

## PARTICIPATION OF INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA WALES STUDENTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA DURING THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT EVENT

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### ABSTRACT

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement has ignited passionate participation by people around the world, including normal daily citizen, public figures, celebrities, politicians, and even the younger generation. Using social media as its main tool, the BLM movement has allowed social media users to use their channel as an avenue to support the issue and to speak of problems in relation to racism. Postings on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are filled with the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter using texts, photos, and videos. Active participation by social media audience worldwide, including among Malaysians, has generated millions of conversations on the movement. Related issues such as police brutality and racial injustice are heavily discussed among Malaysians through various social media channels. This paper studied 55 students from the International University of Malaya-Wales and overall, this research found students as actively seeking news and information via social media channels. The respondents also believed that social media are effective in making awareness of various social issues. Participation among the younger generation into the related conversations are also high. Overall, the respondents also agreed that social media aids the awareness of the movement and the issues they discussed on their channels.

**Keywords:** *Social media, social movement, black lives movement*

### INTRODUCTION

In this era of modernisation, it is safe to assume that social media plays a very important aspect in society nowadays. There is no denying that social media has become a safe space for audience to share their thoughts and opinions for the world to read. Ergo, when a group of people that share the same perspective comes together, a movement can easily be formed. Organising a social movement is no stranger to social media nowadays as social media has its own benefits such as that it helps to

amplify the cause across borders and, in a way, acts as a catalyst to a social movement. The impact social media has on the field of politics and social is almost impossible to disregard (Koandu&Gyamfi, 2021).

This explains why the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM) has been dubbed the largest civil movement in the history of the United States (Koandu&Gyamfi, 2021). Even those who are not residing in the United States felt the impact of the movement and participated along via various media channels. The term 'Black Lives Matter' originally started in 2013 as a social media hashtag that acts as a message responding to the result for the trial of George Zimmerman, a police officer who had shot and killed an unarmed innocent, African American teenager Trayvon Martin (Mercado, n.d.). In the trial, Zimmerman justified his actions by claiming that it was self-defence and was found not guilty by the end of the trial (Francis & Wright-Rigueur, 2021). The verdict of the trial causes outrage all across the United States and many took to social media to voice out their disappointment. Majority of the postings can be seen using the hashtag as a sign of protest.

In recent years, the movement reignited when a video of a police officer knelt down on George Floyd's neck for nine minutes which later resulted in Floyd's death, went viral. Floyd's last words of "I can't breathe" triggered many that watches the viral video, causing an outrage and this became the spark of the months-long movement (Francis & Wright-Rigueur, 2021). Despite this movement happened several years ago, the impact is still felt today with people constantly educating themselves of the issue and becoming more empathetic towards those who are being discriminated against.

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic that was happening during the event, the movement was done online through various social media postings and channels, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. The word spread quickly with almost 20 million Instagram posts using the #BlackLivesMatter. Without many realizing, people from United States and all over the world has joined in the movement, organizing their own protests. In Malaysia, conversations regarding racial injustice were amplified on social media. Issues surrounding colourism among Malaysians as well as police brutality towards the Indian community were discussed heavily on these sites and received high numbers of interactions (Khoo, 2020). The Black Lives Matter movement prompt these issues to be discussed and has warranted attention from several key policymakers to address the issues.

This shows how social media can help a movement to grow and educate people all around about the pressing issue. Granillo (2020) emphasizes on how people should not downplay the role of social media in starting and sustaining a social movement.

With extensive use of technology among the young generation (Hendricks, et al., 2021), social media and social movements are now a topic that comes hand in hand. All it takes nowadays for a social movement to start is a viral post on social media concerning an important matter and a catchy hashtag that will capture the public's attention. Despite there have been many attempts at trying to change the justice system and at educating people to be sensitive towards issues like race, it is very unfortunate that such injustice is still very much alive nowadays. People are being discriminated against solely due to differences in skin colour, race, religion,

sexual orientation and many more. It is even more disheartening that this vile behaviour is happening all over the world, including Malaysia, where it is known for the diversity of its people, coming from different race and background. However, small movement has been organised by Malaysian on social media to seek justice for a number of police brutality cases that happened on Indian Malaysians. Though the movement did not last long, the recent 2020 Black Lives Matter Movement prompt Malaysians to speak out about the tragedy as many Indians are often being discriminated against mainly due to stereotypes. This matter was brought onto social media to further amplify the issue with various users were posting and sharing posts about the issue which caught the attention of several local politicians to address the issue.

Since the rise of social media, it has been used to spread news and information of a certain pressing topic. In 2011, the issue of Arab Spring became one of the first social movements to be held through social media. Arab Spring was an anti-government protest involving several countries in the Middle East including Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen (Blakemore, 2019). The Arab Spring movement grew rapidly, thanks to social media and was even given the moniker 'Facebook Revolution' and 'Twitter Uprising' (Gilbert, 2021). Everyone with access to the Internet and a social media account were easily aware of the movement as it grew internationally. In addition to that, a majority of news outlet was covering about the movement based on what was posted on social media. The same is happening with the Black Lives Matter movement. It was organised on social media and it grew big. Everyone around the world was posting and talking about the issue and it helped the movement to become one of the biggest social movements. Therefore, this study is conducted to explore the role of social media in spearheading a social movement.

Based on the problem statement above, this paper aims to investigate the effectiveness of social media in spearheading social movement among university students. Therefore, the research question is how effective is the usage of social media in spearheading social movement among university students.

There is no definitive way to define a social movement. Different experts have their own way of defining a social movement. A process where institutions are pressured by a group of people to make a change in policies or conditions that are found problematic would be the definition of social movement or some would use the term 'activism', from a public relations standpoint (Chon & Park, 2019). An American sociologist, Charles Tilly defines social movement as a course of interaction between those in power and individuals who informally represents a constituency, in which said individuals will publicly make demands for a change (Yilmaz, 2017). Another sociologist defines social movement as a chain of performances where normal citizens attempt to make a change in social issues through collective action (Chon & Park, 2019). To put simply, social movements are a group of individuals engrossed on a certain social or political issue.

Generally, there are many reasons why social movements are held. Predominantly, sharing the same beliefs and consensus enable individuals to come together to a certain cumulative event (Chon & Park, 2019). Social movements commonly focused on a certain set of issues or policies, hence when a group of people who partake in the same belief come together, this can act as the fundamental of a

movement leading to a social movement being formed. On top of that, the practice of free speech can also lead to a social movement (Mundt, Ross & Burnett, 2018). In recent times, freedom of speech is being practiced in many democratic countries. People are allowed to voice out their opinions freely and with the help of technology, those opinions can be amplified and reach a wider audience. This often prompts many to start a social movement to fight for what they believe in.

Seeing the power of social movement and the changes it can elicit, experts in sociology as well as psychology all around the world have come up with a few theories as to why social movements are convened: relative deprivation theory, collective action theory, and new social movement theory.

Relative Deprivation Theory is defined as the act of lacking of resources, such as money, food and others that are considered crucial in order to sustain a good life (Longley, 2021). The theory was first suggested by a sociologist during World War 2, Samuel Stouffer (Teasley, 2021). This theory is frequently linked to social movement as this theory is what drove the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s where African Americans that were living in the United States then were denied of basic human rights (Longley, 2021).

The second related theory would be the Collective Action Theory. This theory is defined as any structure of social or political act executed by a number of individuals to accommodate their needs (Cloud, 2021). Typically, this theory emanates when a group of people who share the same beliefs are within close proximity with one another as to coordinate better (Ostrom, 2009). This theory suggested several factors that are pivotal in order for a social movement or collective action to happen, which includes structural conduciveness, structural strain, social control failure and so on.

Lastly, the New Social Movement Theory is also routinely correlated to social movement. It proposes that the new form of social movement emphasizes more on issues related to basic human rights in preference to matters regarding economic or political concerns (Buechler, 1995). Experts in the field often disputed this issue after seeing how social movements nowadays are more engrossed on matters concerning cultural concerns. This is because as time goes on, many individuals are becoming more aware of cultural sensitivity which is something many tend to overlook before.

With the invention of the Internet and the advancement of technology, comes the emergence of social media which quickly became an essential part of our life. Social media has become so pivotal that Granillo (2020) stated how social media is crucial to people now in a similar way as how the national news broadcast was in the 1960s. This is due to its various functionality such as connecting with people across the globe and becoming the platform for many to share their thoughts and opinions (Sathish, 2018). Not to mention how social media has also become the main source for receiving news and information. Social media, or some would prefer the term 'social networking sites' are essentially web-based services that authorize users to manufacture a profile within a bounded system (Yilmaz, 2017). Social media first emerged in 1997 with a site called "SixDegrees" (Hendricks, 2021). The site then only allowed its users to create a profile and connect with others in a smaller scale compared to social media nowadays (Hendricks, 2021).

Afterwards, slowly but surely, many other social media sites began to emerge,

giving people various options to choose from. Some of the most notable one would be Myspace, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram and many others. Different social media sites offer users different experience. For example, Twitter is for those who likes to share their thoughts and opinions while Instagram would be for those who loves photography. The idiosyncrasy of social media has definitely made it unique and is probably the main reason why many is addicted to social media. As mentioned, social media has become the salient tool for communication and information (Chon & Park, 2019). It connects people worldwide instantaneously.

According to the statistics, social media is being used by 57.6% of the world's population, which is nearly 4 billion people (Chaffey, 2021). Not to mention how all that is needed to access these social media sites is just an Internet connection which commonly is being offered for free at many public places such as cafes and shopping malls. Seeing as how many people are using social media sites, the inventor of said sites created a way for a certain post to spread quickly through the Internet or some would call it 'to go viral'. Algorithm was created where if a certain post containing a hashtag or a phrase, it will be easier for others to find the post and interact with it. This feature has been used by many, especially businesses as part of a marketing campaign.

As time goes by, social movements continue to progress especially with new technology being incorporated in such as social media (Chon & Park, 2019) and ever since the 2011 Arab Spring movement, numerous researchers, journalists and media experts has disputed over the usage of social media in social movements or activism (Gilbert, 2021). The impact of that movement was truly unexpected and indirectly proved that social media can be a powerful tool used in social movements. The same event that occurred in 2011 is happening now with the 2020 Black Lives Matter Movement, where it was organised largely on social media. A term often used when describing any social movements that is utilizing social media sites would be "social media activism" (Yilmaz, 2017). Social media, without a doubt has transfigured the growth of various social movements as it allows a social movement to benefit from the many conveniences of social media such as reaching a larger audience, assists in spreading a news or information faster, connects many people globally and so forth (Mundt, Ross & Burnett, 2018). An activist, Remedy Ryan has also mentioned how social media plays a vital role in amplifying public awareness regarding a certain issue, especially those that are not being covered in traditional media (Mahajan, 2020).

Woefully, despite having many precedence, social media activism has its downside as well. Some experts in the field have argued that social media activism effects the vitality of a social movement. The term 'slacktivism' is frequently used by many to justify as to why social media activism will not work as plausible as a normal social movement (Yilmaz, 2017; Kwak, et al., 2018). 'Slacktivism' comes from the word 'slack' or 'slacker' along with 'activism' and it was first used by Dwight Ozard with Fred Clark in 1995 (Yilmaz, 2017). Slacktivism is defined as the act of supporting a cause by conducting effortless measures that may not cause a significant change (Kwak, et al., 2018; Lodewijckx, 2020). A study done by a university in Pennsylvania actually shows that these acts can still help a social movement to grow. Results from the study attest that there are two groups of people involved in a social movement

which are the core group and the periphery group (Granillo, 2020). Individuals that are out and actively protesting on the streets and getting physically involved in demonstrations are considered the core group while those that are at home, helping to spread messages online are the periphery group (Granillo, 2020). It is believed that no matter how extensive an individual is involved in a social movement, be it big or small, it is still beneficial to the movement.

All in all, activists all around the world still believes that there are more benefits in utilizing social media in a social movement, though the public have been advised not to mindlessly share information that are not verified (Mahajan, 2020).

## METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted in a quantitative manner as to better acknowledge the social world. Quantitative research in its nature allows data to be interpreted in statistics and numbers rather than leaving it open-ended. Compared to a qualitative research, quantitative research requires more structured questions as to study the topic thoroughly. There is no better way to collect data for quantitative research than to conduct a questionnaire. The questionnaire was held through Google Form and contains various questions regarding the Black Lives Matter movement awareness and the social media usage. The questions asked covers from participant's awareness towards the movement, relevancy of using social media in social movement and the formation of social movements. The survey was held throughout March 2022 and using convenience sampling as its methodology, the survey was open for all students in International University of Malaya-Wales to participate. There was a total of 55 respondents participated in the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Demographic Profile Analysis

The study was participated by 55 students from the International University of Malaya-Wales. In terms of gender, a majority of the respondents are female students (67.3%) than male students (29.1%). As for age, a large sum of the respondents are from 18 to 22 years old (60%), followed by 23 to 27 years old (20%) and 33 years old and above (14.5%). Only 5.5% of the respondents are 28 to 32 years old. As for nationality, 85.5% of the respondents are Malaysians and the 14.5% are from various countries. And lastly, when asked about the level of education, most of the respondents are currently pursuing degrees (74.5%) and foundation (12.7%), while the rest are postgraduate students (10.9%) or diploma (1.9%).

**Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents**

Item	Description	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	29.1%
	Female	67.3%
	Others	4.6%
Age	18 -22 years old	60%
	23 – 27 years old	20%
	28 – 32 years old	5.5%
	33 years old and above	14.5%

Nationality	Malaysian	85.5%
	Non Malaysian	14.5%
Level of Education	Foundation	12.7%
	Diploma	1.9%
	Bachelor's Degree	74.5%
	Masters' Degree	10.9%

### Social Media Usage Analysis

Table 2 below shows the analysis of social media usage among the respondents. 90.8% of the young generation uses social media on a daily basis. In terms of news consumption, 92.7% use social media to obtain the latest information, while 96.3% believed the news on social media spread faster than other media channels, such as newspaper and television. 90.8% also believe news on social media are unfiltered and went through less gatekeeping process. Around 98% of the respondents use social media to connect with other people worldwide and they use the platform to share their thoughts and opinions about any issues. In regard to minority voice, a majority of them believed social media helps to spread the awareness (minority voice, 96.4%; minority issues, 98.2%).

**Table 2: Social media usage among IUMW students**

Item	Percentage (%)	
	Agree	Disagree
I use social media on a daily basis	90.8%	9.2%
I use social media for my news consumption	92.7%	7.3%
I believe news on social media spread faster than the other media	96.3%	5.7%
I believe the news on social media are unfiltered	90.8%	9.2%
Social media connects people worldwide	98.2%	1.8%
Social media is a good platform to share thoughts & opinions	96.3%	5.7%
Social media helps spread the voice of minority	96.4%	3.6%
Social media shed a light on minority issues	98.2%	1.8%

### Black Lives Matter Awareness Analysis

In the survey, a variety of questions were asked to obtain the respondents' awareness of the Black Lives Matter movement. A majority of the respondents aware of the movement (94.5%) and heard about it through various channels of social media (81.8%). A majority of the respondents also participated in the movement through their social media (60%) and encouraged their friends and followers to do so (72.7%). The respondents also agreed that social media aided the virality of the movement (92.7%) and has impacted the society (70.9%) and worldwide (80%).

**Table 3: Awareness of the Black Lives Matter movement**

Item	Percentage (%)	
	Agree	Disagree
Are you aware of the movement?	94.5%	5.5%
Did you hear about the movement from social media?	81.8%	18.2%

Did you participate with the movement on social media?	60%	40%
Did your social media friends participate with the movement?	72.7%	27.3%
Do you agree that social media helps the awareness of the movement?	92.7%	7.3%
Do you agree that the movement made a change in society?	70.9%	29.1%
Do you agree that the movement made an impact worldwide?	80%	20%
Do you think the movement achieved its goal?	52.7%	47.3%

By conducting this research, the researchers hope to create critical conversations about the issue of racial injustice that is happening all around the globe. There is no denying that the topic is a sensitive topic that people tend to tiptoe around but oftentimes, the hardest conversations are the ones that need to be held. The topic of race, is something that is considered taboo in many societies, including in countries that are as diverse as Malaysia. Even though Malaysians have been taught to respect another race and to never discriminate others, many still fail to understand the sensitivity of the topic. The issue of racial injustice has been something that many have tried to actively tackle over the years but the lack of attention it received is undeserving. Nevertheless, the researchers believe that by talking about the issue, it will create awareness and influence many. The researchers are also hoping this paper to prompt authorities and the appropriate societal agents and policymakers to create a better and safe environment for all Malaysians.

Based on the data received, social media did make the movement a talk-about issue, especially among the university students (Hendricks, et al., 2021). The impact of the movement was felt worldwide even though it was started in the United States. Many from all over the globe started to talk about the issue and sharing their fair share of personal experience of dealing with racism and hate crimes. Instagram pages are filled with blacked-out boxes to show solidarity with the movement while spreading information about the issue (Francis & Wright-Rigueur, 2021).

But, despite that, many also fail to realise that social media can be the drive to spark a social movement. Adhering with the same example, it has been researched that the number of crime cases involving hate crime, police brutality and racism has remained constant over the years despite various awareness campaigns but it was the George Floyd's case that caught the attention of many and prompted the Black Lives Matter movement, which is the biggest movement so far (Granillo, 2020). Concrete and strong evidence, such as the viral video, many saw the injustice and the cruelty that was displayed and this drove the audience to discuss about it online, thus initiating the need to make a change in societal and political values.

Like many things, there are downsides in utilising social media. 'Slacktivism' is something that cannot be escaped as it is bound to happen (Kwak, et al., 2018). Besides that, the issues discussed social media tend to change at a faster rate than traditional news. What was viral today will be forgotten by tomorrow morning which is why it needs a more sustained action (Granillo, 2020). Constant conversation regarding the issue by key people will prevent it from being lost in people's minds.

## CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this research was to study the role and the effectiveness



of using social media channels, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok in helping to raise awareness of a social movement, such as Black Lives Matter, among the students in International University of Malaya Wales. As seen from this research, much like everything else, there are pros and cons to using social media in helping to spread the word in a social movement.

Without a doubt, one of the unique traits of social media would be it can make a very lasting impact on practically any issue that discussed heavily by everyone online. With the Black Lives Matter Movement, the ramifications of social media can be equated to the ramifications of television during the Civil Rights Movement (Granillo, 2020; Mundt, Ross & Burnett, 2018).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

There are many areas, angles and perspective that can be studied in the future as this topic has a wide range and multifaceted. Future researchers could study the difference when social media is involved in a social movement and when it is not. Other than that, research could also be done on the virality of social media. Future researchers could interpret how does a post can go viral on social media, the factors contributing to a post going viral along with researching about social media's algorithm. How does social media algorithm work and how can people take advantage of it to make their post goes viral? Social media is truly an intricate platform that many are still trying to understand. Moving on, the topic of social movement could also be research more in depth. The different types, examples, theories and many other aspects can be investigated, and study as social movement is a practice that has been done by many since the beginning of time. Social movement is how we make other people hear our worries and concerns regarding a crucial issue.

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