RESIST: Examining Black Lives Matter in the Changing Landscape of Social Trust

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Abstract

#BlackLivesMatter represents a quintessential example of digital resistance. The tenants of democratic change, however, rely on building social capital and social trust to sustain democratic action. This article, therefore, examines whether and how social trust is built through an online resistance movement. Using qualitative interview data pertaining to Black Lives Matter, we consider whether the bonds of social trust and social capital so central to face-to-face social movement are also fostered through online mobilization. Moreover, we examine how movement leadership and participants establish the trust that is sufficient for successful resistance. We find that individuals involved in BLM use social media as a resource to share factual events, and they trust social media because it lacks the modifications that occur through traditional media. At the same time, however, they invest in fact checking and research as part of their resistance activism. The result is the growth of a form of networked social trust that exists over a virtual civic sphere. Accordingly, social media are tools to make local issues global, build trust, connect people, and bring about progressive social attitudes and social activism. We discuss the implication of these findings with regard to social media as a forum for resistance and democratic action more generally.

Introduction

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement represents a quintessential example of digital resistance. Organized under the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, the movement evokes emotional responses and serves as a call to resist power and take action. As a testament to its reach, the Black Lives Matter hashtag was used almost 16,000 times daily from July,

2016-May 2018 (Anderson et al. 2018). BLM's power extends beyond the United States and into the U.K. and Canada, creating a forum for participation, mobilizing resistance and demanding oversight of racial and social injustice (Anderson et al. 2011). Moreover, BLM produces social capital by fostering civic and political participation among its followers and giving rise to local organizational chapters in cities throughout the United States (Paxton 1999).

In some ways, the surge in digital resistance seems like a natural outgrowth of the rapid and ubiquitous rise in social media use. Social media is not only an avenue to share and gather information, but it is also a platform with the potential to encourage social movements and promote social change. Pew Research revealed that two-thirds of Americans believe that mediated platforms help give a voice to underrepresented groups and elicit attention from elected officials (Anderson et al. 2018). Moreover, social media is a "networked public sphere" providing a platform for multiple perspectives and allowing for horizontal communication.

At the same time, however, current research suggests that social trust is at an all time low (Taylor et al. 2017; Ortiz-Ospina and Roser 2018). Furthermore, research indicates that this decline in social trust is linked to social media use (Moy and Scheufele 2000). Indeed, practices like the promulgation of "astroturf" or illegitimate political websites would seem to make those who are most active on social media also the individuals who exhibit the lowest levels of social trust. In this article, therefore, we examine the relationship between social media as a powerful source of digital resistance and low levels of social trust in general and social media in particular. Theoretically, we situate our investigation in literature on social trust that argues that social trust is vital for building the social bonds and social capital necessary for social action (Raine 2018; Putnam 1995; Sztompka 1999). Trust can be understood as "a positive attitude towards the partner and confidence that the partner will perform," encompassing interpersonal relationships as well as attitudes towards groups and institutions (Nguyen and Rose 167:2009). As such, a lack of social trust would seem to indicate a limited ability to mobilize individuals for resistance.

In this contemporary era, therefore, where on-line activism can provide broad reach, but levels of social trust are quite low, we examine

how activists establish BLM as a social movement that serves as a site of social change. After providing some background on Black Lives Matter, we discuss the importance of social trust and social capital as a cornerstone for democratic action and social change. We then explain our qualitative methodological approach of using in-depth interviews with membership and leadership in the Black Lives Matter movement to explore how trust emerges in virtual civic space. We show that activists establish what we term "networked social trust" over virtual civic space that serves as the basis for effective movement goals. Networked social trust does not replace face-to-face relationships, but operates in conjunction with interpersonal interactions. We also consider various strategies activists use to manage views of those who counter the movement. Through these processes, we show that the networked social trust that emerges through on-line resistance is central to ensuring the continued effectiveness of BLM and resistance movements more broadly, with a discussion of the implications of this form of trust for longstanding social change in a social media era.

#BlackLivesMatter: Building a Resistance Movement Over Social Media

The Black Lives Matter Global Network started in 2013 after George Zimmerman was acquitted of murder charges in the death of Trayvon Martin. Its founders, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi created #BlackLivesMatter as a platform to express dismay over police violence against the black community. In 2014, following the death of Michael Brown and mobilization against police brutality in Ferguson, Mo., Black Lives Matter moved from virtual presence into an activist one, with supporters spilling out into the streets to work against racial injustice. Catalyzed by black protest against systemic police violence, the movement grew into a decentralized, diverse and sustained effort to seek human rights and far reaching social justice (Rickford 2016). Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political member-led campaign organized over social media in a way that propels conversations and aids in developing plans of action.

The hashtag, #BlackLivesMatter, has been used to not only share stories, but also to empower people to act against violence on Black

communities. Currently there are more than 40 chapters in countries including the U.S., Canada, and the UK (Anderson et al 2011). Black Lives Matter is decidedly democratic. Unlike traditional social movements in which charismatic leadership frames the problem and organizes a specific strategy for envisioning movement goals, Black Lives Matter is primarily a grassroots effort with few full time organizers (Rickford 2016). The array of activists involved in Black Lives Matter includes those from diverse racial, economic and social backgrounds, including members of LGBTQ, working class, black feminist and other marginalized populations (Rickford 2016). Importantly, Black Lives Matter is a particularly important space for social media savvy youth of color to voice their experiences in public space (Carney 2016).

Lebron (2017) describes Black Lives Matter as a "force demanding change in America." His discussion traces the history of slavery, the Jim Crow era and the uncertainty of the civil rights movement with the sustained question of whether blacks will ever achieve equality. The fight is one of resistance and social justice which Lebron (2017) describes as a battle against people's identity being weighed down by oppression, it's the history people taking control of their own authority to protect their lives, their self-respect and, and their potential for flourishing (Lebron 2017).

BLM is one in a series of powerful resistance movements to emerge online in recent years. The goal of BLM is to have a world where blacks have the power to thrive socially, economically and politically; connecing black people to social action in their communities (Anderson et al 2011; Carney 2016). At the same time, however, Black Lives Matter, like other online movements, is decentralized and relies on membership to organize, lead and articulate movement activities. As with other hashtags related to events or political causes emerging in recent years, such as the Occupy Movement, #MeToo and #Resist, BLM faces challenges specific to building resistance online, including how to create the social trust necessary to sustain the movement's goals.

Social Trust, Social Capital, and Social Media

Trust can be defined as a "psychological state, a positive attitude toward the partner and confidence that the partner will perform," and it is affected by expectations, hopes, and previous anticipations being

consistently and reliably met (Nguyen and Rose 2009:167; Yap and Lim 2017). But trust is not limited to an individual attribute or attitude. While trust can be placed in specific individuals, it is also applied to abstract people, institutions and systems. In a democratic state, trust is a necessary cornerstone for government to be effective (Paxton 1999). There are many benefits to having higher levels of trust in society, including strong social bonds and increased social action. Indeed, when groups of individuals work together, it is social trust that encourages communication and links people in moving towards a common goal (Yi Wu et al. 2012; Sztompka 1999). Trust also propels cooperation and builds community (Sztompka 1999). In this sense, social trust is critical to successful democracy because it both legitimates institutions and allows for resistance against those institutions.

Social Capital and its Effects

It is the process of community building, or associating with one another that people generate social capital. Social trust is both a component and a result of social capital. According to Putnam (1995), social capital is composed of social networks, norms of reciprocity, and trust. Putnam argued that face-to-face interactions create the avenue to build norms of reciprocity, such as voting, reading the news, and being involved in the community. These norms generate interpersonal trust, which then generates trust in institutions, such as the government (Coleman 1988; Putman 1995). Trust is also an outcome of social capital, creating a cycle that enhances democracy. At an aggregate level, once social capital is established, it increases trust because people are continually interacting with one another (Paxton 1999). Additionally, social capital helps maintain democracy by influencing the quantity and quality of political participation, allowing for protest, resistance and demands for social change. General social trust is also key, since taking action relies on both knowing others and having confidence and trust in those relationships (Paxton 2002).

Trust in the Context of Social Media

Thus, trust is an important component of social capital since it affects social networks and the creation of norms of reciprocity. However, research on the democratic implications of social trust and social capital

is situated in the context of face-to-face interactions. Current research has shown that social media positively affects social capital, but social trust is declining (Bouchillon 2014; Anon 2014). The General Social Survey (GSS) shows a decline in trust in the United States, not only towards the government but also towards individuals (Anon 2017; Ortiz-Ospina and Roser 2018). The General Social Survey (GSS) administered in the U.S. shows that people trust each other less now than they did 40 years ago (Anon 2017; Ortiz-Ospina and Roser 2018). Importantly, declines in social trust coincide with the rise in social media use. Indeed, when discussing social trust, people often point to social media a source of misinformation and mistrust (Moy and Scheufele 2000). Moreover, the Internet is often used as a space to fortify, promulgate or manipulate opinions through false information (Cho et al. 2011, Daniels 2009, Mackie 2009). "Astroturfing" or the process of crafting and releasing false information that appears to be written by spontaneous contributors is widespread (Zhang et al 2013). Astroturfing often appears in the form of grassroots support, contributing to an atmosphere of distrust and the spread of misinformation online (McNutt 2010).

Thus, while the Internet creates a democratic and participatory space, and is increasingly a site for social movement and social change, it also allows for false information to circulate and generate mistrust (see "Understanding and Addressing the Disinformation Ecosystem" 2017). These seemingly paradoxical forces of social media increasing social capital but decreasing social trust guide this exploratory research. Black Lives Matter, for example, generates social media attention and allows for widespread participation in demands for social change, but also permits the spread of false information and can amplify detractors (see Freelon, McIlwain and Clark 2018). Morover, since social media – as the motor of the movement – are accessible to all, messages can be framed and shaped outside of the hands of resistance movement leadership as well (Cox 2017). We examine Black Lives Matter as a resistance movement that seeks to increase social justice, but exists in an online space replete with contradictions concerning social trust. We ask how Black Lives Matter builds social capital and social trust that are necessary for democratic action.

Data and Methods

In order to understand how trust is built over social media, we use qualitative grounded theory techniques in conducting open-ended, semi-structured interviews of people who are actively involved in Black Lives Matter. An individual who is actively involved is someone who is part of the local chapter of the state in which they reside, has been posting or following content online, and has attended events as a result of online participation. We also sought out leadership within various chapters of Black Lives Matter, since they could address questions about social media use as well as movement goals. Since the emphasis is to understand the process of building trust through mediated sources, we employ a convenience purposive selection of participants. In addition, since BLM is a movement that uses mediated sources to share stories and spread news across the United States and other countries including Canada and the UK, we situate this study in an online virtual setting. An online virtual setting is not composed of the physical space that personal interviews fall into, yet it includes components like interacting, observing, interviewing and, participating (Bailey 2018).

Research for this study was conducted from the spring of 2018 through the spring of 2019. Preliminary contact with participants took place through the BLM website and Facebook page. Introductory emails and Facebook messages were sent to chapters in major cities, including Los Angeles, Little Rock, Tulsa, Kansas City, etc. describing the purpose of the research and inviting members to participate. Initial access proved be challenging since no personal relationships previously existed, but once contact with participants was made, we relied on snowball sampling until we reached saturation with our interview subjects.

In total, we conducted 7 interviews with Black Lives Matter participants, four of whom identified as men and the remainder identifying as women. Participants identified as either African American or black and ranged in age from 22-46 years old, with most participants being in their early 40s. Interviewees were located in Atlanta (n=2), Memphis (n=2), with one each residing in New York, Tulsa and Denver. As a result of location and convenience, interviews are conducted through the phone and last between 30-60 minutes. Seidman (2019) acknowledges

that phone interviews can be less personal, therefore the researcher is conscious of developing equitable relationships by being respectful about participant's time and priorities throughout our interactions. Moreover, even though Skype was a viable option, the phone gave participants flexibility to interview from different settings, including their work office or from their car.

Interviews were semi-structured, such that a prepared list of questions allowed us to ensure that specific topics we wished to cover were asked of the subjects. At the same time, they were open ended to permit for the flow of the interview was based on active listening and to allow the conversations to build upon what the participant shared (Siedman 2013; Bailey 2018). In addition, questions were modified during the research process to allow for the development of additional questions as interviews are conducted and themes emerged. Preliminary questions are asked about participants' initial involvement with BLM, their use of social media and its reliability. Further questions are asked to leaders of the movement regarding the formation of new chapters and how mediated sources have played a role in this process.

All interviews were recorded and manually transcribed in order to aid in the process of analysis. NVivo software was used to assist in conducting both open and focused coding. Once codes were assigned, we compared interviews and assign categories, such as "reliability", "social media as a social network" and "social media use". Throughout the process, subcategories were created as themes emerged. Interviews were then reanalyzed in the context of the categories and themes that emerged to trace these back to the overall research question. All interview subjects were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities and provide confidentiality with regard to their responses.

Discussion and Analysis

Online Resistance: Social Capital and Social Trust

Because social media is not limited to a specific location, it allows for far-reaching resistance movements, encouraging horizontal communication. Social media is an important tool for social movements, increasing users connection to one another and facilitating their participation in

resistance movements (Hwang & Kim 2015). Indeed, for BLM, social media use is central to the genesis of the movement because it allows for communication with large groups of people effectively and efficiently. Francis, a Black Live Matter participant and avid poster explains:

> [Social media] was very effective for communicating as far as connecting, especially starting the chapter because in social media [platforms] you have groups, so you can talk....Let's say Facebook you have like 5000 friends and Instagram and other things, so you can talk to a big audience of people at one time instead of through the phone or emailing someone.

Social media facilitates interactions and encourages people to become engaged. This is particularly important for young people, who may be more reluctant to pursue other forms of civic or political involvement because social media allows for relationships to be built in a forum that youth are quite comfortable (Shah et al. 2002). As Owen, a member of Black Lives Matter in a large city indicates, 90-100% of BLM communication happens over social media because, "that is what we use, the tool of the millennials. The BLM movement is the movement of the millennials. We are in a digital era and we are utilizing social media."

Yet despite being comfortable establishing social movement over mediated sources, movement leaders still rely on face-to-face communication as critical to establishing social media relationships. Thomas, who is a founder and leader of his chapter of BLM, indicates that:

> A lot of it happens on social media but a lot happens face to face. It's a way to meet people who are interested in the same cause and eventually it becomes face to face meetings. Sometimes its Twitter and Instagram, sometimes its Groupme or other platforms and eventually it is face to face.

Thus, Thomas explains that some BLM activities may begin in virtual space, but at the individual chapter level, they eventually want to interact with people face-to-face. Although conversing with other BLM members or leaders over Facebook or Twitter offers a broad reach, interacting in person is also important. Francis agrees, indicating that he always tries to meet people in person as well as on line:

> Well when I meet someone online, I eventually meet the person for the most part….Off the top you can get more of a feeling of that person…. On social media you can say I am the president of this company, but you don't know if that's true. That is one of the differences. A person can be anyone they want on social media but when you meet someone in person you can kind of make a judgment of what the person is saying, who they are and who they present themselves to be at that moment and at that time, and what they say.

Francis goes on to explain that only through face-to-face connection can you build a trusting relationship. "That is why I personally try to connect with the people I connect with. If we connect on social media first, I like to try to make some in person connection." As both Thomas and Francis say, while they can connect virtually, they also seek to know people personally in order to establish trust. It is through this process that Black Lives Matter produces evidence of high social capital through political participation (Paxton 1999). The loose organization of the BLM structure allows for investment by leaders in both virtual and face-to-face communities.

However, at the same time, Black Lives Matter exists as an on-line activist space and not all people who participate in that virtual space can have a face-to-face connection. As such, the social capital that comes through the movement has qualities quite unlike the social capital built through prior social movements that have a formal social movement organization and leadership that articulates the movement's agenda (Freelon, McIlwain and Clark 2018).

Virtual Platforms for Democratic Action

One aspect that differentiates online movements, therefore, is building social capital and social trust over virtual space. Indeed, because virtual space is free of gatekeepers and open and available for all, one of the primary functions of the movement is to provide information that the public can trust. For Black Lives Matter, this means offering information that is consistent with the experiences of BLM participants and resonates with the lived reality of being black in the United States (Freelon, McIlwain and Clark 2016). Existing as a social movement over social

media is partly what accounts for BLM's success. Research indicates that social media is impactful because people are more open to reading news that comes from friends and family than from news organizations (Sveningsson 2015). Indeed, numerous leaders explained, as does Thomas, that BLM provides the truth, in contrast with the news media, which offers biased and limited perspectives:

> Media tries to craft a narrative that keeps the status quo, the movement crafts a story that tells the truth. Perfect example, after there is a law enforcement killing they always have the standard speech that the officer is going to be on paid administrative leave….Well, BLM's narrative is that the officer was unjustified in killing the person, here is his name, his title, here is the video of the incident, here is how we are going to occupy the space until we get a conviction.

Black Lives Matter, therefore, is also concerned with exposing an alternative to mainstream news and narrative. As prior research indicates, BLM looks to social media to get out information that is not filtered; social media has become an avenue for "un-edited" experiences to be shared (Warren 2014). Participants and leaders see it as an avenue for more real and honest political and social discourse (Choi 1994; Grieco 2017). It is this sense that social media helped propel BLM into a mainstream resistance movement (Freelon, McIlwain and Clark 2016). Owen indicates that this provides unification and a way forward for social change:

> All the movements – it just helps because you get to see individuals' stories and the anecdotal evidence that exists and that is what is actually what is going to make a change. When you hear it straight from the source and so many people are saying the same thing - if you are an honest person it will challenge your own views and challenge the dynamics that we experience in America.

Similarly, Thomas indicates that Black Lives Matter fueled by social media allows for the growth of resistance movements more generally:

> Then you had the birthing of the women's movement and then you had it birthing the resistance….Now it is bringing more groups to

> understand the power of the people. Now there is movement for the polls and people voting.

Black Lives Matter mobilizes and brings people together – both in person and online. By using the hashtag people are able to share their personal stories, but also people are exposed to first-hand accounts of their experiences without being filtered through the lens of television or the newspaper. The movement has provided an avenue for people to meet, to get to know each other, and to act upon their beliefs. This creates a space for democratic action, albeit in a virtual space and with new parameters that take into account both the benefits and pitfalls of social action through social media.

Virtual Paradox: Providing truthful information and generating trust

Importantly, as indicated above, to participants in BLM, mainstream media fails to provide trustworthy reporting. Indeed, Sarah sums up this sense when she says that Black Lives Matter reports from "the black perspective" and continues, "we are telling our stories while the news tells the stories in a manner in which a person of color is in a negative light."

Yet it is exactly that same ability for all participants to be able to report what they see and provide a narrative that counters the mainstream that also allows for counter-mobilization and the potential to spread false information as well as the truth. Despite the reliance on social media for communication, in general, the percentage of those who trust the information they find through these sources is low; research shows that only 5% of social media users trust the information they gather through these sites "a lot" (Monica et al. 2018). Owen explains this paradox as follows:

> Q: How do you know you can trust the online sources and how do you learn who you can trust and who you can't?
>
> A: By looking at their work. Sometimes you can't trust just anybody but then the trick is that it is a public movement, so you can't hide certain information and important information. We need to be better and spreading messages and doing our work in spite of that.

When BLM member Selena is asked about how she knows if she can trust people over social media, she responds, "I don't, I don't know if I can trust them." Because of this, leadership of the movement often mentions doing research as part of the process of on-line activism. Almost unilaterally, when asked about whether or not what people are posting is truthful, respondents sounded like Owen and indicated that verification of both the people and the messages was part of their responsibility:

> You look at the history of the page. Look at the content and you have to do your own investigation. What kinds of friends do they have? What interactions do they have? What are the comments they receive? You have to look at all these things to see if this person is worth believing and following. Is this person trolling us? Is this person genuine concerned about the movement? Everyone is different and has their own different criteria.

Terrance further indicates that movement leadership not only tries to determine if on-line users are trustworthy, but also the validity of the events being reported:

> We vet the information…..If it is tweeted out we go investigate. We send investigators out and send people out in the community to actually know what happened, we get the police narrative vetted to see if that's what actually happened.

Of course, the other side of this investigation means that people who are not trustworthy can – and are – prevented from having access to the movement's social media sites. Preventing the spread of false information is also a responsibility of the movement leadership. Indeed, blocking trolls is also something many respondents pointed to as central to their mission. Terrance explains:

> We just try to get to people the truth and just kind of lay it out there for people….We just like to give people the facts…trying to get people a Black perspective. At the same time, we want to give people who are non-black, our allies, a view into what we think. The hardest thing is dealing with the trolls; I get great pleasure from denying and blocking people. Its liberating.

Blocking people, however, begs the question to what extent the movement is only engaging with those who already agree with their positions and, thereby, exacerbating divisions rather than creating a more just society. As Bakshy, Adamic, and Messing (2015) find, since people select whom to befriend and follow, it can create an "echo chamber" for like- minded individuals.

Importantly, there is limited empirical support that social media echo chambers limit individuals' perspectives. Research indicates that people are not in complete control of what they see over social media and many times the act of engaging with news and information leads to a wider view rather than a more narrow one. Fletcher and Nielsen (2018) find that "social media use is significantly related to increased news use, even among those who come across news on social media while doing other things" (2462). Likewise, a recent study of Facebook showed that even though people befriend those with similar political ideologies, many have friends that cut across political affiliations, thus increasing a person's exposure (Bakshy, Messing, and Adamic 2015).

Aware of this issue, some BLM participants also indicated how they make an effort to engage with those who have opposing views. Rather than just blocking those with whom they disagree. Forest, for example, focuses on listening to opposing views so he can engage others instead of just dismissing them:

> I want to listen to this person, and that's what a lot of people have a problem with because they are trying to get their point across, so they don't know that the best way to get their point across is just listening. I will listen to a person and see how they think that or how they came to a conclusion.

By listening, Forest is able to focus on alternative perspectives and address them.

In a similar manner, Mark indicates that, even among those who disagree with him, his messages remain consistent. Because he is consistent, he is credible because there is accordance between who he is and what he says:

> I think they think I am reliable. They trust my insight. I wouldn't even say they trust my insight; they trust my heart. Especially on Twitter, I usually get, "I don't agree with you, but I think your heart is in the right place." They think I am reliable and reasonable but strong at the same time.

Thus, Mark indicates that he can engage with people who disagree with him because he is being open and honest about his position and others respect that. Terrance speaks of a similar experience when he was invited to speak at a Trump rally where BLM went to protest. He explains that, in the process of his protest, he ended up addressing the audience rather than just acting against them:

> We were protesting at a Trump rally and they invited us on stage. Instead of the visceral, polarizing approach, I spoke from a place of love, through love, and explained our commonality and where we should agree. I think [the video of that speech is] at 60 million views [on YouTube] right now and I got a lot of followers from there.

In trying to speak from a common sense of humanity, Terrance indicates that he was able to reach out to the opposition, instead of attacking them. And, while he may not have changed the minds of the people in the audience, doing so articulated his position more broadly and enabled him to reach a wider audience. Instead of engaging adversaries or being involved in shouting matches, Terrance works toward creating commonality. Although this cannot counter false information or perhaps even change the minds of those who are against the movement, it makes the movement more accessible to a broader audience. We find that it is this process of reaching a broad audience that creates the virtual civic sphere that is linked through networked social trust.

Networked social trust over a Virtual Civic Sphere

Indeed, forming and facilitating the network is both the purpose and impact of Black Lives Matter. Thomas explains it as follows:

> What mainstream media fails to realize is that Black Lives Matter is not an organization, it's a network, so there are numerous organizations that comprise the movement, but there is not one real organization. When

> you have different organizational leaders that are accountable to their organization, it doesn't really matter if some info under the term or the hashtag gets out there. We hold each other accountable.

Unlike a traditional organization, as a network, each leader can take a role in verifying and sending out information. Moreover, they are accountable to one another and to the network more broadly. This form of organization not only allows for broad based involvement in the movement, but also creates both individual within group autonomy and a loose structure that facilitates growth and communication. Terrance explains the structure:

> There are thirty-four groups that march under the Black Lives Matter banner….it means more autonomy in the movement as a whole than being part of that particular structure. The movement is much bigger than the global network.

Spreading information out over this wider network also permits broad communication and increases the spread of the message for Black Lives Matter. At the same time, it allows the movement to continually adapt and respond to other movements under the wide umbrella of resistance and social justice. Terrance explains how this has happened:

> On social media [the message of #BlackLivesMatter] gets sent out infinitely and it's just out there and it gets out in a hashtag. The message is continually being recycled and spread. That is what is important. We have a new campaign called: Re-juv-a-nation, where we will be talking through injustice, financial literacy, environmental injustice AND social media will go a long way in educating people. At the same time this is a hand on, in the community type of project.

Both networked and locally, therefore, the network continues to reach out to and connect with people connected through aspirations for equity. And, indeed, it is the ability to bring in people over social media with a wide influence that continues to fuel and grow the overarching movement. Owen talks, in particular, of the importance of celebrities to increasing the spread of Black Lives Matter:

> Any kind of social movement is about influence. If we are able to be an influencer to the influencers like celebrities and the athletes and other

> VIPs, that's an eye opener. That can only help our movement and our message. We have a following but that following is smaller than their following, so if we can get them to spread the message for us, then it is amplified….On social media you want to try to get that connection with as many people as possible.

Connection, therefore, is both the means and the end of the movement. It is through networking this civic space, through as many influencers as possible, that the movement sustains, amplifies and grows its message. This growth, in turn, increases its reach, strength and appeal, creating social, and in some cases political power.

Global reach, universal appeal

Unlike more traditional social movements that seek a specific legal remedy or equity goal, the Black Lives Matter sees its continued growth and awareness as the objective. Not limited by legal or state sanctioned boundaries, leadership facilitates the growth of this virtual civic space. When asked where the movement is going, Selena explains, "my hope is that it continues to grow. I want to see it in every state and every single country on earth." But it is not just the movement, but also the experiences behind the movement that activists hope will reach people and lead to more justice. Selena continues that, in addition to the growth of the movement, she also wants "for people to see these stories and understand. I really just want understanding from people. I don't want people to dismiss a certain group's experiences because they don't […] experience it.'"

In this regard, virtual civic space belongs to everyone and is catalyzed not by traditional forms of print media, but also by visuals that are seamlessly incorporated into everyday lives. Because average citizens can not only serve as witnesses, but also produce filmed evidence, those who are oppressed can document their lived experiences. As Terrance explains:

> Well, it's almost like the camera becomes a weapon now. If you have a gun you can shoot me and kill me because you have a gun. If you do and I film you doing that, you are going to be in jail. We start arming

> ourselves with videos that all our phones have.… so it's changed the way we people even live. Everything is filmed, everything is filmed now.

Networked social trust, therefore, is an important web in building and expanding this virtual civic space. It is the truth of the experiences of those who are on the forefront of Black Lives Matter as a social movement, but also of those whose voices may have been overlooked, unheard or not believed in the past. This voice is what sustains the movement over media. Terrace sums this up by explaining, "we say what is true and when something is trying to be hidden we try to find what is being hidden and bring it to the light." In this regard, "networked social trust" brings people together and continues to foster this movement over social media.

Resistance over Broad and Networked Space

Social media, therefore, is instrumental to building the networked social trust that fuels BLM and other online movements. As with social movement organizations, however, this social trust does not insulate the movement from problems and disagreements among the movement actors, nor does it ensure BLMs ultimate success. Indeed, the reach that a social network provides replaces the strength of being able to reach many people with having agreed upon, centralized objectives and surefire ways to measure successes. Terrance explains this as follows:

> It's good but the problem is that since it's so segmented people don't necessarily share other chapters causes, which is problematic. There is a lot of strife in the activism world. It manifests itself on social media, they attack themselves on social media and that's not cool. I look forward to the day when folks can really come together. That's something I have not quite seen, but I look forward to it in Heaven. And in the future.

For Terrance, the networked civic space has trouble being cohesive. Because communication and organization is over social media, it is easier to both attack others and objectives of groups are not centralized. Thomas notes similar costs and benefits to online activism:

> Social media is a gift and a curse. It spreads BLM as a hashtag and a movement, but it has also spread the fact that there was division within the movement. The things that were happening on social media, it

> caused people in the community that were watching us to have a lack of faith in the movement.

Thomas goes on to note that these kinds of disagreements – about the objectives of the movement and whose priorities should be met – are also played out on social media, creating factions and taking attention away from the overall project of resistance and social justice. Thomas's concerns have not gone unnoticed. Critics have noted that leadership is often disorganized or disagree about a way forward (Cobb 2016). Moreover, despite the vast attention that BLM has brought to the use of excessive police force, there is limited success in prosecuting the individual officers who perpetrated this violence (Sands 2017). Despite these serious concerns, advocates point out that BLM has moved issues of police brutality and ongoing racial injustice into the mainstream. When measured in terms of its reach and contribution to democratic discourse BLM can be interpreted as quite successful (Freelon, McIlwain and Clark 2016; Jackson 2018).

Conclusion

Black Lives Matter began as a modest hashtag to create space to express outrage at the killing and lack of justice for Trayvon Martin. From a presence on Twitter to a far-reaching virtual movement, BLM moved into public space. Importantly, however, the loosely connected structure of the organization and its networked nature allows it to be both local and global. While it expands far beyond state and national boundaries, it also relies on grassroots participants and individuals who take on a leadership role. This structure allows BLM to continually expand and to mobilize when and where injustices arise.

Part of this expansion is building networked social trust over social media space. Doing so relies on bringing attention to the movement itself and amplifying messages of racial and social justice, while also responding to those who counter the movement. In this respect, social movements generated by and through social media also must continually respond to those who counter the movement while also being careful not to create sealed echo chambers that cannot reach beyond movement followers. Respondents in this study discussed this as an iterative and discursive process. Partly, this involves relying on researching participants who are

active and fostering dialogue that exposes events and truths that have not been reported by traditional media. But this also involves responding to those who are ideologically opposed to the messages of BLM. In this respect, many of those in the movement work to continually engage opposing perspectives and finding common ground, if not from a political or social justice perspective, at least in ways where they can respect one another. Our respondents emphasize being consistent in their posting over social media, and listening and engaging in conversation with those who are ideologically opposed to attempt to find common ground and common humanity. Thus, mediated platforms can be an avenue for people to have these conversations across "truths" online. Thus the notion of networked trust calls for subsequent research that can fully investigate various settings, ideologies, communication strategies and movement objectives, as well as our ability to converse across them.

But with the primary location of BLM being in virtual space rather than geographically located, the movement has and continues to take on and address a series of issues not confronted by traditional social movements. Among those issues is the way that BLM establishes the social trust and social capital that makes for an effective movement. In connecting via a network over virtual civic space, but building face-to-face relationships at a local level, BLM is able to continue to expand, raise awareness and grow the expanse of the personal reach of its leaders. Hooker (2016) calls for a movement that goes beyond the traditional norms of injustice since the law that was used in the civic rights movement has failed the black community on numerous other fronts. BLM has begun to address this by continually increasing its network and expanding its message to social justice on a large scale.

By providing a medium through which those who have historically been silenced can tell their own stories, the networked social trust that Black Lives Matter fosters is a blueprint and opportunity to build a powerful community based on the shared experiences of exclusion, suppression, and oppression (see Collins 2000). As such, it is an important example of resistance activism and useful way to understand online movements. As the respondents to this study indicated, they see racial justice as their immediate cause, but also the ways BLM is connected to environmental justice, financial literacy and as a way to expand into

other forms of social justice. In addition, #BlackLivesMatter paved the way for #Resist, #MeToo and many other movements that seek to talk back to power. Black Lives Matter, therefore, addresses important aspects of democracy such as asking for the rights and freedoms of all people to be respected, giving everyone equal opportunity for success, asking the government to be open and transparent, respecting the views of those not in the majority, and having the freedom to peacefully protest (Pew Research 2018). For those generally excluded from power or social status, social media can be a powerful tool to make themselves heard. In doing so, networked social trust like that which is the basis for the success of Black Lives Matter can also be the basis by which to understand other mediated resistance movements. To be sure, BLM is not an unlimited story of success. As with many movements, there are disagreements and disputes about its goals and effectiveness. These concerns have been exacerbated in a political climate that is increasingly entrenched and polarized along racial lines. However, while BLM is an imperfect and iterative resistance movement, it does continue to create a new kind of virtual civic sphere that carves the way for networked social trust where long silenced voices can be heard.

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