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From Isolation to Visibility: Social Media as a Tool for Native American Activists to Generate Support for their Social Movements

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A Thesis in the Field of Anthropology & Archaeology

for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

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Abstract

For years social media has become an ever more central component of daily life, especially in the United States. It is a communication tool that allows people to have social interactions on a global scale. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have been widely adopted even beyond personal use to include business, government, education, and advocacy. Activism is an arguably important part of the American Democratic experience, allowing people and groups to express their concerns or frustrations with institutions, social norms, and government action, etc. The pursuit of activism via social media has been both rapid and impactful in the United States and abroad. Movements such as Occupy Wallstreet and Black Lives Matter have utilized social media platforms to put their central issues at the forefront of American consciousness. This thesis explores how Native American activists have utilized and benefitted from the use of social media to both garner attention for their causes and generate support for them. We will examine three separate Native American led movements and what impact social media may have had on the public attention and engagement each movement received over a two-year period.

Dedication

To the tireless efforts of the people who fight for freedom, acknowledgement, and safety. It is those that are few and far in-between that ignite us to action and inspire us to be our best selves. Time and again we owe them debts more than we can repay. I am because we are.

"If I have been able to see further, it was only because I stood on the shoulders of giants."

-Sir Isaac Newton

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Chapter I.

Introduction

Through social platforms, digital representations of ourselves and the groups to which we subscribe have become important media for expressing our opinions and participating in society at large. The evolution of the public space has evolved to include the world wide web, and people around the world have assembled to become citizens of this new domain. In this thesis, I explore the concept of digital story telling through social media as a means of sparking participation in social movements. With a single post from a handheld device, it is possible today to spark outrage and action through access and virality. The focus of this exploration is on American Indigenous groups because of their long history of activism coupled with a lack of visibility in mainstream American media.

I will investigate how Native-American groups are leveraging social media platforms for visibility of social issues and any impacts this has on participation. My research question is large and encompassing of both usage of social media platforms and their effect. How is information technology being used to protect human rights, hold government accountable, and promote general social wellbeing? Are American indigenous tribes using social media to raise awareness of their pressing issues? Additionally, how has their digital presence affected the way they approach raising awareness? Have there been any shifts in public support, engagement, or access after starting their digital presence?

My hypothesis is that social movements originating from marginalized communities generate more exposure and public support by utilizing social media

platforms and tools. Social media have allowed for the creation of a shared narrative by the Native American community, helping to generate a larger pool of support for social issues through the unifying attributes of socially focused technologies. Native American activist groups with higher levels of social media visibility will likely see greater success in achieving higher public engagement and support than groups with lower levels of such visibility. These social media campaigns are also more likely to catalyze increased traditional news coverage from sources such as online publications and television news, increasing the public's awareness of these issues.

One indication that led me to this hypothesis was the case of the Dakota Access Pipeline, which initially received little to no traditional media coverage. It was through viral social media attraction that indigenous groups protesting its construction and legality were recognized more widely. That realization prompted me to look at other cases within the context of marginalized communities seeking validation and representation through non-traditional means. Causes such as #Occupy and Black Lives Matter also found support and stimulated mobilization through their social media engagement before receiving any other types of coverage.

Social media platforms are an avenue to creating more visibility to issues of great importance for indigenous communities, and similar to the Dakota Access Pipeline protest they could be catalysts for generating needed support from the larger North American community. Even when considering the lack of salience that exists within those communities, the Native American community is often invisible in social discourse.

In order to investigate this topic, I take a multipronged approach. After identifying a number of influential social media accounts that focus on issues in the Native American

community, digital posts will be sorted and categorized to compare engagement and support to the reach and frequency of traditional news media and online trends. Additionally, I will examine Native led social movements that have been sparked through, or amplified by, social media platforms. Case studies include protests at Standing Rock and the Line 3. Additional case studies from social media driven movements outside of the Native community will help to discern the pros and cons of this approach.

The importance social platforms play in the success of Native-American communities in creating social movements is not widely researched or understood. With the current speed at which information moves, and incorporation of social media into the lives of people from all demographics, it may be possible to develop tools and strategies that can be used toward these aims. The larger narrative around social justice and equity has often been dominated by discourse around Black and White populations in the United States; however, Native American groups are often overlooked in these conversations despite having a number of pressing issues regarding health, resource access, and land. It seemed only natural to focus my research there. Understanding why social movements happen and for whom can help societies potentially provide visibility or pathways to equity for marginalized groups of people.

Chapter II.

Background

Social Movements and Digital Activism

Social movements are defined by collective action towards a social goal, such as a change in values or organization.[1] Social movements have evolved to include peer-to-peer information technology which acts as a digital catalyst for creating and sustaining support for causes. Social media tools such as Twitter and Facebook allow groups that are affected by, or interested in, specific issues to connect and act on their inclinations.[2] A single shared message from a privately-operated account can generate the support of millions, generating socio-political and fiscal capital that can be leveraged toward some aim. All of this can happen in a hyper focused way, in real time, resulting in what is known as virality. In this case, virality refers to the rapid spread of information though peer-to-peer networks using information technology such as social media.[3] While social media enhances the probability of information having a viral effect within a society, it is also possible for virality to be caused by a combination of media broadcasts and information technology.

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[1] "Social Movement," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed May 14, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-movement.

[2] Matt DuPuis, "Social Movement Rhetoric and the Digital Shift" (M.A. thesis, DeKalb, Northern Illinois University, 2018), 3–5, http://search.proquest.com/docview/2102586306/abstract/E249D9B5B6A34954PQ/1.

[3] Sharad Goel et al., "The Structural Virality of Online Diffusion," *Management Science* 62, no. 1 (July 22, 2015): 180–96, https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2015.2158.

This new tactic has seen great success in bringing attention to causes without the support of traditional news media such as television and newspaper outlets. Because of its success, social media activism has been adopted by numerous groups in an attempt to resonate with a larger audience. The groups themselves run the gamut of ideology, class, and power; however, they all attempt to maximize the speed and access that social media affords them and their causes. For Native Americans, social media has become a tool that has allowed tribes and allies to bypass the gatekeepers of information in order to promote their ideologies and protect themselves.[4]

While not unique to the United States of America, many causes that have found support on social platforms have previously had little to no support from major media outlets. Reasons to circumvent traditional media channels could in part be related to limited media space, lack of visibility on the issue, or fear of a narrative painted by those outside the movements.[5] Large social movements that have focused on broad issues of race and class, such as Black Lives Matter and #Occupy, received little to no support before gaining attention via peer-to-peer networking through Twitter and Facebook. The lack of hierarchy surrounding the spread of information on these platforms has allowed for increased speed with regard to information sharing. Thus, social media can be a powerful tool for groups that have found it difficult to attract or maintain mainstream media coverage for their issues. #Occupy, for example, received little or no meaningful

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[4] Cutcha Risling Baldy, "The New Native Intellectualism: #ElizabethCook-Lynn, Social Media Movements, and the Millennial Native American Studies Scholar," *Wicazo Sa Review* 31, no. 1 (April 1, 2016): 90–110, https://doi.org/10.5749/wicazosareview.31.1.0090.

[5] Amber E. Boydstun, *Making the News: Politics, the Media, and Agenda Setting* (University of Chicago Press, 2013), 13.

media coverage prior to the influence of social media that increased the virality of the issue.[6] Deluca, Lawson, and Sun argued that the traditional news outlets gave trivial attention to the cause and its organizers, but later both increased coverage and prolonged the time the movement received press attention due to the magnification created by social media efforts. They also stressed that public attention and discourse related to causes like these are critical in shaping the ideas and perceptions of the public about movements in general. The increase in public support was highly related to enhanced visibility of the campaign.[7]

While social media has proved to be an equalizer for magnifying social issues, this has been especially true for minority groups that have used these tools to fight negative stereotypes and call attention to injustices that may have been invisible to others in the past. Social media activism has become a combination of powerful imagery and skillfully brief text that has sparked emotion and action of people.

Native American groups in the United States are both marginalized and largely invisible in the larger discourse of social equality. The effects of this constant state of obscurity are damaging both to Native American groups and to the wider public discourse regarding their status and wellbeing. Social representation of both identity and perspective of any group plays a role in that group's understanding of its own value and

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[6] Kevin M. Deluca, Sean Lawson, and Ye Sun, "Occupy Wall Street on the Public Screens of Social Media: The Many Framings of the Birth of a Protest Movement," *Communication, Culture & Critique* 5, no. 4 (2012): 483–509, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1753-9137.2012.01141.x.

[7] Deluca, Lawson, and Sun, 497–501.

potential.[8] This is also relevant to how other groups and society at large understand groups such as indigenous tribes. Accurate representations of marginalized groups in the media can play a positive and affirming role in progressing toward an equitable society.

Native groups have had less representation than most other groups in the United States, with much of that representation based on negative or antiquated stereotypes.[9] Native Americans have been defined broadly through association with sporting mascots and more commonly known tribes, such as the Sioux or Navajo, thereby twisting the narrative around the diversity of cultures and beliefs that exists amongst these groups.[10] This has in effect created a class of people who have struggled to progress in their public image due to misinformation and lack of visibility. Activism that utilizes new forms of social media has been, and can continue to be, useful in fostering a new awareness and dialogue that is both controlled and distributed by marginalized and largely invisible groups. As a result of outcries on Twitter, Native advocates like Jaqueline Keeler began receiving requests from the traditional media to have Native representatives come on their shows to address issues such as mascots themed in the image of indigenous people.[11] Native American groups now have an opportunity to create a new perspective and understanding for the greater community that can produce a net positive effect

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[8] Stephanie A. Fryberg and Sarah S. M. Townsend, "The Psychology of Invisibility," Decade of Behavior, 2008, 174–77, https://doi.org/10.1037/11681-010.

[9] Stephanie A. Fryberg and Sarah S. M. Townsend, "The Psychology of Invisibility." (American Psychological Association, 2008), 198, https://doi.org/10.1037/11681-010."

[10] Peter A. Leavitt et al., "'Frozen in Time': The Impact of Native American Media Representations on Identity and Self-Understanding," *Journal of Social Issues* 71, no. 1 (March 13, 2015): 39–53, https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12095.

[11] Baldy, "The New Native Intellectualism," 93–98.

toward progress on issues they are facing. Social media has helped create avenues for them to take control of the narrative.

Indigenous groups in the U.S. have an extensive and storied tradition of activism, fighting for access to resources, disputing ecological destruction, and resisting violations to their sovereignty. More recently they have also taken to social media to expose serious social impacts they are facing. Some of these include the harmful representation of Native tribes, the use of Native lands for corporate gain, and the disappearance of thousands of indigenous women.[12]

The largest success from the use of social platforms of a Native group to date was in the protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline. #NoDAPL. This pipeline was built as a means to carry oil from North Dakota to distribution centers in Illinois. Since it was planned to be built adjacent to the water supply of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, the tribe raised concerns about the effects any spills would have on their water supply as well as environmental impacts on the local ecology.[13] The construction of the pipeline also threatened the destruction of ancient burial grounds in the area.

During the physical protests, demonstrators wearing traditional garb were physically attacked by private security forces. One of the protesters explained that the

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[12] Lauren Cooper, "Native American Activism: 1960s to Present," Zinn Education Project, 2015, https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/native-american-activism-1960s-to-present/.

[13] Justin Worland, "How Activists Are Using Facebook Check-In to Help Dakota Access Pipeline Protesters," Time, October 31, 2016, https://time.com/4551866/facebook-dakota-access-pipeline-check-in/.

national narrative gave the security forces the feeling that their actions were justified.[14] The images from these violent actions toward the protesters were amplified by social media leading to a viral level of attention. The protest resonated with many people due to the unjust treatment of the Native American protesters. Additionally, the background of the protests drew in those who were worried about environmental and cultural conservation.[15]

While the protest only succeeded in the temporary delay of the construction of the pipeline, it was successful in garnering support from a number of seemingly disjointed sources and created a new paradigm for disadvantaged groups to publicize protests and gain attention. While there is disagreement in the social sciences about tactics such as these, there does appear to be merit in the ability of social media to increase visibility and by extension support.

Critics such as Malcolm Gladwell contend that the effects of digital activism are weak at best. He argued that for activism to be successful, there first must exist a strong social bond that ignites a group to action. These strong bonds act as symbols of consequence should the group fail at achieving its goal. Gladwell calls into question the strength of any bond that can be shared within a group that is loosely connected via a virtual space. Since there is very low risk and potentially nothing personal at stake for the online activists, participants may lose interest or never do more than like and share a post

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[14] Erika Larsen, "Meet the Native Americans on the Front Lines of a Historic Protest," September 23, 2016, https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2016/09/portraits-from-dakota-access-pipeline-protest/#close.

[15] Kate Hunt and Mike Gruszczynski, "The Influence of New and Traditional Media Coverage on Public Attention to Social Movements: The Case of the Dakota Access Pipeline Protests," *Information, Communication & Society*, September 24, 2019: 1–17, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2019.1670228.

for their own social networks.[16] Gladwell's argument also seems to suggest that online activism is a stand-alone approach rather than a tool that can work in tandem with other organization strategies.

Another critic of digital media use for activism, Evgeny Morozov, believes that this form of protest is lazy and detracts from traditional methods of activism. In his writing he refers to this type of activist effort as "slacktivism," stating that this method is for those who would prefer to risk nothing while also attempting to make overall social changes.[17] Henrik Christensen also asserted that digital activism was not successful at the time of his writing and that it was unlikely to work in the future. He cited claims that "slacktivists" did not achieve their goals and their efforts had no real effect on "real-life politics."[18]

Gladwell may be correct that social media ties are fragile, but that does not mean the movement is inconsequential for everyone involved. Also, there is an argument to be made that the social cause itself may create a social bond strong enough to allow a movement to mature and progress. Papacharissi and Blasiola's study of the Egyptian revolution, one of a series of uprisings in the Middle East known as the Arab Spring, demonstrated that the speed and success of protests was both fueled and accelerated by

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[16] Malcolm Gladwell, "Small Change," *New Yorker*, September 27, 2010, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/10/04/small-change-malcolm-gladwell.

[17] Evgeny Morozov, "The Brave New World of Slacktivism," *Foreign Policy* (blog), May 19, 2009, https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/05/19/the-brave-new-world-of-slacktivism/.

[18] Henrik Serup Christensen, "Political Activities on the Internet: 'Slacktivism' or Political Participation by Other Means?," *First Monday*, February 2, 2011, https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v16i2.3336.

social media tools such as Twitter and YouTube.[19] Social media alone was not a sole reason for the success of protesters, however it amplified the message to a greater audience, increasing dramatically the chances of gaining support more broadly.

The protesters in the case of Egypt and generally across the string of uprisings known as the Arab Spring would have had few or no personal ties yet were still successful in altering entire governments with the mobilization and voice that social media afforded them. Additionally, in the case of the Dakota Access Pipeline, Native protesters drew support from outside groups that may have not otherwise considered the impacts of the pipeline's construction. Similarly, #Occupy created a similar effect with social media generating thousands of protesters at sites across the country and millions of posts related to the support of the movement and message.[20]

Critics of social media as a tool for activism such as Christensen and Morozov argued that activists risked nothing and therefor achieved nothing in the process. While they were most likely correct that social media will not be a complete replacement for traditional tactics of activism, it can still play an important role in the process of amplifying a movement's potential. [21]

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[19] Zizi Papacharissi and Stacy Blasiola, "Structures of Feeling, Storytelling, and Social Media: The Case of #Egypt," 2016, 211–19, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315716299-15.

[20] Deluca, Lawson, and Sun, "Occupy Wall Street."

[21] Christensen, "Political Activities on the Internet."

Making the Case: Modern Social Media Movements as a Consideration

Modern technology coupled with social media platforms have made it possible to capture and share information easily and spread it around the world in a matter of seconds. Moments that previously would have not had any evidence other than eyewitnesses now are recorded in high definition and shared with very little burden, disseminated instantaneously and accessible globally. While there are hundreds of cases for the use of this type of information sharing, grassroots organizing that typically relied on peer to peer transmission may have the most to gain. Social movements can now be started without the help of mainstream media outlets or political speeches, but rather through a 2-minute clip shared to Facebook exposing some injustice. Social media has played a key role as a tool supporting major protests in recent history, facilitating and enhancing the effects of the movement. Black Lives Matter, the Arab Spring, and the Occupy protests are examples from a growing pool of social media driven movements, and all grabbed the world's attention by maximizing the potential of social media to spread awareness and increase support for their distinct messages.

The Arab Spring

The Arab Spring movement was a series of demonstrations beginning in 2010 in which people protested oppressive behaviors from their respective governments. These protests began in Tunisia, eventually spreading to Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and

Bahrain.[22] The initial spark that led to this revolution was provided by a Tunisian fruit vendor who set himself aflame outside the capital building in protest of his treatment by authorities.[23] The resulting protests received social media attention that would later fuel movements throughout the region, each with its own course of action. For example, in the case of #Egypt, protests led to social upheaval and eventually the removal of their President who had held office for 30 years.

Unsurprisingly, the governments under protest tried to reduce the impact of these social uprisings by targeting social media in hopes of reducing the ability of protesters to relay information. In multiple countries such as Iran, sites such as Twitter and Facebook were shut down or blocked so that individuals would not be able to discuss upcoming demonstrations. Iranian citizens may have had the will to participate in the Arab Spring movement. They were, however, effectively immobilized by the government's ability to block access to social networking applications.[24] This constrained their ability to plan, arrange, and proceed with a protest. Government efforts to reduce communication through social media coupled with violent responses to protests ultimately reduced the overall size and scope of the movements in many cases.

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[22] Papacharissi and Blasiola, "Structures of Feeling, Storytelling, and Social Media," 213–14.

[23] Filipe R. Campante and Davin Chor, "Why Was the Arab World Poised for Revolution?: Schooling, Economic Opportunities, and the Arab Spring," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 26, no. 2 (2012): 167–87, https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.26.2.167.

[24] Lidija Spasojevic, "Social Media as a Tool for Political Change: The Uprising in Iran (2009) and Egypt (2011)," April 7, 2017, 3–7, https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/33826164.

Social media played a prominent role in filtering information amongst protesters during the Arab Spring. It did not take long for government officials to become aware that protesters had been using social media sites in order to organize their actions, spread information and raise global awareness about what was going on. The response to the use of these tools varied by region. A few agencies used social media to discuss issues with their populations, hoping to spur conversations and peaceful resolutions. Conversely, many states hoping to stem anti-government protests decided to monitor internet use and block access to specific sites. The most extreme example of this was the Egyptian government, which responded to the uprising by completely cutting off internet access in order to cut communication and information sharing to a minimum. This had a significant impact on Egyptian citizens, as a large population utilized social platforms. [25]

However, the imposed restrictions did not completely stop the protests. For example, even though Egypt completely closed off people's access to the internet, the demonstrations did not stop. Instead, they became bigger and more determined. The government's actions further reinforced the beliefs of protesters that the Egyptian government was oppressive. While social media may have been a key tool in catalyzing the movement, it is clear that it is not the only factor to consider as the momentum continued even with its removal.

Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter were tools used to accelerate social change in the events that make up the movements now known as the Arab Spring. Communities in Arab countries became connected with the help of social

[25] Spasojevic, 33–34.

media which helped to mobilize protests and encourage discourse from the ground up.[26] Social media tools are important considerations when analyzing the significant impacts of the Arab Spring movement and cannot be dismissed as a potentially powerful instrument to foster agency and promote social change.

#Occupy

The Occupy movement followed the Arab spring in 2011, and used the lessons learned to amplify its messaging and reach. The first #Occupy protest was called Occupy Wall Street (#OccupyWallstreet), which took place in New York City in 2011. In just one month, #Occupy protests had occurred in over 82 countries around the world.[27] The name came from the idea of making wealth inequality more visible by occupying the spaces around the Wallstreet Financial District in New York, which to the movement symbolized the wealth gap. It grew from #OccupyWallstreet to #Occupy as people around the country started to participate outside of New York. The protests sought to raise awareness about social and economic inequality around the world, redefining the social discourse of capitalism and democracy. The movement used the slogan "We are the 99%" in order to highlight that the majority of people are not extremely wealthy and do not have access to resources in the same way as do billionaires, or the top 1%.[28] The

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[26] Papacharissi and Blasiola, "Structures of Feeling, Storytelling, and Social Media," 216–19.

[27] Jeffrey S. Juris, "Reflections on #Occupy Everywhere: Social Media, Public Space, and Emerging Logics of Aggregation," *American Ethnologist* 39, no. 2 (May 8, 2012): 262, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2012.01362.x.

[28] Juris, 259.

#Occupy movement was inspired by part of the Arab Spring movement, describing the democratic awakening that people experienced and the refusal to put up with injustice any longer. Social media were used throughout the #Occupy movement to find support from people around the world.

The movement started with Occupy Wall Street but spread around the world in the span of a month.[29] These results are not likely to occur without the help of tools like social media, as organization with that level of speed and urgency is extremely difficult. The message of the Occupy movement resonated with people who were otherwise disconnected from one another and fueled nationwide mobilization of people. Social media can provide a platform for people to voice their opinions, share experiences, and draw attention to their causes. Web 2.0 applications such as social media tools perpetuate a continuous cycle of information sharing and therefor encourage social participation.[30] However, unlike the Arab Spring, governments did not respond to Occupy by blocking or reducing access to the internet or social platforms, introducing another factor in the use and success of social media tools. The case of the Arab Spring indicates that protests may have continued or been amplified, however that is not clear.

Black Lives Matter

More recently in 2020, the video recording of the death of George Floyd initiated a wave of protests throughout the United States, even sparking protests in Europe as well.

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[29] Deluca, Lawson, and Sun, "Occupy Wall Street on the Public Screens of Social Media," 484.

[30] Deluca, Lawson, and Sun, 501.

A 17-year-old passerby recorded Floyd's death at the hands of the police and shared the video via social media.[31] Similar to other cases, the video went viral and received significant social media attention prior to receiving prominent national media attention.

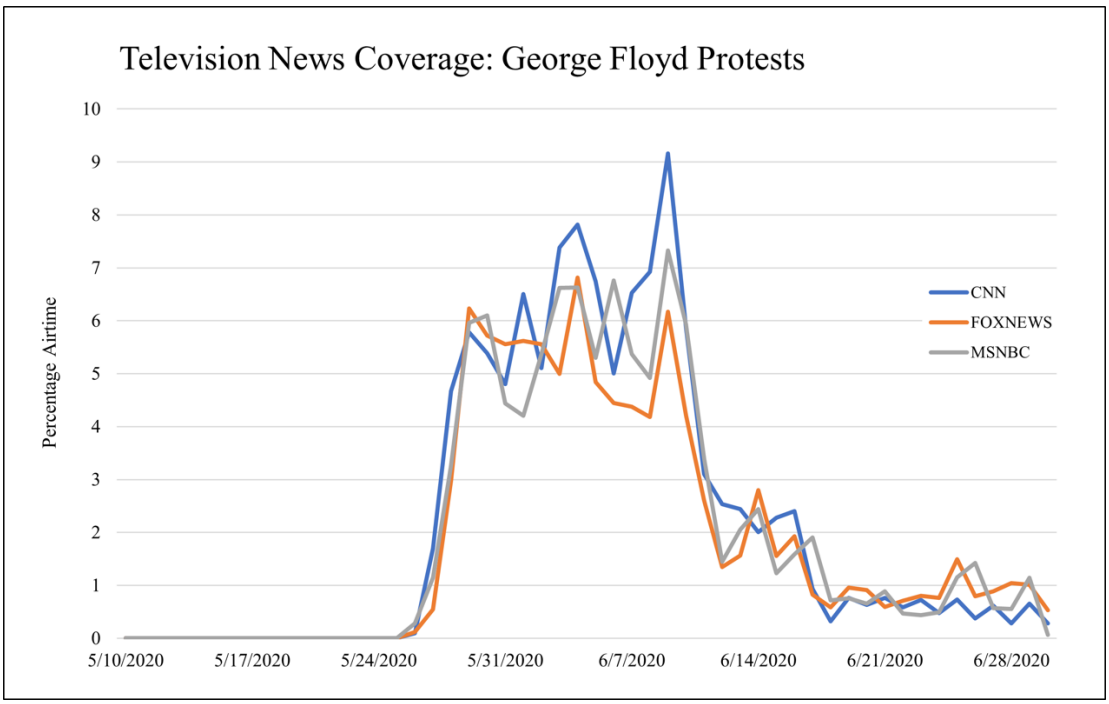


Figure 1. News media mentions: George Floyd

Television network coverage of George Floyd during peak protests and coverage, GDELT Television Explorer.

[31] Larry Buchanan, Quoctrung Bui, and Jugal K. Patel, "Black Lives Matter May Be the Largest Movement in U.S. History," *The New York Times*, July 3, 2020, sec. U.S., https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/03/us/george-floyd-protests-crowd-size.html.

Throughout the Black Lives Matter (#BLM) movement, video and eyewitness accounts that were shared via social media have exposed the reality of excessive use of force and misconduct at the hands of the state.[32] In the case of George Floyd, the video that was shared through social media channels shaped the national narrative around the case, prompted communities to protest, and even played a vital role in the conviction of one of the responsible parties.[33] The video was shared to Facebook on May 25th shortly after its recording, and went viral immediately after.[34] Following the viral video it took several days for national media to pick up the story and another two weeks before reaching its peak coverage. (Figure 1) It is currently estimated that the protests over George Floyd's death generated the largest movement in United States history, with anywhere from 6-10% of the overall population having participated. Social media served as a sounding horn that mobilized between 15 to 26 million people to physically participate in protests in over 500 locations in the U.S.[35] While the Black community has

[32] Alexander H. Updegrove et al., "Red States and Black Lives: Applying the Racial Threat Hypothesis to the Black Lives Matter Movement," *Justice Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2020): 85–108, https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2018.1516797.

[33] Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs and Marie Fazio, "Darnella Frazier Captured George Floyd's Death on Her Cellphone. The Teenager's Video Shaped the Chauvin Trial.," *The New York Times*, April 20, 2021, sec. U.S., https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/20/us/darnella-frazier-video.html.

[34] Meredith Deliso, "Timeline: The Impact of George Floyd's Death in Minneapolis and Beyond," ABC News, April 21, 2021, https://abcnews.go.com/US/timeline-impact-george-floyds-death-minneapolis/story?id=70999322.

[35] Buchanan, Bui, and Patel, "Black Lives Matter May Be the Largest Movement in U.S. History."

carried on the fight for racial justice for generations, the #BLM movement has enhanced the overall reach of this message through social media.

Technology has provided a new way to protest and has enhanced the effectiveness of movements around the world. Black Lives Matter was shared around the world in days. The Arab Spring raised awareness about issues in the Arab nations and the oppression of their governments. #Occupy emphasized that social media can also be used in a positive light in order to work together as a large group of people. Social media have been a primary component in recent social movements, proving they are a tool worth utilizing for any group that has a message to share with a larger audience. Black Lives Matter, the Arab Spring, and the Occupy protests incorporated social media into their movements so that they could spread awareness and make global progress.

Fighting Invisibility: A History of Native American Activism in North America

Native American activism in the US has a long history that covers a broad set of tactics and time periods. Resistance has been a common action and value amongst vastly different tribes across the county. From the perspective of indigenous groups, the preservation of their cultures, languages, and homes relies on their ability to resist outside pressures from the broader American society. Government policy and American society in general have largely operated with an 'out of sight, out of mind' approach. National representation of Indigenous cultures has been largely limited and contributes to a level of invisibility. The most prominent Native representation relates to sport mascots and negative stereotypes. Narratives surrounding marginalized minority communities are

controlled by the group that possesses the most power and influence.[36] Native American tribes and lands can fall victim to this sort operational framework as 'out of sight' can also mean a lack of political power.

Indigenous activism may exist at all points of the spectrum, but its content always has a familiar tone and focus. The common themes usually touch on the following demands:

1. Sovereignty of Native peoples and lands
2. Environmental protections from corporate/government interests
3. Federal assistance for indigenous social programs

The first Pan-American Indian group formed in the United States was the Society of American Indians (SAI) and was comprised of working professionals who wanted to develop a unified Native voice.[37] The organization would lobby on behalf of all tribes, leveraging the size and scope of the group. The SAI made some significant contributions toward the advancement of Natives in the United States. One of its principal achievements happened post-World War I when the group helped persuade Congress to grant citizenship to all Native American Indians. Ultimately this effort would be a central

[36] Fryberg and Townsend, "The Psychology of Invisibility.," 194.

[37] Doug Keil, "Rebuilding Indigenous Nations," Expedition Magazine - Penn Museum, 2013, https://www.penn.museum/sites/expedition/rebuilding-indigenous-nations-native-american-activism-and-the-long-red-power-movement/; Steven Sabol, "In Search of Citizenship: The Society of American Indians and the First World War," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 118, no. 2 (2017): 268–71, https://doi.org/10.5403/oregonhistq.118.2.0268.

factor in the failure of this association, as there was significant disagreement amongst the group's leadership about citizenship and what it meant for tribal sovereignty.

Founded in 1911, SAI survived only ten years, disbanding in 1923 due to infighting and inadequate resources. While the organization did not withstand the test of time, it did create a precedent for other organizations, Native or otherwise, to establish national associations to address local needs.[38]

The Society of American Indians would later be followed by The National Council of American Indians (NCAI) in 1944. The NCAI is now the oldest national indigenous organization in the United States.

In the 1960s and 70s, Indigenous Activism would be categorized as the Red Power Movement. Organizations such as the National Indian Youth Council and American Indian Movement (AIM) would take large steps distinct from those used by their predecessors who had focused on the lobbying and establishing political relationships with lawmakers. These groups, made up mostly of a younger generation, focused on direct action rather than diplomacy.[39] The tactics of AIM and the Indian Youth Council reflected the larger context of the Civil Rights Era, relying on the use of civil disobedience, and even at one point an armed standoff.

In 1969, Indigenous protesters occupied Alcatraz Island for 19 months. Their goal was to reclaim the island for indigenous use, and secure funding for a cultural complex

[38] Keil, "Rebuilding Indigenous Nations."

[39] Keil.

and university.[40] Calling themselves 'Indians of All Tribes,' their occupation of Alcatraz did not ultimately succeed in its demands; however, it did influence future occupations, setting a standard for indigenous acts of resistance.[41]

Following the occupation of Alcatraz there were more than a dozen notable indigenous-led events that would receive national attention. These include the occupation of Mount Rushmore, Plymouth Rock, Wounded Knee, and the Bonneville Power Administration headquarters.[42] Many of these would end in success, including a major initiative in 2011 to block the construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline. The pipeline was designed to transport billions of barrels of tar sands oil from Canada to Texas, with routes through Native American territories in the United States. Opponents of the pipeline indicated the substantial environmental risk it posed to ecosystems across the country.[43] The Pipeline's construction was halted by the Obama Administration due to pressure from activists across the country. Indigenous activists were key in leading demonstrations and spreading awareness about the pipeline's potential effects.

Similar to Keystone, the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) was proposed as a cheaper method of transporting crude oil from its source in North Dakota to a processing plant in Illinois. The project would transport a half-million barrels of fracked oil per day

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[40] Cooper, "Native American Activism."

[41] Keil, "Rebuilding Indigenous Nations"; Dean Chavers, "Alcatraz Is Not an Island," *World Literature Today* 93, no. 4 (October 1, 2019): 61–64.

[42] Cooper, "Native American Activism"; Chavers, "Alcatraz Is Not an Island."

[43] Melissa Denchak, "What Is the Keystone XL Pipeline?," NRDC, January 20, 2021, https://www.nrdc.org/stories/what-keystone-pipeline.

between these locations. The proposed route passed through Native territories as well as several of the largest fresh water sources in the country.[44] Indigenous protesters claimed that the project violated treaties that protected indigenous land from culturally destructive construction, as well as environmental protections meant to impose caution and increase research and visibility for such an undertaking.[45] The pipeline could potentially contaminate the reservation's water aquifers and disturb culturally significant sites still being studied. Ecological conservationists, historians, and archeologists alike joined the opposition of the pipeline, even petitioning the White House to take action.[46]

In order to protest the construction, the Standing Rock Camp was formed by members of the Sioux nation. This encampment would eventually grow to include members from over 200 tribes as well as non-natives. The Dakota Access Pipeline protests received national attention and a wide range of supporters.[47] The protesters earned an early victory, as the Obama administration halted the construction of the pipeline and ordered a new route to be developed. However, upon the transition to the Trump administration, construction was re-approved and expedited. The pipeline is

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[44] Cooper, "Native American Activism."

[45] "Dakota Access Pipeline," Sacred Stone Camp - Iŋyaŋ Wakháŋagapi Othí, 2016, http://sacredstonecamp.org/dakota-access-pipeline/.

[46] Larsen, "Meet the Native Americans on the Front Lines of a Historic Protest."

[47] Stephanie Woodard, "YES! Magazine Special Report: The Spirit of Standing Rock on the Move," YES! Magazine, 2017, http://reports.yesmagazine.org/spirit-of-standing-rock/index.html.

currently in operation and is still the subject of legal battles between the Sioux and the owner, Energy Transfer Partners.[48]

Since the late 1960s, Indigenous led resistance has incorporated an element of occupation in order to simultaneously draw attention to a cause, and physically impede progress on a project. The opposition to DAPL had an additional element that helped amplify the cause: social media.

[48] Jacey Fortin and Lisa Friedman, "Dakota Access Pipeline to Shut Down Pending Review, Federal Judge Rules," *The New York Times*, July 6, 2020, sec. U.S., https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/06/us/dakota-access-pipeline.html.

Chapter III.

Research and Methods

This study takes a quantitative and qualitative approach to understanding the connection between social media's influence and relationship to engagement and support from a broader public. The study considers the effects of multiple Native American social media influencer accounts in their attempts to garner public attention and support for social causes related to the North American Indigenous community. The study will measure public attention over a two-year period, 2019 to 2021, generated in part by the identified accounts in an effort to discern a relationship between social media activism and levels of public engagement and support. Public engagement, as measured by physical protests, will also be measured within that timeframe based on available data.

Support and engagement were measured through a combination of reach and public engagement. The GDELT Television Explorer API was used to determine the number and timeframe of mentions in television news and online articles that a cause received over the study period. The GDELT Explorer is a tool that can search for keywords and phrases stored in the Television and Online News Archives. It can identify the number of mentions over a requested time period from major television news networks in the United States, as well as online news outlets.[49] Television news plays an intricate role in the broader public's view of a social issue, often framing the issue for the viewers in ways that can be either favorable or antagonistic to a social movement. This is

[49] "The New Television Explorer Launches! – The GDELT Project," accessed July 20, 2021, https://blog.gdeltproject.org/the-new-television-explorer-launches/.

especially true of Native American communities that have struggled with the contextualization of their social movements by traditional news media.[50] News outlet data will be compared to the number of social media posts from influencer profiles related to the cause over that period of time to determine a positive or negative relationship with more general public support and consciousness.

Google Trends data and news mentions will be compiled to determine public interest over that time. Google Trends is a tool offered by Google that allows the public to see the popularity of a given web search over a specified interval of time.[51] It is not able to identify what reason a person have for searching for information on a topic, but for the purpose of the study it will indicate the popularity of the selected social causes through Google searches over a period of time. Since over 80% of search engine usage in North America utilizes Google Search, Google Trends is a highly accurate representation of digital trends.[52]

As Hashtags are used across all four social media sites, the total number of mentions will be used to estimate the overall reach of a message, and then compared to

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[50] Tim Baylor, "Media Framing of Movement Protest: The Case of American Indian Protest," *The Social Science Journal (Fort Collins)* 33, no. 3 (1996): 241–55, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0362-3319(96)90021-X.

[51] "FAQ about Google Trends Data - Trends Help," accessed July 20, 2021, https://support.google.com/trends/answer/4365533?hl=en.

[52] Dave Davies, "Meet the 7 Most Popular Search Engines in the World," Search Engine Journal, March 3, 2021, https://www.searchenginejournal.com/seo-101/meet-search-engines/; "Desktop Search Engine Market Share North America," StatCounter Global Stats, accessed July 20, 2021, https://gs.statcounter.com/search-engine-market-share/desktop/north-america.

the amount of public engagement with the topic. Hashtags are an organization method that groups user posts to a web platform with similar content into categories. Most social platforms use and organize hosted content this way.[53] Hashtags allow social media users to seek out content in order to engage with it, and for marginalized groups this affords the opportunity to disrupt popular narratives.

Twitter will be the primary source of data due to data privacy enforced by the other larger platforms. Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram are the top three platforms accessed by adults in 2019.[54] Twitter comes in 7th place with 22% of U.S. adults utilizing it, but it is also considered a hub of political speech. Since this study is focusing on social movements, this emphasis on Twitter is suitable as it is viewed by many scholars as the Web 2.0 revitalization point for political discourse and debate.[55] Major social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube also use Hashtags, allowing for interconnections between posts and causes. This means that data collected from Twitter will likely be amplified with the inclusion of post metrics from the other platforms.

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[53] Janna Joceli Omena, Elaine Teixeira Rabello, and André Goes Mintz, "Digital Methods for Hashtag Engagement Research," *Social Media + Society* 6, no. 3 (July 1, 2020): 2–3, https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120940697.

[54] Andrew Perrin and Monica Anderson, "Share of U.S. Adults Using Social Media, Including Facebook, Is Mostly Unchanged since 2018," *Pew Research Center* (blog), April 10, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/10/share-of-u-s-adults-using-social-media-including-facebook-is-mostly-unchanged-since-2018/.

[55] Gwen Bouvier and Judith E. Rosenbaum, *Twitter, the Public Sphere, and the Chaos of Online Deliberation* (Springer International Publishing AG, 2020), 2–7, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/harvard-ebooks/detail.action?docID=6274747.

To track the potential impact of social media on the broader public, several steps were taken. The first step was to identify social media super-users based on the following criteria:

1. Social media accounts selected for study must focus on promoting awareness of, and action toward, Native American social issues. Posts submitted and shared on the selected social platforms are used to determine if an account meets this criterion. A 'post' can consist of video, audio, photography, art, and informational materials such as flyers. These types of submissions must be consistent over the lifespan of the selected account.
2. Accounts must have substantial public reach, that is 10,000 or more subscribers/followers, through one or more of their connected social media profiles. Public profiles and large followings are important considerations for the speed at which information travels and can play a role in the virality of information.

The accounts identified and selected were curated with the aforementioned criteria and can be found in Table 1 (Appendix A).

In order to monitor and maintain interactions with the chosen accounts, an additional researcher account was developed and kept separate from any personal accounts. Although studying human activity online can be done anonymously by social scientists, it should still maintain a level of objectivity wherever possible. The research focused account subscribed to no accounts and remained private in order not to not allow for any random followers. Additionally, the account made no posts, and did not engage intentionally with any other user or post, other than viewing material for data collection.

Once a list of influential Twitter accounts was created, their posts were downloaded using a free tool called Vicinitas.[56] This web-based platform allows for limited Twitter user tracking. The last 3,200 tweets can be downloaded for any public Twitter profile, and up to 2,000 tweets cataloged by Hashtag. Each site both utilizes Twitter and has a focus on increasing awareness of Native issues and events in North America.

Influencer accounts can become amplifiers and diffusers of information, relaying more localized news to a broader audience to seek support or opposition. Selected profiles/sites are considered high visibility actors due to their large reach. They are centralized hubs for the sharing of content. An influencer account that distributes content related to its viewpoints can be compared to a cable news network that redistributes stories that are generated from local news outlets. A list of the selected social media profiles, and their associated platforms and reach can be found in Table 1 in Appendix A.

[56] "Vicinitas : Twitter Analytics Tool for Tracking Hashtags, Keywords, and Accounts," accessed July 11, 2021, https://www.vicinitas.io/.

Measurements

The identified accounts that met the criteria and are publicly available were mined for Twitter posts. Using the Vicinitas tool, up to 3,200 tweets were collected per influencer account. These posts were used for two points of measurement. The first was the identification of current social movements that could be used for this study. Because of a lack of access to Twitter historical data, it was important that causes were recent and active. The data collected from social media influencers resulted in close to 27,000 tweets which were then mined for Hashtag related causes. These posts were used to track the timing and intensity of social media attention related to each topic. Since Hashtags are used to organize similar ideas on social platforms it is important to use causes that utilize them to make it possible for this study to analyze the reach and effect of the associated posts. In order to source Hashtags from the dataset a social media analysis tool called Graphext was used. [57] This is a free web-based application that can be used for data visualization, trend analysis, and text extraction. Graphext can analyze social media datasets to identify Hashtags from text and indicate the number of times they are used. The tool identified over 1,000 Hashtags, many of which were used sparsely or were not related to a social issue. From this list three Hashtag related indigenous causes were chosen to study based on both the frequency of use and the number of profiles that chose to promote them.

The three Hashtags chosen were #LandBack, #StopLine3, and #NoDAPL. The first two are ongoing causes that are more recent and active than the third. #NoDAPL is

[57] "Graphext - Data Science for Business," accessed July 11, 2021, https://www.graphext.com/.

related to the opposition of the Dakota Access Pipeline and a good reference point to review since the related movement is considered in this study as highly effective. Additionally, despite its age, the Hashtag usage of #NoDAPL amongst the users in this study was in the top 3% of Hashtags used in all the collected posts. The topics were used to narrow the scope of the research, reducing the overall number of posts and the engagement associated with them. The Hashtags and the projected influence beyond the influencer accounts was measured using Vicinitas. By downloading up to 2,000 posts categorized by each Hashtag, the total potential influence using the follower counts was calculated. These posts are a separate and random sample of data used to measure the general influence of the issue on social media by random users. This data is limited by the tool up to 2,000 posts within 10 days of the execution of the search. While this does limit the extent of data available for research purposes, it allows for a recent measure of social media influence for each topic. These data can be found on Table 2 in Appendix A.

Once the topics were selected, the collected influencer tweets were organized using the Hashtags and used as data points over time that could be compared to public interests and media coverage related to the topic. The number of tweets from these accounts were plotted against search engine trends and media coverage to determine the existence and strength of a relationship. The ability to control elements of the outflow of information related to a cause should have a positive relationship with increased public attention. Control of the narrative combined with increased attention can be leveraged into social support for the cause.

The influence of Twitter and social media to increase public engagement will be measured using protests related to each cause. Protest data were collected from the

Crowd Counting Consortium and the Count Love Project. The Count Love tool uses web crawlers that search news sites and social media on a daily basis for information related to protests.[58] These data are then compiled and available for public consumption in a limited capacity. The Crown Counting Consortium takes the data in partnership from Count Love and other publicly available reports related to politically motivated crowds and stores them. Those data are available in a raw format that includes information about the event and sources.[59] Protest data from the last 2 years were collected for this study and sorted based on the relevant topics. Twitter posts were compared to the number of protests during a given time to determine if a relationship exists.

[58] "Count Love: Protests for a Kinder World.," Count Love, accessed July 22, 2021, https://countlove.org/faq.html.

[59] "Crowd Counting Consortium (CCC) - About," accessed July 22, 2021, https://sites.google.com/view/crowdcountingconsortium/about.

Limitations

An outside limitation to social media research is access to social media raw data due to prohibitive costs. The most popular social media platforms impose costs for accessing large quantities of raw data for research purposes. Twitter has remained largely accessible although it also has paywall limitations. Since data from the two largest social media entities, Facebook and Instagram, are not easily available, the scope of this study is reduced, however not insignificant. It is not clear that the number of members active on a social platform is relevant to the speed of transmission or societal support a social movement may receive.

Additionally, I am limited in the amount of Twitter posts I can collect using free software. While the 3,200 posts per profile allows for a robust sample from the selected influencer accounts, the 2,000-post limitation for Hashtags is very restrictive as there may be hundreds of thousands to millions of posts. This limited number of Hashtag related posts will still allow for a sample analysis that can be used to determine the potential reach of a topic to the greater public as users have a circle of influence numbered in the millions. If there is a difference in attention or support for a cause, there may be a difference in the total potential audience.

Due to Covid-19 and social restrictions there may have been a decrease in physical protests during the time period of this study, which could impact the amount of visible social movements. Conversely it could also serve to enhance both the importance and results of the study.

Chapter IV

Social Media and Social Movements: Generate Attention then Support

As of 2021, social media has become a normalized part of the social experience. According to the Pew Research Center, more than 70% of people in the United States utilize some form of social media, with the number increasing to 80% among people 50 and younger.[60] This means that information can be shared potentially with millions of people with just a smart device, an internet connection, and a free social media account. For social movements that may have difficulty spreading their message through traditional media this has the potential to draw more people to support, or potentially oppose, social issues they find vital. In this chapter we will explore possible connections between Twitter exposure and the attention/engagement an issue has received over the past few years.

#NoDAPL: One Million Check-ins

No Dakota Access Pipeline (#NoDAPL) was a central messaging point for the social media campaign against the Dakota Access Pipeline construction. This hashtag campaign was organized by indigenous youth to gather support for, and raise awareness of, their protest.

[60] "Demographics of Social Media Users and Adoption in the United States," Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech, April 7, 2021, https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/social-media/.

The social media campaign started in March of 2016 with the hashtag #ReZpectOurWater, relating to the land and water rights of Native American reservations. Following the permitting of the original pipeline route the developers altered their plans, rerouting the pipeline through Native lands and water sources. [61] The Standing Rock protests became the largest gathering of Native Americans in the United States in 100 years and were largely driven by social media campaigns.[62] Hashtags across Facebook and Instagram, such as #WaterIsLife and #NoDAPL, received significant attention on those platforms.

In September of 2016, tensions between protesters and private security reached a violent tipping point. In an effort to clear the Standing Rock camp to allow for construction efforts to continue, security forces released dogs and pepper-sprayed protesters. [63] Indigenous protesters took to their phones to record what took place and shared videos across their social media platforms. Images of protesters being pepper sprayed and attacked by security dogs went viral, elevating the protests in the American consciousness.

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[61] #MoveMe, "#MoveMe - A Guide to Social Movements and Social Media," #MoveMe, December 4, 2017, https://moveme.berkeley.edu/.

[62] C Northcott, "Life in the Native American Oil Protest Camps," *BBC News*, September 2, 2016, sec. US & Canada, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-37249617.

[63] Alan Taylor, "Tempers Flare During Protest Against the Dakota Access Pipeline - The Atlantic," September 6, 2016, https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2016/09/tempers-flare-during-protest-against-the-dakota-access-pipeline/498809/.

Previously, national media mentions of the anti-pipeline protests had been few to nonexistent. In the months September-November 2016, however, the American news media began to focus on the pipeline construction with many emphasizing the social media attention the protests were receiving (Figure 2). Attention reached an all-time high that November as public attention on social platforms peaked.

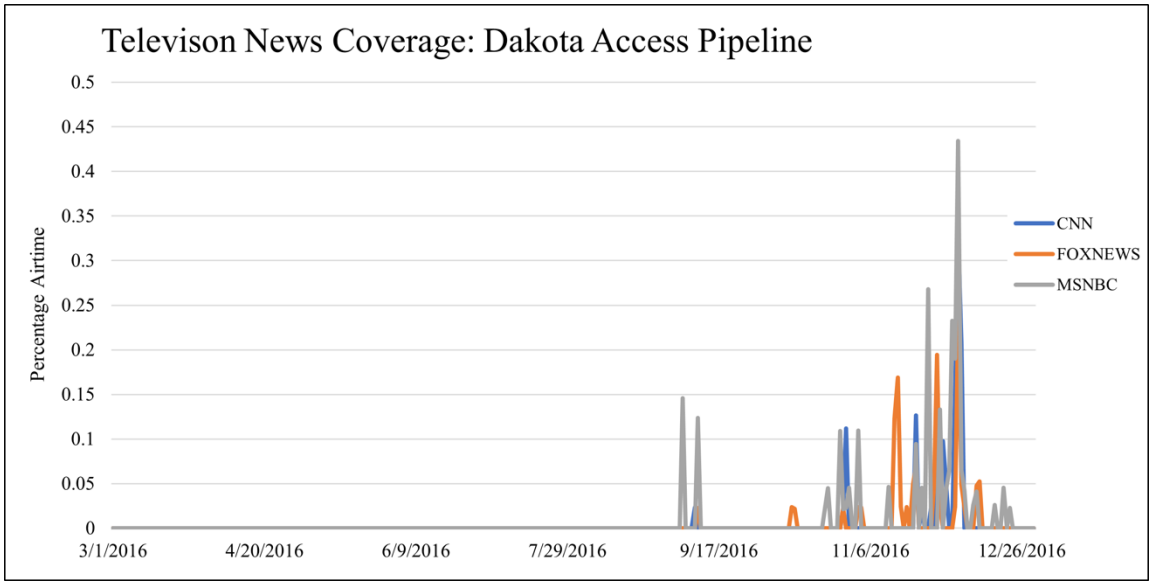


Figure 2. News media mentions: Dakota Access Pipeline (2016)

Television network coverage of Dakota Access Pipeline during peak protests and coverage, GDELT Television Explorer.

In November, following a mass arrest of protesters by local authorities, a rumor began to circulate that police were using the Facebook Check-In feature to track Standing Rock protesters. This feature allows Facebook users to demonstrate to other users that they are in a specific event location or taking part in a social gathering. If this rumor was true, it meant that government officials could themselves use social media to target protesters for arrests. The Morton County Sheriff's office later denied the claims, but the

rumor went viral and led to a massive overnight following of the protests in Standing Rock. In a matter of a few days the number of Facebook Check-ins grew from 140,000, a number that had already increased substantially since March, to 1.5 million.[64] This effort sought to make it impossible, or very difficult, for law enforcement to target protesters using social media.

Following this Facebook Check-in episode, another viral video emerged on social media channels. The video showed a journalist, Erin Schrode, getting shot with a rubber bullet by police while conducting a video interview of protesters.[65] Law enforcement denied responsibility for the incident. The video, like others from the protest, received a viral reception from social media channels. Between Facebook and Twitter, the video was shared from the primary channel over 65,000 times, received over 2 million views, and thousands more interactions and comments.[66] Viral moments like these catapulted the movement into the American consciousness. The ease of access for the transmission of information and ideas combined with the virality of the content being shared vastly

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[64] Merrit Kennedy, "More Than 1 Million 'Check In' On Facebook To Support The Standing Rock Sioux," NPR.org, November 1, 2016, https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/11/01/500268879/more-than-a-million-check-in-on-facebook-to-support-the-standing-rock-sioux.

[65] Hilary Hanson, "Pipeline Protest Reporter Shot With Rubber Bullet Mid-Interview, She Says," HuffPost, November 4, 2016, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/erin-schrode-pipeline-shot-standing-rock_n_581bb038e4b0e80b02c8d81f.

[66] Erin Schrode, "Erin Schrode, NoDAPL Protest," Facebook, November 3, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/erinschrode/videos/vb.1064550072/10209534018401713/?type=2&theater&xid=17259%2C15700023%2C15700043%2C15700186%2C15700190%2C15700248%2C15700253.

expanded the reach of a movement taking place in a small and remote encampment in a field outside of a construction site.

In the age of instant transmission of ideas, social media has become a tool for the unseen and unheard. Prior to the salience afforded through social media platforms, the #NoDAPL protests received little to no media attention and had almost no following outside of the Native American community. Through social platforms awareness of and attention to the issue grew exponentially and gained a vastly broader viewership as national media/mainstream media was forced to pick up and increase coverage, all fueled through viral social posts.

After these protests garnered public attention, the Obama administration halted construction of the pipeline. This victory was short lived, though, as less than a year later Trump assumed office and signed an Executive Order allowing for the construction to continue. The pipeline was shut down briefly in 2020 by order of a federal judge.[67] In June 2021 requests to permanently shut down the pipeline for environmental concerns was denied, allowing for its continued operation.[68]

While #NoDAPL likely experienced its peak attention and engagement in 2016, it is still an actively used hashtag amongst Twitter users. The 2,000-tweet sample gathered

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[67] Fortin and Friedman, "Dakota Access Pipeline to Shut Down Pending Review, Federal Judge Rules."

[68] Laila Kearney and Devika Kumar, "Federal Court Closes Dakota Access Case, but Allows for Fresh Challenges," *Reuters*, June 22, 2021, sec. Energy, https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/federal-court-closes-dakota-access-case-allows-fresh-challenges-2021-06-22/.

from Vicinitas had a total follower reach of 1.06 million Twitter users between June 22 and June 30, 2021. The Standing Rock Sioux continue to mount efforts in opposition of the pipeline and work to gather public attention and support for the cause.

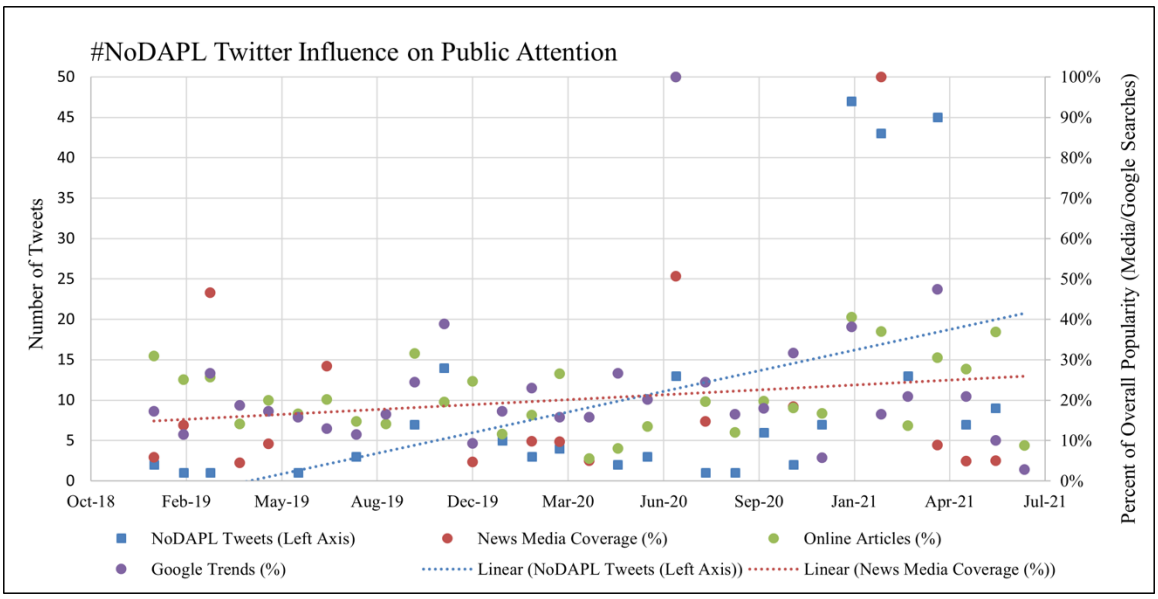


Figure 3. Twitter influencer posts compared to news coverage and web searches: Dakota Access Pipeline.

Public attention to Native American opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline from 2019 to 2021, GDELT Television Explorer, Google Trends.

Twitter, Google Trends, and media related coverage data were organized by month in order to compare public attention to #NoDAPL and tweets from the selected influencer accounts. News coverage and search trends were organized by the percent of popularity over the timeframe of study (right vertical axis) and the total tweets per month are also plotted (left vertical axis) to compare the two figures (Figure 3). In the last two

years the peak of television news coverage aligned with the peaks of related tweets from the accounts. Tweets reached a two year high in January 2021, coinciding with the swearing in of Joe Biden as President of the United States. News coverage the following month reached a two-year high related to the pipeline activism.

A Pearson's *r* analysis of coverage compared to tweets (n = 240) over the past two years revealed a moderate positive correlation, $r = .39$, $p < .05$. The correlation of tweets to online news articles, $r = .34$, and Google trends, $r = .31$, were also moderate positive but slightly weaker than found with television news. This means that there is a statistically significant relationship between #NoDAPL tweets and the public attention outside of social platforms.

During the time period of this study the #NoDAPL hashtag has the least total influence of the three being researched here, which may be one reason that the relationship is not stronger. Additionally, a breakdown of the television news coverage of the pipeline revealed that during the peak period of coverage, all of the reporting was from conservative stations and took a viewpoint opposed to that of the protesters. While social media may have drawn significant attention to the opposition of the pipeline, it potentially had an opposite and unintended effect on television news coverage. A few months later, the recent environmentally-related court challenges were dismissed by a federal judge, allowing for continued operation of the pipeline.

Engagement by protest was very infrequent over the two years that were studied. Only 5 protests were counted during that period, all of which occurred in 2021. One protest occurred in March, and another four in April, coinciding with the increased social media presence. This, however, provided too few data points to look for a relationship

over the course of 2 years. Protests that occurred during the months of March and April were compared on a daily timeframe to the increased social media presence related to the cause. A positive moderate correlation, $r = .54$, $p < .02$, between the number of #NoDAPL posts and related protests. The sample tweets (n = 58) and timeframe were shorter than the two years reviewed for public attention but suggests there may a positive influence on public engagement related to social media activism. This finding is further enhanced by the fact that 3 out the 5 protests during this time were promoted and cataloged via Twitter scraping by the Count Love project.

#LandBack: Getting Native Lands into Native Hands

The LandBack movement is centered around securing the return of land to Native Populations, especially those lands that were taken or retained after being promised by treaty. One of the major campaigns has revolved around South Dakota territories and the closure/return of Mount Rushmore to Natives.[69] In the 1980s the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Lakota tribe's claims to the land, however the tribe has not been able to reclaim it 30 years later. The movement looks very different depending on the tribe and location. The claims to lands are heavily rooted in either the historical forced removal by governmental officials or by treaties that were not upheld. Efforts to restore those lands to Native tribes around the country are considered a part of the LandBack initiative.[70] While

[69] "LANDBACK," LANDBACK, accessed July 23, 2021, https://landback.org/.

[70] Harmeet Kaur, "How Indigenous People Are Reclaiming Their Lands -- and Their Sovereignty - CNN," CNN, November 25, 2020, https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/25/us/indigenous-people-reclaiming-their-lands-trnd/index.html.

some tribes have claimed small victories, many are continuously maneuvering within the judicial system and Federal government to reestablish tribal ownership of land. In order to gain both support and organize, social media has been incorporated into the strategy of activists who have repurposed the rallying cry into the hashtag #LandBack.

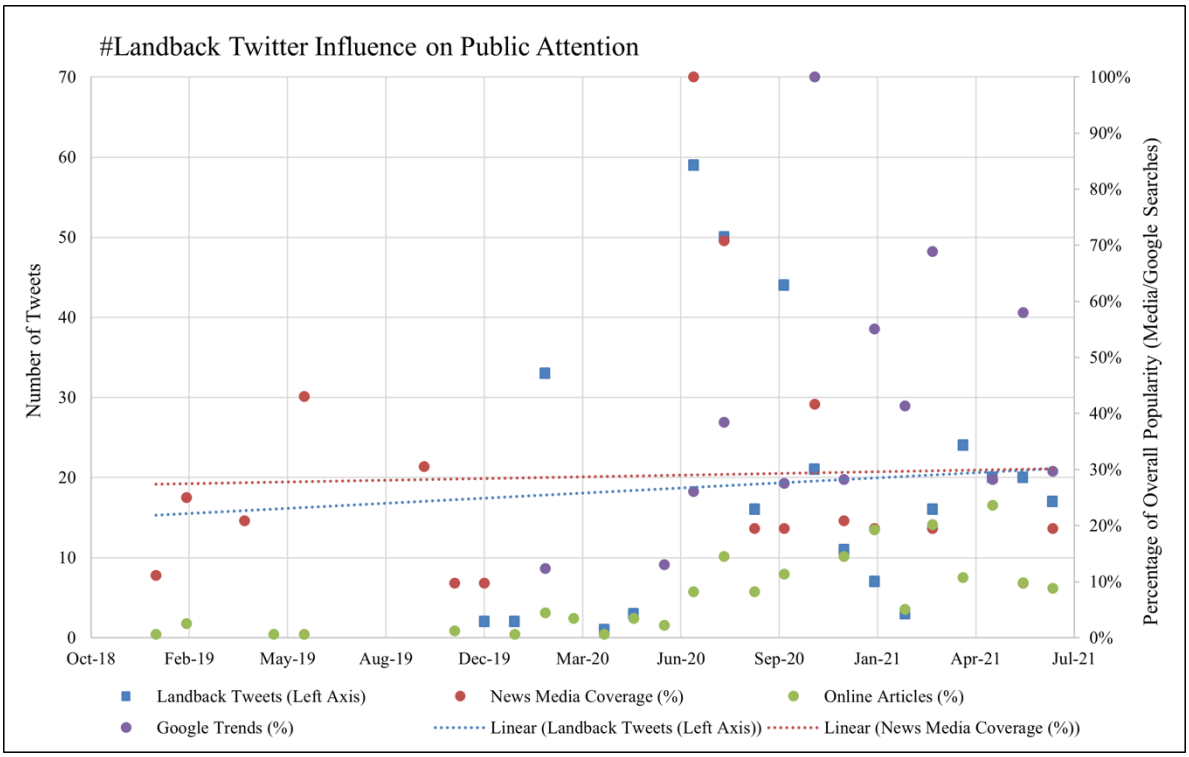


Figure 4. Twitter influencer posts compared to news coverage and webs searches: LandBack.

Public attention to Native American LandBack movement from 2019 to 2021, GDELT Television Explorer, Google Trends.

Over the two years of measurement a Pearson's *r* analysis demonstrated a substantial positive relationship between Twitter posts (n = 349) and media coverage, *r* =

.65, p < .001. While still an imperfect association, it provides further evidence of a relationship between Twitter activism and public awareness, demonstrated in Figure 4. It is in no way definitive of a causal relationship, however, but it suggests an inter-dependent relationship between the two measures. Searches recorded by Google Trends also have a positive moderate correlation with tweets, $r = .43$, $p < .02$, signifying a link between social media influence and online trends in interest. Online news publications had the lowest correlation with tweets, $r = .31$. This correlation may not be statistically significant, $p > .05$. Similar to #NoDAPL there was a stronger relationship of tweets with television news coverage than with the other two measures of public interest and visibility used in this study.

Public protests related to #LandBack within the 2019-2021 timeframe were found in the Crowd Counting Consortium dataset between the July of 2020 to July of 2021, allowing for one full year of measurement. This information was plotted and measured against #LandBack influencer tweets (Figure 5).

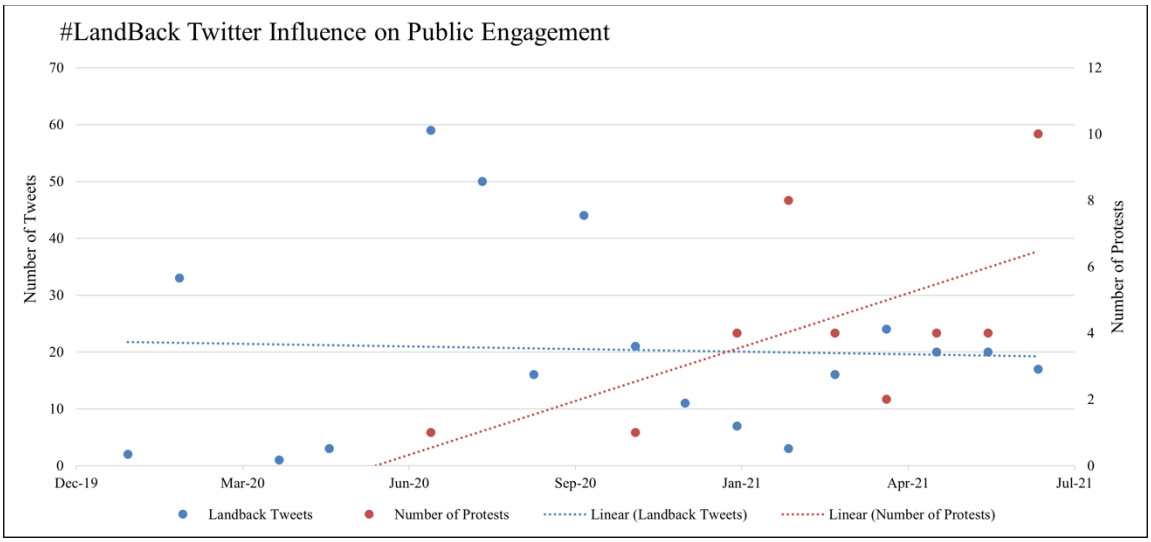


Figure 5. Twitter influencer posts compared to Public Engagement: Land Back protests.

Public engagement in the form of protests related to the LandBack movement from 2019 to 2021, Crowd Counting Consortium.

A scatter plot of the data, Figure 5, shows an increase in active protests beginning in the summer of 2020 as the frequency of tweets underwent a sudden spike during the same time. Over the timeline Twitter posts gain more consistency as the volume starts to average around the 20-tweet level. Simultaneously, reported protests also begin to have more consistency. The correlation between the #LandBack tweets (n = 347) and protests (n = 38) is moderately positive, $r = .53$, $p < .02$.

The 2000 tweet sample of #Landback had the second most influence of the three hashtags used for measurement and produced similar correlation values as the least influential. Additionally, more than 75% of the protests were either reported or organized using social media, contributing to the influencing factor on public engagement.

#StopLine3: A Continued Struggle for Environmental Conservation

Stopping Line 3 is about preventing the renewal of a 340-mile pipeline from Canada to parts of Minnesota and Wisconsin. The pipeline's construction would constitute a rerouting of the existing structure and add an additional 300 mile stretch of pipe. Indigenous opposition claims that the new route increases the chances of contaminated fresh water and cause damage to ancestral lands. Enbridge, the company responsible for the construction and operation of the pipeline, contends that it has made updates to the new construction that will minimize the project's environmental impact.[71] Activists are not convinced, however, because pipelines operated by Enbridge have a history of spills. The Line 3 pipeline currently in operation spilled in 1991, leaking 1.7 million barrels, nearly contaminating a river used by millions of people.[72] This is estimated to be the largest inland leak in United States history. The environmental impact was lessened by 18 inches of ice that covered the river at the time, preventing a massive contamination of the water supply. Enbridge is also responsible for the second largest inland spill in 2010, which leaked one million barrels of oil in Michigan and contaminated the Kalamazoo river.[73] Activists who are concerned with the construction

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[71] Jariel Arvin, "The Indigenous-Led Fight to Stop the Line 3 Oil Pipeline Expansion in Minnesota, Explained," Vox, March 25, 2021, https://www.vox.com/22333724/oil-pipeline-expansion-protest-minnesota-biden-climate-change.

[72] Winona Laduke, "Happy Anniversary: The Largest Inland Oil Spill in U.S. History Happened in Minnesota," Grand Rapids Herald-Review, May 2, 2017, https://www.grandrapidsmn.com/opinion/happy-anniversary-the-largest-inland-oil-spill-in-u-s-history-happened-in-minnesota/article_2ade2706-004f-11e7-9023-2b31a01741a6.html.

[73] Joseph Riesterer, "The Enduring Legacy of the 2010 Kalamazoo River Oil Spill," Belt Magazine, July 12, 2019, https://beltmag.com/kalamazoo-river-line-6b-oil-spill/.

of Line 3 have started to protest by obstructing operations as well as conducting peaceful marches. At a rally in June of 2021 protesters referenced the Standing Rock protests of the Dakota Access Pipeline, and that was the high point of recent resistance.[74] Social media posts that demonstrate opposition to the pipeline use the hashtag #StopLine3.

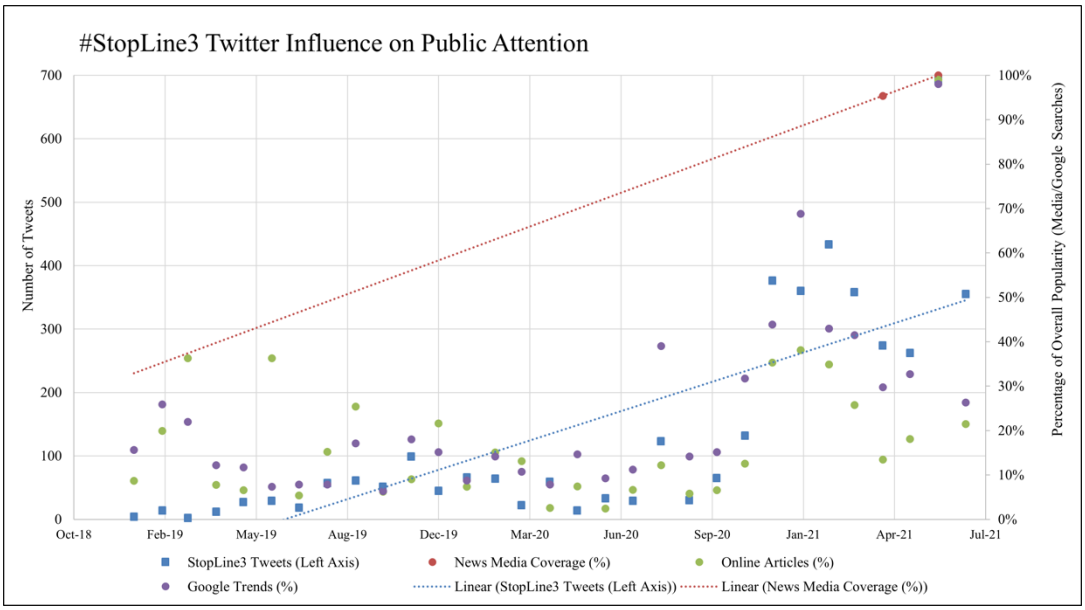


Figure 6. Twitter influencer posts compared to news coverage and webs searches: Stop Line 3.

Public attention to Native American LandBack movement from 2019 to 2021, GDELT Television Explorer, Google Trends.

[74] Dave Kolpack, "Oil Pipeline Foes Protest Enbridge's Line 3 in Minnesota," AP NEWS, June 7, 2021, https://apnews.com/article/mn-state-wire-minnesota-government-and-politics-arts-and-entertainment-environment-and-nature-38ba4df28f86672847e9006ef5b03c75.

The scatter plot comparing Twitter posts to public attention (Figure 6) demonstrates the closest connection found within the sample. Television media had the lowest correlation with Twitter posts (n = 4,166), one that is nonetheless moderately positive result, $r = .56$, $p < .01$. It is of note that Twitter coverage of this social cause over the two-year period had a sudden spike in the beginning of 2021. It was followed by some television news coverage. During the period of study there were only two instances of television news reporting on efforts for or against Line 3, however. Google Trends searches had the closest relationship with Twitter posts, a strong positive correlation, $r = .89$, $p < .001$. Additionally, online articles also had a substantial and significant relationship with Twitter posts over the time period, $r = .76$, $p < .001$. The peak in public attention during the period of this study is in June of 2021. During that time, public perception was at its height. Since television news did no reporting on Line 3 up until April of 2021 no connection can be made between social media activity and public attention can be made prior to that time. Because of this social media has a high likelihood of being responsible for public attention prior to that point. Additionally, television news mentions in April related to no spikes in search trends, online articles, or tweets.

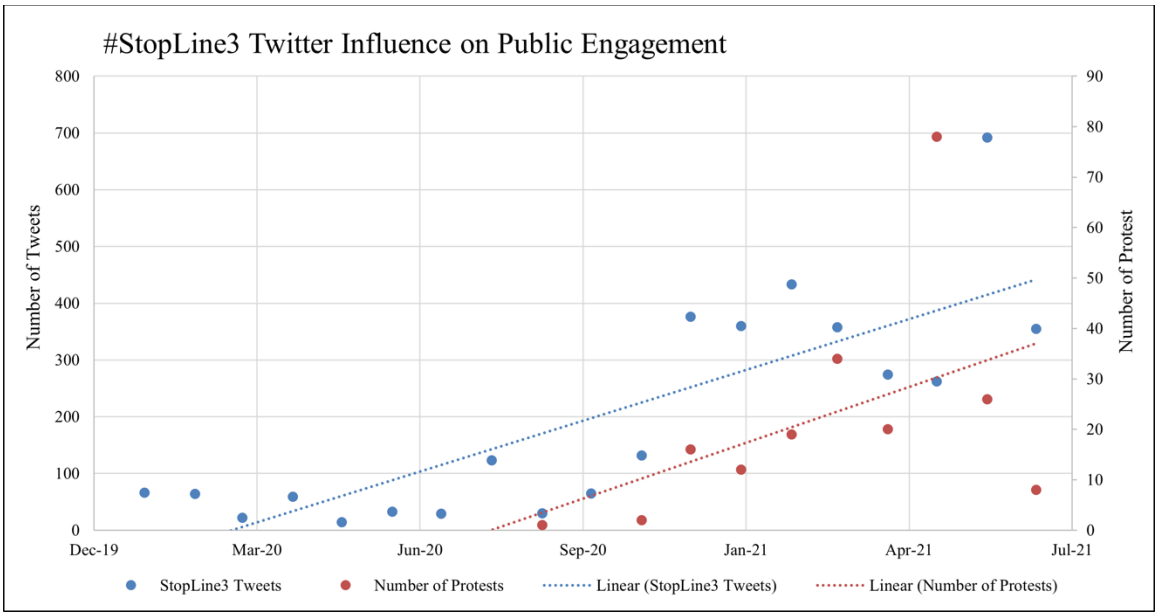


Figure 7. Twitter influencer posts compared to Public Engagement: Stop Line 3 protests.

Public engagement in the form of protests related to the StopLine3 movement from 2019 to 2021, Crowd Counting Consortium.

The scatter plot in Figure 7 compares Twitter posts to protests revealing a linear relationship. As tweet frequency increases there is a similar growth pattern in the amount of protests. A moderate positive relationship exists between Twitter posts (n = 3,747) and Stop Line 3 protests (n = 216), r = .53, p < .02. The random sample of 2000 #StopLine3 tweets revealed the hashtag to be the most influential of the three, with more than double the potential reach than #NoDAPL currently had at the time of the sample. It is also of note that only 46% of the protests in the sample used social media to either report or organize the events.

Chapter V

Discussion

This study focused on the impact that social media can have on public attention and public engagement with social movements led by marginalized communities. Its emphasis was on the utilization of Twitter posts and hashtags to attract both greater support and attention to the topic. The research about the hashtags selected for the study as well as an analysis of the tweets from the selected accounts indicated a significant usage of social media posts and hashtags by the accounts studied.

Of the 13 accounts selected for their consistency of tweeting information related to Native American social issues, 26,752 tweets were collected. The accounts in that collection used over 1,000 different hashtags to draw attention to Native causes over a three-year period. The study focused on three of those topics which narrowed the sample of influencer tweets down to 4,755 tweets, 85% of which were related to #StopLine3. The total influence across social media platforms for all accounts studied, listed in Table 1, is close to 1.9 million people. This means that social media run by indigenous activists, inclusive of platforms not included in the study, are being used to promote their communities' interests and there is a significant population of people interested in either listening or engaging with those causes. But does that translate into more attention or support outside of social media?

Based on this study, the answer leans toward yes, but there is also a need for further study. While there was a positive moderate correlation between Twitter posts and television news media for all three causes studied, there were differences for each that may be accounted for when considering additional variables that were collected during

the course of research. In the case of #NoDAPL, a positive relationship existed between television coverage and Twitter posts, but the height of television news coverage was dominated by opposing viewpoints. What this demonstrates is that even when a group has the ability to amplify a message and control the initial narrative around it, they cannot control how it will be framed when it is being covered from outside sources. Additionally, protests related to Tweets about #NoDAPL had a moderate positive relationship, although it could only be measured over a two-month period. A more convincing element of the protest data is that 3 out of the 5 protests found were reported on and/or organized via social media. This link was present in all three cases, accounting for 50% of all measured protest in the dataset.

The #LandBack relationship linking television news and influencer tweets provides a different picture, as that cause received more consistent coverage over the two-year period of study. A much stronger relationship was found between the two in this case, forming a much more definable pattern in the scatter plot comparing coverage to posts (Figure 4). While this is promising, it does not indicate a causal relationship between the two. Twitter posts and television news coverage could be interdependent, each drawing on the other. The intention of the study was to find if an impact exists on broader public perception as measured through television coverage. If there is an interdependent relationship between Twitter activism and news coverage, then there does exist some influence of social media on coverage and public consumption of issues. This will potentially grow to have more significance over time as there is an estimated movement of the North American population toward consuming news through social media channels. The Pew Research Center estimated 71% of Americans in 2020

consumed at least some of their news from social media, up 3% from 2018.[75] Facebook and YouTube were first and second in terms of news consumption, with Twitter coming in third place: 15% of the US population regularly used it as a news source. Additionally, the study found that 59% of Twitter users regularly use the platform for the consumption of news. If this trend continues there may be a more significant shift in the relationship between television news and social media.

The largest and potentially most significant Twitter dataset was from the #StopLine3 movement. There was a significant amount of Twitter posts by the influencer account before any television news coverage happened. This does indicate the potential for digital activists to influence television news coverage. Additionally, a very strong positive relationships with search engine trends and online news publications over the two-year period were found for #StopLine3, well in advance of television news (see Figure 6). Additionally, protests related to Line 3 rose significantly relation to the tweets, resulting in more protests than #NoDAPL and #LandBack produced combined in the last two years. Almost 50% of the total number of protests were either reported on and/or organized with social media platforms.

Why the significant difference in #StopLine3? The most apparent difference is the frequency and number of tweets produced by the accounts studied. The amount dwarfs that of the other two Native causes. Due to recent evolutions in the NoDAPL protests there has been an increase in the social awareness sounding the issue, however, the height

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[75] Andrew Hutchinson, "New Research Shows That 71% of Americans Now Get News Content via Social Platforms," Social Media Today, January 12, 2021, https://www.socialmediatoday.com/news/new-research-shows-that-71-of-americans-now-get-news-content-via-social-pl/593255/.

of the attention and engagement falls outside of the range of the study due to the lack of availability of social media data. Since protests related to Line 3 are more recent this may account for the difference in the placement of attention related to the issues. The Landback movement, while an ongoing movement, its mission is more abstract as it is coopted based on the needs of the group using it. Different tribes will use this banner to maintain a cohesive message to fight for the reallocation of land in different regions and for different groups. This makes #Landback more of a class of events rather than a focused protest like #StopLine3 and #NoDAPL. This ambiguity may potentially hurt its adoption or hinder an understanding by a larger audience. From a social media perspective there are no gaps in the two years of tweets related to Line 3, meaning every month had at least a few while #NoDAPL and #LandBack both had several lulls in posts. This demonstrates an attention gap amongst the Twitter users studied in how different causes were prioritized when creating posts. There may exist a relationship between the frequency and magnitude of posts and the attitudes of those who run the accounts. This would need to be further researched to measure if a relationship exists.

Arguments Against Social Media as a Tool for Change: #Slactivism

The growing global population is increasingly adopting the internet and social media, but not all researchers agree that social media has a high level of influence on social change and movements. Christensen (2011) warns that increased activity on social media does not necessarily translate into mobilizing civilians to address pressing political

matters.[76] Secondly, he refers to citizen activism on social media as ‘slacktivism,’ meaning political activities on social media do not have political impacts in real life, but just puts participants into a 'feel-good' mood. Lastly, compared to traditional activism like mass protest, he asserts that social media mobilization prevents achieving political goals, instead, diverting energy that could otherwise fuel the use of other effective tools for social change. In his view, then, social media activism distracts the public from using effective forms of engagement (e.g., offline/physical participation) to change the political landscape.[77]

Morozov (2020) further addresses slacktivism claiming it has no political or social impact. The large social media activities it creates convey the illusion that they are impacting political change.[78] He argues that social media activism is for idle persons who do not risk arrest, torture, and police brutality outside the virtual world. Therefore, Morozov regards online activism as unproductive and ineffective for social change; he suggested that 1000 "slacktivists" equal the work of one traditional activist involved in demonstrations, protests and labor organization movements. [79]

Comparing activism and slacktivism, McCafferty (2011) notes that today’s activist is just plugged into digital tools like social media that do not make a significant impact on

[76] Christensen, “Political Activities on the Internet.”

[77] Christensen.

[78] Morozov, “The Brave New World of Slacktivism.”

[79] Morozov.

where it matters most.[80] He believes that information technology, particularly social media and the internet, may bring focus to social issues like environmental sustainability, social justice, governance, and human rights, but there is no consensus whether online efforts impact policy change. The social media networks, blogs, and mobile apps seem effective in passing messages and gaining financial support and participatory support through online streaming, but they do not advance activism "to change the hearts and minds of the public, and effect real change." McCafferty, like others, argues that activism is about showing up in person and demonstrating. In contrast of a physical movement, it is difficult to measure the influence of online activism on social change.[81]

A study by Sam Gregory on activism versus slacktivism paints a picture of how contemporary activism can be eroded and slacktivism encouraged. The author bases his case study on Kony 2012, a viral human rights internet video that sparked unprecedented online interest in supporting a movement to apprehend the leader of Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a rebel group operating in several African states. Gregory's findings demonstrate that social media can reduce activism to just clicks and comments that may not result in a significant impact or foster social change.[82] The Kony movement lost popularity over time, meaning that social media advocacy did not result in sustained

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[80] Dennis Mccafferty, "Activism Vs. Slacktivism," *Association for Computing Machinery. Communications of the ACM* 54, no. 12 (December 1, 2011): 17, https://doi.org/10.1145/2043174.2043182.

[81] Mccafferty, 17.

[82] S. Gregory, "Kony 2012 Through a Prism of Video Advocacy Practices and Trends," *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 4, no. 3 (2012): 463–68, https://doi.org/10.1093/jhuman/hus024.

attention to the cause, and that it can be subject to the law of diminishing returns. The study further highlights that information changes as it is propagated via online platforms from one user to the other, leading to reduced relevance and inconsistency. This further demonstrates how social media and social change relationships can be weakened and flawed. He contends that digital activism can be corrosive to traditional forms of protests as it can obstruct understanding by a greater audience and prevent further action.[83]

The analysis by Sam Gregory points out some critical flaws in social media as an informational tool, however these flaws do not seem to be unique to this medium. Traditional media may also be subject to the law of diminishing returns, with viewership down significantly as fewer adults are relying less on television and print news media.[84] Also, the ability to share to share incorrect or misleading information related to important social knowledge can potentially be monitored and fact checked by the companies that own and manage social media tools. Twitter has recently started a fact checking campaign that will be community driven, similar to Wikipedia; it seeks to help reduce the spread of false or twisted narratives.[85] Additionally, the Kony movement was very different from others studied in this paper as U.S. citizens were protesting events

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[83] Gregory, 464.

[84] Katerina Eva Matsa, "Fewer Americans Rely on TV News; What Type They Watch Varies by Who They Are," *Pew Research Center* (blog), January 5, 2018, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/05/fewer-americans-rely-on-tv-news-what-type-they-watch-varies-by-who-they-are/.

[85] Barbara Ortutay, "Twitter Launches Crowd-Sourced Fact-Checking Project," AP NEWS, January 25, 2021, https://apnews.com/article/twitter-launch-crowd-sourced-fact-check-589809d4c9a7eceda1ea8293b0a14af2.

happening in other countries, making it potentially difficult for an ununified group to establish and execute particular goals, especially in person.

In the article "small change," published by The New Yorker, Malcolm Gladwell argues that a revolution will not happen via tweets. The author gives an account of how social media has failed to elicit social change in society. Gladwell argues that the connections built on social media are built on weak ties. It is likely difficult to convince “friends” made via social media to show up for in-person protests. Many of the friends that someone has on social media can be made up of people that they will never meet. These weak bonds prevent social platforms from being employed as true tools for any real progress towards a social change in society.[86]

Gladwell gave an example of how civil rights protests in the US were more effective to fight racial injustices in the 1960s before the advent of social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. One black student who was denied a cup of tea in a restaurant organized a mass protest, involving over 70,000 students. In contrast, social media activism like the case of the Arab Spring Twitter revolution had less impact than street protests. The limited contact between virtual activists and their weak ties in social media derail efforts for social change, unlike the civil rights movement. Gladwell further indicates that social media activism lacks a centralized leadership structure and clear lines of authority, making it difficult to stipulate the roles of participants and reach a consensus

[86] Gladwell, “Small Change.”

on goals for the social media movement. Lack of hierarchy and division of labor lower the effectiveness of digital protesters.[87]

These arguments against social media as a catalyst for social change have serious merits and highlight some areas to improve, however many of these ideas have not held up over time. Gladwell (2010) assumes that weak ties are indicative of the failure of a movement, however, organizations that have strong deep ties can also face barriers to success. In an article refuting Gladwell's, Angus Johnston argues that the student-run civil rights group called Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) was built on strong ties and yet struggled to find its footing, however, it became more successful as a national organization of loosely affiliated chapters instead.[88] This is because SDS was seen as an idea, rather than an organization, that could be adopted and incorporated by students and youth adults across the country who felt strongly about social change.

Additionally, Gladwell's remarks were made a decade ago, when social media were still in their infancy. He failed to predict how social media could potentially become a binding and unifying force, maximizing loose ties to create national narratives. The virality of information shared online can attract loosely or completely unaffiliated persons to a single idea as we have seen with protests related to oil pipelines and financial disparities, i.e. Occupy and NoDAPL. Additionally, social networks can also be made up of acquaintances, friends, family members, and coworkers, rather than the strangers

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[87] Gladwell.

[88] Angus Johnston, "What Malcolm Gladwell Doesn't Understand About Social Networks | HuffPost," Huffpost.com, September 28, 2010, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/what-malcolm-gladwell-doe_b_741916.

Gladwell references in his arguments. These closer ties that exist within these social networks mean that messages and actionable information may likely be received and acted upon.

Another argument against the use of social media relates to misconceptions from the general public about collective action, with some believing that digital participation, such as sharing or liking posts relating to social issues is enough to contribute to the cause. The followers of online activists will most likely not be bearing substantial costs or putting themselves at risk in order to bring about social change. Social media political discourses are further vulnerable to disengagements due to varying expression of participants.[89] Critics of social media advocacy argue that internet campaigns do not directly connect with institutional politics, and hence, cannot influence authorities. Notably, most virtual activists do not go beyond internet activism to engage in mass action and demonstrations to bring about real-life change in politics.[90] National and political organizations are perceived to not make their decisions based on online public activities. As social media gains a more central presence in everyday life, however, this may become less and less true.

Liking or resharing a message in support of a social cause carries a low-level of risk for digital citizens. There is growing support, however, that it may have a broader

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[89] Natalie Fenton and Veronica Barassi, "Alternative Media and Social Networking Sites: The Politics of Individuation and Political Participation," *The Communication Review (Yverdon, Switzerland)* 14, no. 3 (2011): 179–96, https://doi.org/10.1080/10714421.2011.597245.

[90] Nojin Kwak et al., "Perceptions of Social Media for Politics: Testing the Slacktivism Hypothesis," *Human Communication Research* 44, no. 2 (April 1, 2018): 197–221, https://doi.org/10.1093/hcr/hqx008.

impact that can influence more attention and action, even change. One recent study found that Twitter has an impact on the agenda setting of national media and can often be used as a reference point for national coverage.[91] This can have a profound impact on broader society as a story adoption by news media is incredibly influential, permeating all aspects of the human experience with the power to influence the masses to support or oppose, and even the power to transform democratic institutions.[92]

Research conducted by Clay Shirky calls attention to the influence of mass protests to overthrow or change governments using social media strategies. This author argues that the actual potential of social media depends on supporting the public domain and civil society, which will take an extended period to realize change; change will not occur within a few months or weeks.[93] This can create unrealistic expectations for the speed at which social change happens. Consequently, social media on its own can complicate the realization of social change.

According to "Tweets and the Streets," a research paper authored by Paolo Gerbaudo, activist use of Facebook and Twitter platforms does not neatly fit into the concept of "cyberspace," as something that is disconnected and ethereal.[94] Social media is

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[91] Sharon Meraz and Zizi Papacharissi, "Networked Gatekeeping and Networked Framing on #Egypt," *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 18, no. 2 (2013): 138–66, https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161212474472.

[92] Boydstun, *Making the News*, 1–27.

[93] Clay Shirky, "The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change," *Foreign Affairs (New York, N.Y.)* 90, no. 1 (2011): 28–41.

[94] Paolo Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism* (London: Pluto Press, 2012), 18–47, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt183pdzs.

considered a category of public space re-appropriation. The hashtag can possess a broad influence to stimulate the disenfranchised to becoming "intimate publics" that generate a coherent and vigorous type of online activism, particularly among those who are excluded from conventional mainstream media discourse. At the same time, the hashtag's agency can provide restricted empowerment that reinforces hegemonic norms and perpetuates digital suppression. For example, tweets that address sexism serve to inspire more activism and public discourse intended to reduce violence and harm for women. Nevertheless, when women protest sexism online, they are likely to garner gendered criticisms that attempt to silence them instead of amplifying their messages.[95] Social media is a double-edged sword, however, it can also be used as a tool toward the goal of progress.

[95] Mindi D. Foster, Adrianna Tassone, and Kimberly Matheson, "Tweeting about Sexism Motivates Further Activism: A Social Identity Perspective," *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 2020, 741–57, https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12431.

Conclusion

Social media as a tool may have a number of barriers and drawbacks as a tool for social change, however its worldwide ubiquity, presence, and potential are undeniable. Social media tools are not solely responsible for social change or even catalyzing movements, but rather can be used to amplify messages for change. Social movements are generated out of human interests and thus have always been human led. Social media allows for near instant communication about a cause from anywhere and to anyone in the world who is connected by a social network. As the world trends more towards interconnectivity there is a high likelihood that social networks will increase in membership and tie ever more closely with our daily lives. The Pew Center estimates that 71% of Americans get their news from social media, trending upwards every year. This is just one indication of how social media has started to impact the United States. Social movements have started to take advantage of this enhanced interconnectivity toward their goals and movements.

Native American activists have also realized the power of social platforms and now uses them to amplify their causes. Their use of social media has helped draw in the support of millions of people around the country by sharing their experiences online. In the case of the Dakota Access Pipeline, Native activists were protesting ahead of any social media usage, however, the sharing of videos of what they encountered through social media channels made their fight a national one. People with no connection to their tribe, and who had never heard about the pipeline or its potential harm to the community and environment wanted to help. Social media allowed for that connection to be made,

and more importantly for the movement, allowed for the framing of the issue to be controlled by those that it affected most. In the past marginalized communities depended on traditional media channels for coverage of their social issues. Leaving that in the hands of others meant giving up the power of the story to another group. Native American communities have continued to struggle with how traditional news media cover Native American issues. While social media may not completely fix that, as exemplified by the most recent news coverage of #NoDAPL, it does give groups the recourse both to correct misinformation publicly and also to address opposing viewpoints without the help of another entity.

It is evident from the study that the level of attention received on social media could have an impact on both public attention and public engagement. However, there are additional components that have helped Native American activists be successful in their usage of social media platforms towards this aim. As outlined in the background, Native groups have a long history of activism accompanied by a long list of effective strategies to protests or challenge both government and corporate interests. That has given them an advantage as protests have a clear message and goals. In contrast, the #Occupy movement caused protests all over the country but there was no clear leadership and the goals were not concrete. While it succeeded in drawing attention to wealth inequality it is unclear that something concrete was achieved to bridge the wealth gap. Indigenous led protests have clear goals such as reclaiming Mount Rushmore, a land illegally taken from the Lakota.[96]

[96] Annette McGivney, "The Battle for Mount Rushmore: 'It Should Be Turned into Something like the Holocaust Museum'" the Guardian, July 3, 2021,

The usage of social media as a tool for activism has its limits, but the benefits can be significant. When paired with conventional organizing tactics, social media can be used to instigate widespread social movements by people who are only loosely connected. This can be valuable to a society as it creates new connections and can potentially build community around issues that affect many, or even just a few.

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http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jul/03/mount-rushmore-south-dakota-indigenous-americans.

Appendix A.

Tables

Table 1. Social Media Profile Selection.

Organization Name	Platforms Used	Total Subscribers	Tweets Collected
Indigenous People's Movement	Facebook (F), Instagram (I), Twitter (T),	149,700	726
Red House	F, I, T	82,500	3,162
NDN Collective	F, I, T	169,600	2,257
Illumi Natives	F, I, T	78,400	3,196
Indian Country Today	F, I, T	690,300	3,200
Seeding Sovereignty	F, I, T	241,843	2,310
Honor the Earth	I, T	91,300	3,195
Giniw Collective	I, T	39,600	642
Resist Line 3	I, T	25,900	1,680
Indigenous Environmental Network	I, T	262,400	3,189
MN 350	F, I, T	31,223	3,195

List of social media profiles and associated platforms/subscribers.

Table 2. Hashtag Influence.

Hashtag	Total Sample Tweets (n)	Total Subscriber Influence
#NoDAPL	886	2,005,683
#StopLine3	2,080	4,494,756
#LandBack	2,080	3,722,877

List of social media hashtags and associated influence based on a random sample of collected tweets.

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