SOCIAL MEDIA MOVEMENTS

HOW CHARLOTTESVILLE EVOLVED

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Final Capstone Project

ABSTRACT

Social movements have existed for hundreds of years. Frequently we reflect back to the Women's Suffrage movement, the March on Washington, and later the Arab Spring. However, what makes the Arab Spring different is its striking integration of social media. A key point of this white paper will seek to further analyze social movements through the Charlottesville protests in August 2017 from an in-depth social media analysis. Answering the question of how putting a hashtag on the end of a post or message propels a movement forward and makes change will be a primary focus throughout this paper.
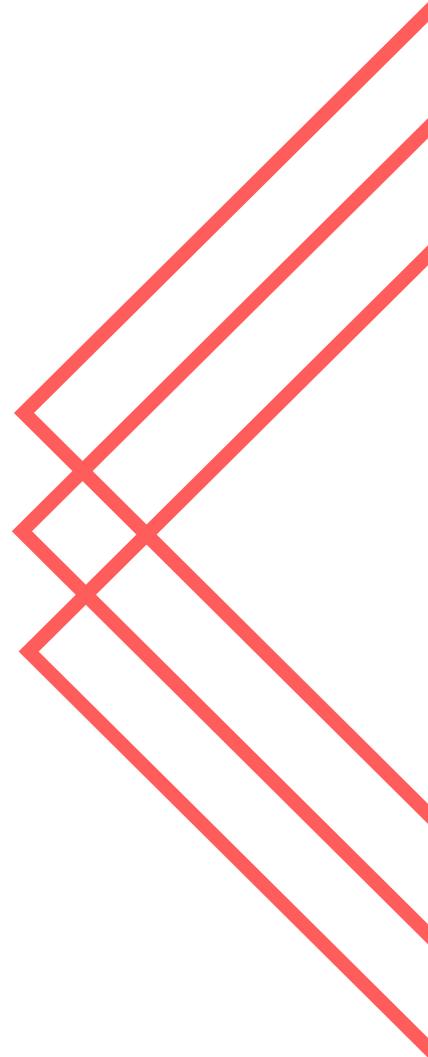
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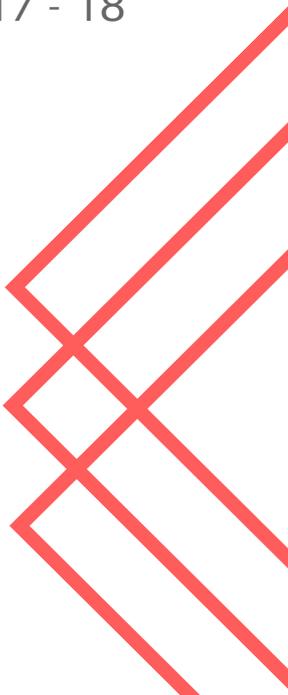
INTRODUCTION

A social movement is a loosely organized campaign that brings people together to either incite or prevent change in political, religious, or general societal frameworks. These types of movements bring groups of people together and typically last longer than mobs, masses, crowds, etc. Motivations of members can be due to (1) values of the "spiritual community" and the aims of the movement, (2) the emotional effect of following a leader, or (3) the pursuit of individual interests (Heberle 2008).

It is important to ask how movements gain momentum and draw in audiences to join and make change for the cause being promoted. The spread of mass media began in 1517 when Martin Luther posted his Ninety-Five Theses on Wittenberg Castle church for everyone to see, sparking the Protestant Reformation movement. Later movements such as the March on Washington utilized newspapers for advertisements or articles, flyers around cities, or simply phone calls. However, today, social movements are looking a little bit different; people create hashtags to post on Facebook, Instagram, and other social media platforms to spread their messages for billions of users to see. Users scroll through their social media feeds to find content about current movements around the world. Statista reported that as of January 2018, there are 2.2 billion active Facebook users, and, 68% of American adults are Facebook users. This number of users on Facebook alone shows the significant impact social media has on society, and today's meaning of being connected with others.

With this number of social media users in mind, it is necessary to question the increased participation of social movements and if it simply raises awareness about issues or if it "translates into more meaningful and tangible societal benefits" (Rotman, Vieweg, Yardi, Chi, Preece, Shneiderman, Pirolli, Glaisyer 2011). This leads to the question of "slacktivism" versus activism in social media engagement for change, and how the users did such with the #Charlottesville movement.

This white paper will seek to understand what putting a hashtag on the end of a post or Tweet means, and how social media propels social movements into a new reality of change. Through examining the birth of social movements on social media and their evolution, audiences will understand the true impact social movements have today. After analysis of the Charlottesville protests in August 2017 readers will unravel the goals of the protests, what happened, and the effectiveness of the use of social media in this movement.

BACKGROUND

There have been hundreds of social movements over the years through America and around the world that have changed laws, viewpoints, and even societal norms. For example, in 1963, without social media, 300,000 people attended the March on Washington led by Martin Luther King Jr. to protest change on racial inequality. There were no Facebook events, no Snapchat filters or hashtags to promote the event; people came together from the press. As social media integrated into society, social movements began to change, and the world evolved in a different direction by means of social activism. This white paper looks to the Charlottesville protests as an answer to how hashtags play a role in activism and how social media has contributed to social movements as a collective.

Now, with social media, there are hashtags for almost any movement to engage users and bring a new level awareness for audiences. Moreover, "social media can be seen as the contemporary equivalent of what the newspaper, the poster, the leaflet or direct mail were for the labor movement" (Gerbaudo, 2012). Understanding past and current social movements and the way they spread, one can see how the Charlottesville protests and social media movements evolved.

NOTEWORTHY SOCIAL MOVEMENTS
- Women's Suffrage
- Civil Rights
- Black Lives Matter
- Occupy Wall Street
- Charlottesville

"Social media can be seen as the contemporary equivalent of what the newspaper, the poster, the leaflet or direct mail were for the labor movement"
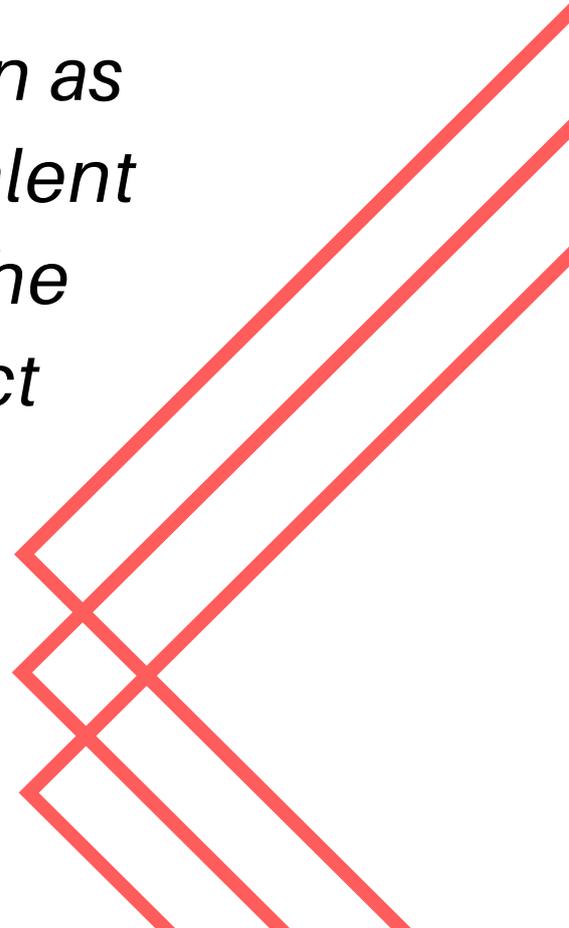
Social Media Integrates with Social Movements

According to Pew Research Center, 69% of Americans use some sort of social media platform. The infiltration of these platforms on societal change has increased tenfold in just the past few years. 2011 was dubbed the "year of the protestor" by Time magazine due to protests all over the world from Egypt to Spain, and the U.S. The movements were popularly heard around the world as the majority of activists turned to user-generated content on social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook to spread their messages. Spreading messages on social media for political movements has been looked at as 'citizen journalism' while users draw in larger audiences. However, social media have gained more attention because of "their use as means of organization of collective action, and more specifically as means of mobilization in the crucial task of 'getting people on the street'" (Gerbaudo 2012). Table 1 below shows numbers of users on the eight major worldwide social media platforms.

Users on Eight Major Worldwide Social Media Platforms

Platform	% of People Using in America (as of January 2018)	Number of Active Users Worldwide (in millions)
YouTube	73%	1,500
Facebook	68	2,167
Instagram	35	800
Pinterest	29	200
Snapchat	27	255
LinkedIn	25	260
Twitter	24	330
WhatsApp	22	1,300

Table 1: (Anderson & Smith 2018; Statista 2018)

Social media gives citizens a platform they are comfortable using to have a voice in political movements they might not otherwise have been involved in. This was clearly seen in August 2017 in Charlottesville, VA, when hundreds more protestors than expected mobilized overnight. This was mainly in part from the momentum gained on social media to protest the removal of a Robert E. Lee statue. Surely, social media is imperative for the initial mobilization of movements and continuous momentum through hashtags and sustained conversations. However, to analyze the moving pieces of the Charlottesville protests, it is necessary to understand how the first significant social movement integrated with social media unfolded.

Hashtags Used in the Charlottesville Protests:

#Charlottesville
#UniteTheRight
#ThisIsNotUs

https://www.vox.com/identities/2017/8/14/16143168/charlottesville-va-protests

FIRST MAJOR SOCIAL MEDIA MOVEMENT:
Arab Spring Uprisings

Living under an oppressive government, dissatisfied youth and other citizens had enough of income gaps, human rights violations, poverty, and more, so they decided it was time for a change. That is how the Arab Spring began to mobilize in late 2010 in the Middle East-Northern African (MENA) region. Activists joined to organize and publicize their outrage at the governments, beginning in Tunisia and Egypt. At this time, Facebook was just beginning to become more popular, as seen in the table 2 below. However, outsiders looking at the protests were able to watch what was going on because of the increase in social media usage in the region.

In the Tunisian town of Sidi Bou Zid when protests began breaking out, print and broadcast media were controlled by the government, so social media was the only way information could get out to the rest of the world. Videos of the protests circulated Facebook for the world to see; audiences became enraged and eager to participate more. In this time, "the number of Facebook users in the region almost doubled from 11.9 million in 2009 to 21.2 million in 2010" (Joseph, 2012). When the movement began integrating more on social media, Twitter was not as popular because its Arabic interface had not been introduced yet. Despite this, users still effectively created hashtags indicating specific days to come together for protests, also known as "days of rage", in the various MENA countries.

Facebook Penetration in MENA as of April 2011

Country	% of Population Using Facebook
Yemen	1.37%
Syria	1.94
Libya	3.74
Egypt	7.66
Palestine	13.1
Jordan	21.25
Tunisia	22.49
Bahrain	36.83

Table 2:
(Joseph, 2012)

SIDI BOU ZID BACKGROUND:

- Mohammed Bouzazizi set himself on fire out of discontent with the Tunisian government
- Popular Twitter hashtags in the MENA region in early 2011 were #Egypt, #Jan25, #Libya, #Bahrain, and #protest.

It is clear that social media played a leading role in how the political conversations were shaped in the MENA region and around the world in the fallout of the 2011 protests. Clay Shirky notes the necessity of discussion, not only mass media messages, surrounding the issues being presented by movements. He presents this in a two-step process where "opinions are first transmitted by the media, and then they get echoed by friends, family members, and colleagues" (Shirky 2011). Joseph demonstrates that the protests in MENA fulfilled both functions in Shirky's two-step process:

1. Transmission - Social media guided audiences to see the need for awareness of the corruptions in Tunisian and other MENA governments, making a desire to cause change.
2. Echoes - Groups coordinated rapidly to demonstrate against their governments.

Joseph concludes that "while the 'Twitter revolutions' outside Egypt and Tunisia have not been as successful, the contagion effect-including the enthusiasm whipped up by trending hashtags, dissident Facebook groups, and mainstream media continues to threaten some of the most oppressive regimes in the world".

INSIGHTS

- In 2010, 9 in 10 Egyptians and Tunisians claimed to use Facebook to organize the protests and spread awareness about them (Huang, 2011).
- "The Dubai School study reveals that calls to protest in the region, which first appeared on Facebook, resulted in actual street protest in all but one instance" (Joseph, 2012).
- Political issues took over Twitter in the MENA region spreading messages about democracy, liberty, and freedom.

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/joseph-v-micallef/the-arab-spring-six-years_b_14461896.html

THE MODERN SOCIAL MEDIA MOVEMENT:

Charlottesville Protests:

What Happened

In February, the Charlottesville City Council voted to remove a statue commemorating the well renowned Confederate general Robert E. Lee from a park that, at the time, was called Robert E. Lee park. The name of the park was changed to Justice and Emancipation park, naturally receiving hesitation and backlash from the surrounding community. When the City Council came together in February to discuss removing the statue, community members spoke their opinions. One speaker "argued that the statues of Civil War generals promote and perpetuate a false narrative of a lost cause and blur the memory of the suffering of the enslaved majority of Charlottesville" (Tyree 2017). This statement is the core of the polarizing sides of the Charlottesville protests that is analyzed below.

Between the renaming of the park and the removal of the statue, on May 13, 2017, around 100 white nationalists protested the removal of the statue with lit torches. This led to the initial outcry on social media about the protests "as an attempt to intimidate minorities" (Hayden and Nestel 2017).

Then, on Friday August 11th, thousands of white nationalists gathered in Charlottesville again with lit torches a day ahead of the what was called the "Unite the Right" rally (Spencer and Stolberg 2017). The men were chanting sayings such as "you will not replace us", "white lives matter" and other various Nazi-inspired phrases. This was only the beginning of the tension presented by the protests by both active participants and distant participants on social media.

Hashtags were used worldwide to gain momentum and attention toward the Charlottesville protests and controversies. People of all sides used #Charottesville to show their support and awareness. Users aligning with the white nationalists posted with #UniteTheRight. Other users denounced the white nationalists with the hashtag, #ThisIsNotUs, a phrase to unite the rest of America and portray that not everyone aligns with the white nationalists protesting. I used Meltwater, a media monitoring and analyzing intelligence software, the analyze the three hashtags.

"...statues of Civil War generals promote and perpetuate a false narrative of a lost cause..."

INSIGHTS

- Removal of the Robert E. Lee Statue in Charlottesville.
- Protests are organized to denounce the removal.
- #Charlottesville, #UniteTheRight, #ThisIsNotUs are used to gain attention on social media of the protests.

#Charlottesville

The attention has been on Charlottesville since the controversy of removing the Robert E. Lee statue began, social media has consistently played a large role in that. It was not until it became a true social media movement that #Charlottesville was prominent on various social media platforms. Primarily active on Twitter, the following shows the prevalence of #Charlottesville on social media and what this means for social media movements. These four visualizations present a social media analysis on #Charlottesville from August 10, 2017 to September 10, 2017. They show the social media exposure, the trending themes, and a sentiment analysis.
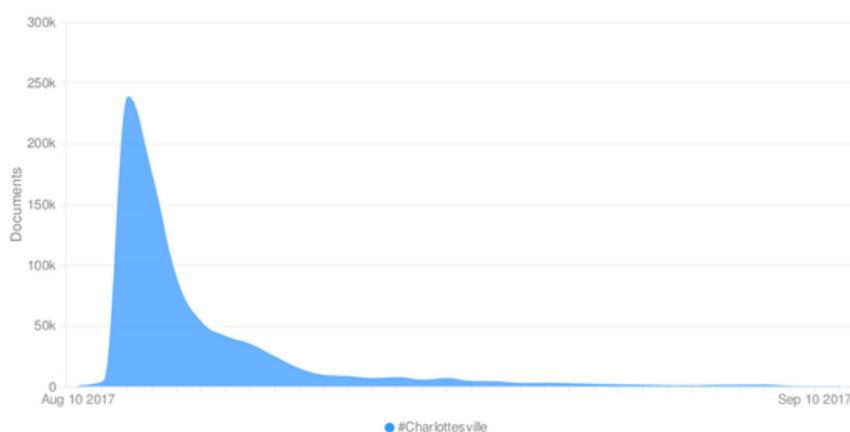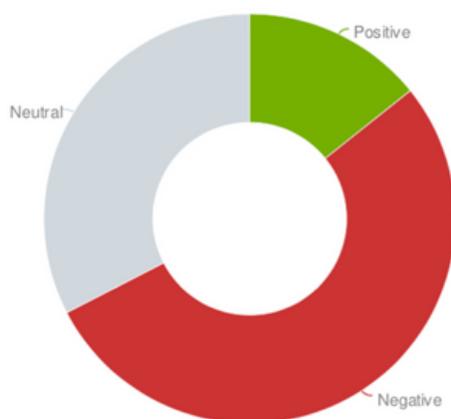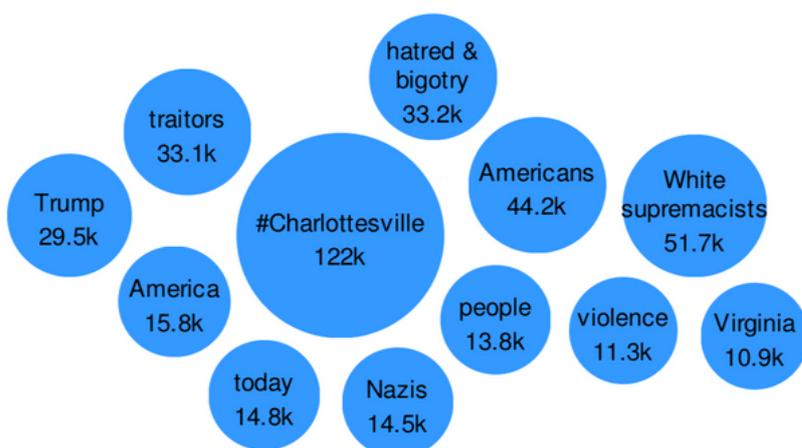

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

In figure 1, the significant increase of the use of #Charlottesville on social media, primarily Twitter, is seen on August 11 from almost nothing to almost 250k mentions. Utilizing the hashtag to promote the message from both sides is effective for users to rally around change and be aware of what is happening. This was also a trending hashtag on Twitter during this time. Figure 2 shows a sentiment analysis of #Charlottesville, which is primarily negative. Meltwater concluded that most uses of the hashtag were related to negative content. This content includes posts from white nationalists and opponents of the Unite the Right rally. In figures 3 and 4, the words most closely related to #Charlottesville and its use are seen. It is without surprise that "white supremacists", "traitors", "violence", "hatred & bigotry", among many others, are connected. The negativity that arose from the #Charlottesville movement sparked two other hashtag movements: #UniteTheRight and #ThisIsNotUs. These hashtags allowed social media users to show their awareness and hope for change on both sides of the protests.

INSIGHTS

- #Charlottesville increased in engagement on social media around the August 10 protests.
- The hashtag mainly had negative sentiment, with disdain about the white nationalists protesting
- Words correlated with the hashtag align with hatred, bigotry, Neo-Nazis and similar phrases.
- Users around the world became engaged in what was happening Charlottesville and showed their solidarity by using the hashtag

#UniteTheRight

The "Unite the Right" rally was organized through a Facebook event, showing how connected people are around the country from social media. Leading up to the protests, "the Guardian published a story about how young, white, men are becoming radicalized through YouTube" (Diep 2017). Since the election of President Trump, the #UniteTheRight mentality has had a greater penetration and overall impact on social media. Looking closer to the events in Charlottesville, these visualizations focus on social media from August 10 to 17, 2017. They also include social media exposure, the trending themes, and a sentiment analysis.
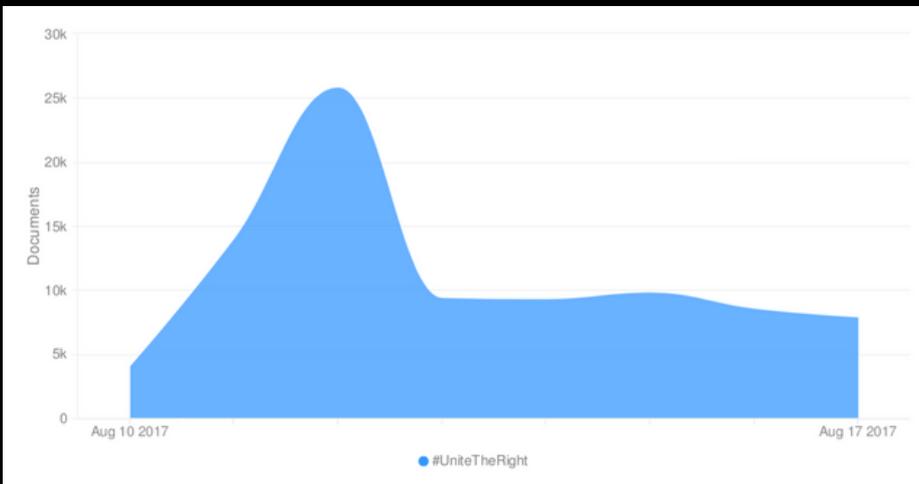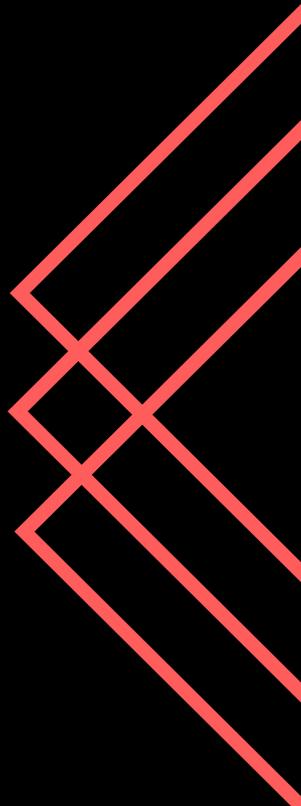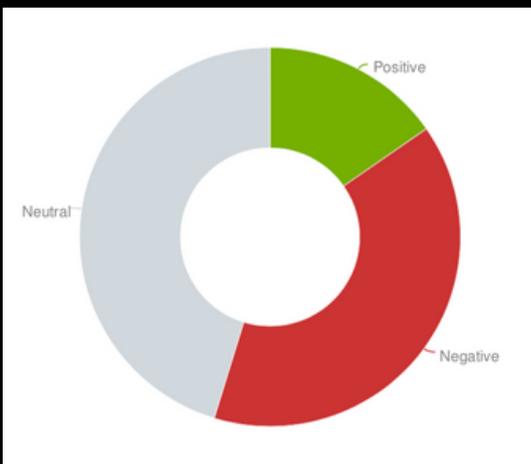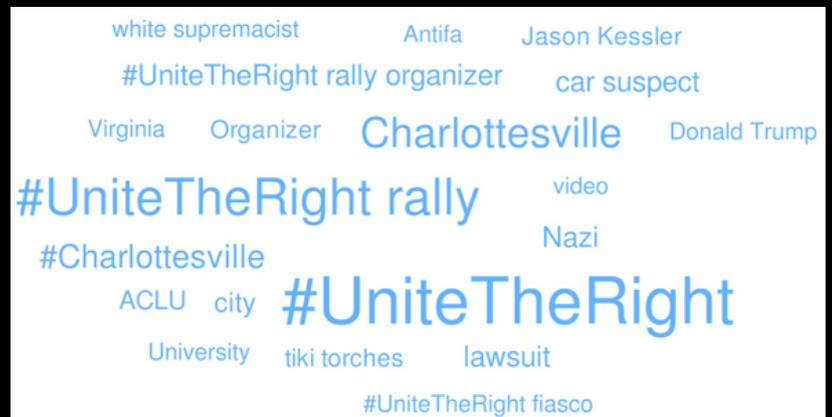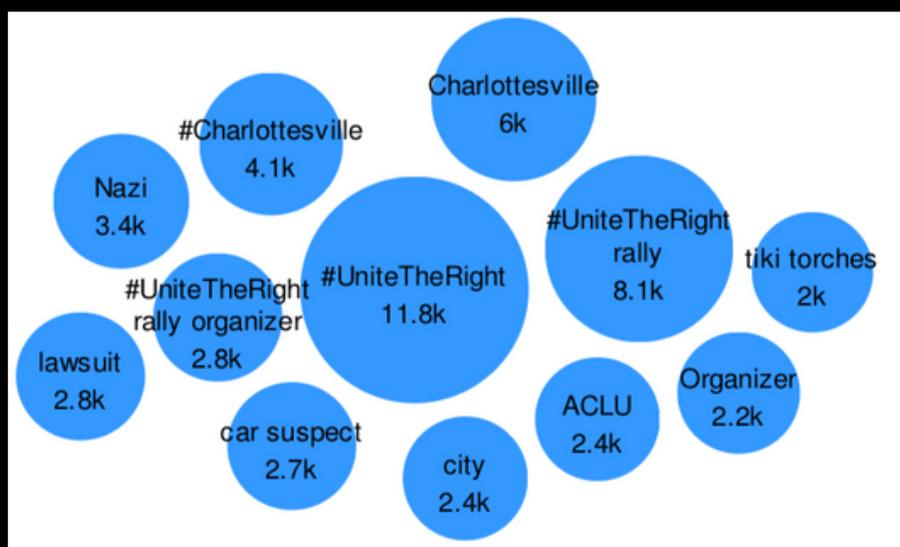
Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7

Figure 8

Since there was awareness about the Unite the Right rally, it had a little bit of activity on social media prior to the protests. However, right after August 10, the engagement skyrocketed 5x the early engagement in August, from 5k to 25k. This shows the increase of raising awareness of the protest due to using social media to promote it. Looking at figures 7 and 8, you can see the types of phrases used along with the #UniteTheRight hashtag. Keywords to point out are "Antifa", "Nazi", "ACLU", and "Donald Trump". Two highly influential keywords were Donald Trump and ACLU, which can be inferred that they aligned more with the protestors denouncing the removal of the Robert E. Statue. When these kinds of phrases in social media posts, it draws in more followers knowing that influential people are involved in the protests for #UniteTheRight. These develop more momentum towards the hashtag and the protests overall.

INSIGHTS

- #UniteTheRight use increased 5x more on August 10 surrounding the rally.
- Influential keywords associated with the hashtag draw in more audiences.
- Following the protests, the hashtag still had high numbers.
- Utilizing a specific movement-oriented hashtag engaged thousands of more users to join the movement.

#ThisIsNotUs

In opposition to the harsh "Unite the Right" rally, social media users came out in large numbers to denounce the white nationalists and their actions surrounding the protests. Initiating their own hashtag, #ThisIsNotUs, users joined together and "mobilized in full force to begin naming and shaming the attendees" with the hashtag (Newcomb 2017). In Dominque Mosbergen's article in the Huffington Post, she wrote, "people used the phrase to express their disdain and disappointment at the hatred and bigotry on display in Charlottesville, and to condemn the violence which resulted in the death of one woman and the injury of dozens" (2017).

Predominant figures in pop culture joined in using the Hashtag such as Lady Gaga to show their support using the hashtag. It cannot go without saying that users criticized using this hashtag since hate speech has been a continuous issue in America, and the protests are nothing new; using the hashtag perpetuates the hateful culture and can even be described as "slacktivism". This is when users recognize and post about their awareness of issues, but fail to show action to make change (Rotman, Vieweg, Yardi, Chi, Preece, Shneiderman, Piroli, & Glaisyer 2011)

Below the visualizations analyze the use of #ThisIsNotUs from August 10-17, 2017 through social media exposure, the trending themes, and a sentiment analysis.
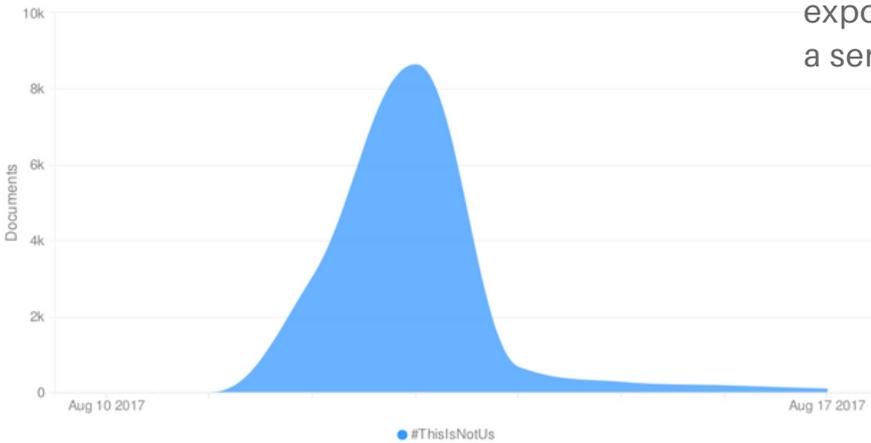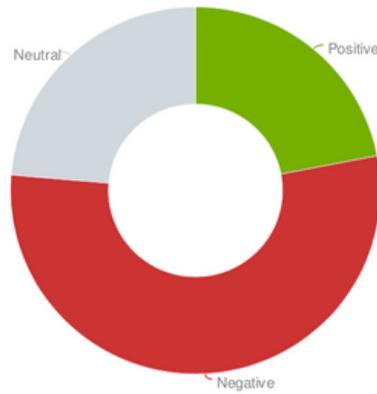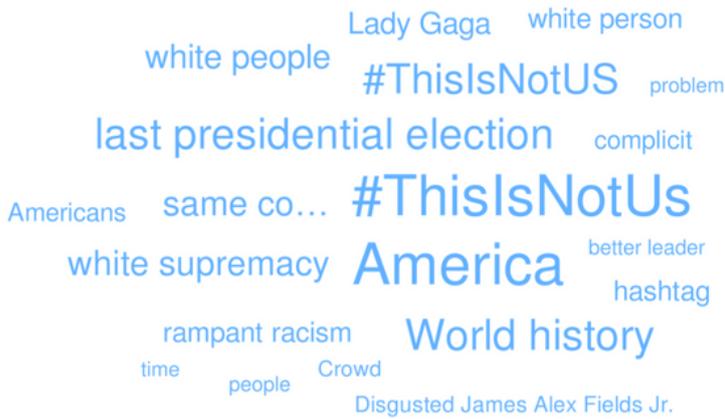

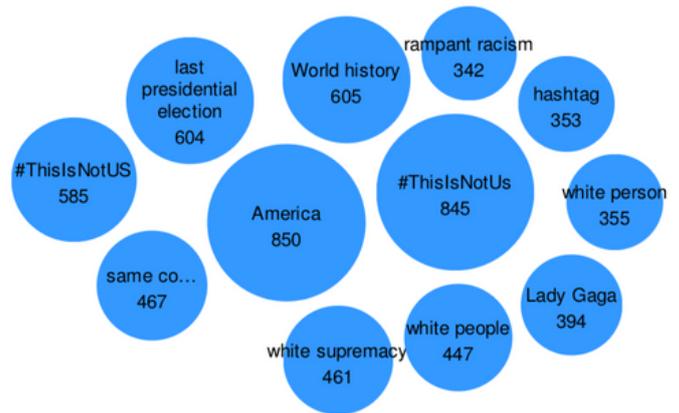*Figure 9*

Figure 10

Figure 11

Figure 12

In contrast to #UniteTheRight, #ThisIsNotUs did not rise in use until a little bit after the protests began, as seen in figure 9. This is due in part to users on social media reacting to the protests and seeing the hateful content online and in what people were protesting ("Jews will not replace us", etc.). Users created a meaningful hashtag to represent the people who did not align with the white nationalist protests showing that these protests and attitudes are not what America is or should be. Lady Gaga Tweeted denouncing the white nationalist protestors as well, which garnered a lot of attention and was mentioned many times. Looking at the sentiment analysis in figure 10, there is a significantly more negative sentiment from users as they were harshly criticizing the protests and #UniteTheRight movement. An interesting keyword that is used a lot here, but not with other hashtags is "America". This shows the representation of #ThisIsNotUs as a collaboration among upset users. Also, "rampant racism" is a specific, yet frequently used phrase that was picked up by many users describing what was happening in Charlottesville.

INSIGHTS

- Users created #ThisIsNotUs to oppose the hateful hashtag and further denounce the white nationalist protestors.
- Predominate people such as Lady Gaga spoke out with the hashtag.
- Highly negative sentiment is associated with the hashtag as users were bashing the Charlottesville protests.
- The hashtag is potentially problematic because it can promote 'slacktivism', as the use decreased shortly after the protests.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing the three hashtags used during the Charlottesville protests, it cannot go without note what the social implications of the protests and social media usage are. White nationalists protesting "you will not replace us", and other similar racist statements are trying to gain back their dominance in society. One of these purposes is in part to their fear of minorities overpowering them one day. Ideas like this were even seen in the late 20th century.

"I asked if he had any Civil War ancestors. Carter shrugged. 'Yeah, but I don't know the details. Anyway, that's not why we're here. This fight's about today, about the ethnic cleansing of Southern whites-same thing that's happening in Bosnia. There's black history month, there's a black Miss America pageant, there's even a black Yellow Pages in South Carolina. Can you imagine a Yellow Pages for whites? No way. Anything for whites is PIC-politically incorrect.'"
(Horwitz 1998).

Understanding the past ideologies that connect to those more modern, white nationalists are further emboldened through social media usage. Juris defines the cultural logic of networking in his article through explaining global movements that were in the late 1900s and 2000s that began using digital media including a "social and cultural disposition" that familiarized actors towards four ideas:

1. Building horizontal ties and connections among diverse, autonomous elements
2. Free and open circulation of information
3. Collaboration via decentralized coordination and directly democratic decision making
4. Self-directed networking
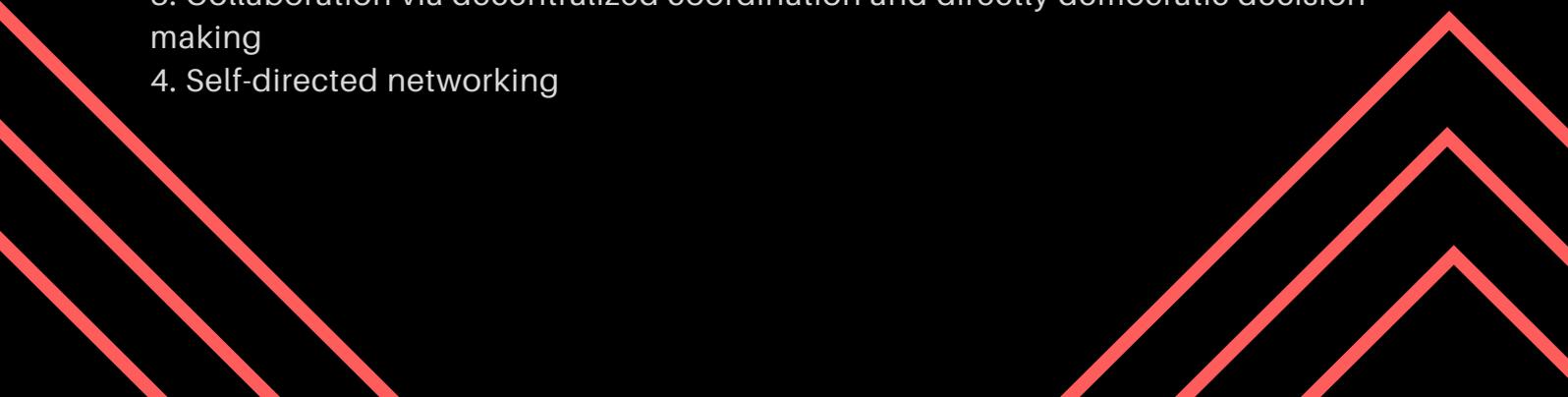
These four ideas create a "meaningful framework for grasping the actions of others that are shaped by our interactions with networking technologies and, in turn, gives rise to specific kinds of social and political networking practices" (Juris 2012). Understanding this model of global movements integrated with social media allows for the analysis approaching the Charlottesville protests' hashtags and the intentions of the social movement. Social media enables movement participants to organize and raise awareness of their intentions worldwide, as opposed just to locally or nationally. "It could be to raise money, or it could be to engage in attacks on social media. Some of the activity is virtual. Some of it is in a physical place. Social media has lowered the collective-action problems that individuals who might want to be in a hate group would face. You can see that there are people out there like you. That's the dark side of social media" (Diep 2017). Social media perpetuates a variety of actions among social movements, as seen in the Arab Spring Uprisings, and contrasting from the March on Washington in 1963.

Putting those three hashtags at the end of Tweets or other social media posts can mean more than perceived. It shows alliance, support, and denouncement of the lost cause mythology more than many other ideas. What might be seemingly ineffective to cause change, creating meaningful hashtags for a movement to spread ideas and garner momentum is more beneficial than expected. Moreover, Integrating social media into a social movement is vital in creating change and gaining a following, as seen in the Charlottesville protests and movements that followed. And, it is clear that utilizing #Charlottesville, #UniteTheRight, and #ThisIsNotUs, was effective and drew in thousands of more people that were not physically attending the protest, a theme seen in modern social movements.

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