that Black students and other minorities that attend some of this country"s most prestigious PWIs are being subjected to on an almost daily basis. The #BlackOnCampus movement was very impactful and the movement, which started out small, generated a following on Twitter and caught the interest of other forms of media, to include television, radio, and news periodicals. Twitter became a sounding board for the many voices that for decades had been silenced out of fear and threats of retaliation. The messages relayed through Twitter could no longer hide the reality that students were walking around campus, not just worried about how well they did on a test or organizing a meeting for a group project. They instead were worried about what hurdles they would have to overcome that day just for being a Black student on a predominantly white college campus.

The images and messages shared through social media were very influential for those students of Mizzou and for students attending other PWIs. Seeing these students stand up for social injustices that were continuously

occurring on their campus and overcoming the dominate voices that wished to silence them, sparked a level of activism that has not been seen in decades. Sharing these messages and images also allowed the general public to see that was going on behind closed doors at these institutions of higher education. In the instance of Mizzou, the administration was well aware of the racial tension that existed at the university; however they failed to address the issues that were brought to their attention. Once the students took their concerns to Twitter, it was on display for the world to see and at the mercy of the realms of social media.

 In a world where many are afraid to speak their truths and fight for the rights that are legally attributed to them, the hashtag #BlackOnCampus is powerful, uncensored, and unapologetic. The #BlackOnCampus movement remained strong for many weeks following its introduction to Twitter. As displayed through the thousands of tweets shared, students from across the country came together in solitude to put an end to unfair treatment and create a safe and non-combative learning environment for all students on all college and university campuses.

RQ2: What are the limitations that impeded the visibility and mobilization of the #BlackOnCampus movement on Twitter?

The movement proved to be promising, however like many other movements, it soon faded into the confines of social media. While the realities of being a Black student on a predominantly white college campus were revealed to the world, there was little action taken outside of social media to promote organizational and institutional changes. For weeks, Mizzou followed up with the public relations standards of separating from various members of the administration and promising to be more inclusive of their minority student body, however, once the media found interest in other stories, there was very little follow up. While social media is an innovative and progressive tool, social activist of our current times must realize that social media is only the first step to achieving success.

10.   Limitations to Study

This study sought to look closer into the #BlackOnCampus movement and over the messages shared through Twitter revealing the marginalization of Black identity. Our society is well into the post-Civil rights era; however, the conversations shared by students painted a very different picture. The ability to have been able to dig deeper into the motivation behind the movement by conducting interviews with the students behind the tweets used for this study may have provided an even broader perspective of the researchers findings.

11.   Recommendations

Social media is a useful tool that can provide us insight into situations that are happening all around the world. It is the job of our society to look beyond social media as being a form of information and to use it as a stronger form of activism..

It has been two years since the first tweets of #BlackOnCampus and unfortunately racial injustice at PWIs is on the rise. The intentions of the researcher were to shed light on the issues that continue to plague Black students and other students of color at PWIs. For researchers that wish to expand upon this research, it will be imperative to seek further understating to how PWIs like Mizzou use social media platforms today to combat such issues and look closer at the communications and business practices that have been put in place so that students of color have a safe space to speak out against social injustices.

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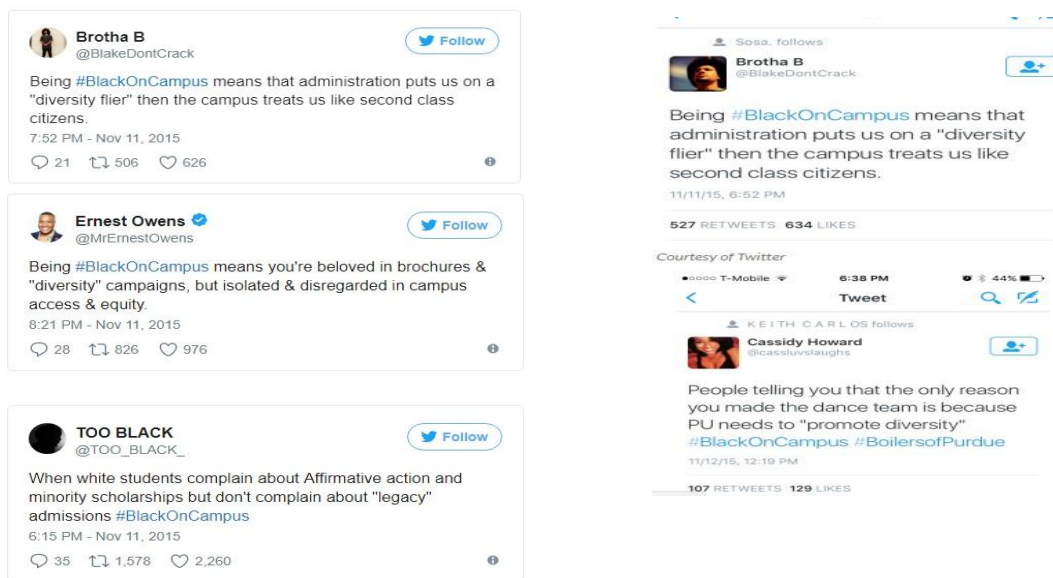
Figure 7: Tweets highlighting the lack of diversity on PWI campuses (Twitter, 2015)
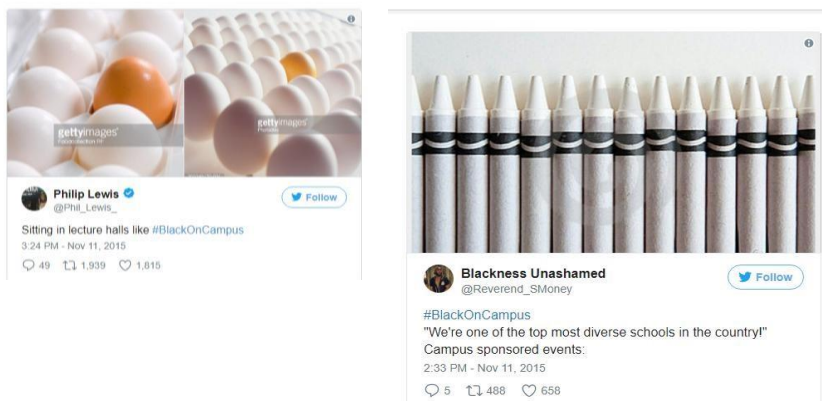

Figure 8: Images illustrated by Black students depicting the lack of diversity on PWI campuses (Twitter, 2015)
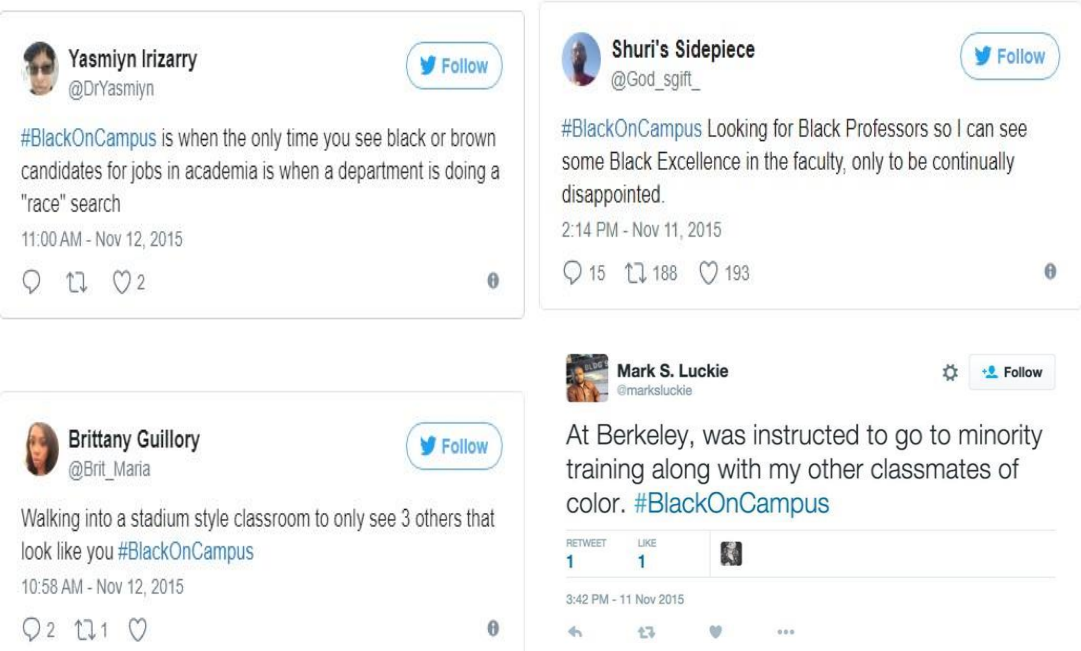
Figure 9: Diversity in the Classroom at PWIs (Twitter, 2015)