

Network Ties That Mobilize: Digital Activism as an Organizing Strategy

By

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Abstract

This study sought to determine whether weak and strong network ties influenced Instagram users' participation in online and offline activism, using the strength of weak ties theory (Granovetter, 1973) as a theoretical framework. The data utilized in this study ($N = 62$) were gathered from a survey that assessed exposure to and level of engagement with activism-related content on Instagram and participation in protest demonstrations during the summer of 2020. The findings suggest that the strength of weak ties theory (Granovetter, 1973) is not supported in this context, as exposure to content from strong ties had more influence on online and offline activism than exposure to content shared by weak ties. However, an examination of open-ended survey questions indicated that personal messages from strong ties elicited negative, oppositional attitudes, implying the value of communication from weak ties in fostering engagement in social movements.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Disclosure Statement

In the preparation of this thesis, no Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools were used.

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List of Abbreviations

BLM - Black Lives Matter

SMP - Social Media Platform

Introduction

During the summer of 2020, protests and other forms of social organizing aimed at calling attention to racial injustice occurred throughout the United States following the viral spread of a video of George Floyd, a Black man, being murdered by a Minneapolis police officer. An organization known as Black Lives Matter (BLM) drove a large contingent of this movement (Bestvater et al., 2023; Buchanan et al., 2020; Burch et al., 2020; Carney & Kelekay, 2022; Chang et al., 2022; Fisher, 2020). While the BLM movement began long before the summer of 2020, it is difficult to ignore the mobilizing impact of social media platforms (SMPs) on movements like BLM (Valenzuela, 2013).

The nature of SMP usage naturally lends itself to the formation of broad networks of weak ties, as users can connect with hundreds of peers at any time. Activists who use SMPs can serve as facilitators of mobilization, unifying disparate groups around a single cause through online activism. This mobilizing impact is part of a “choreography of assembly” (Gerbaudo, 2012, p. 5). In this context, digital behavior becomes part of a larger display of protest behavior rather than a single act of resistance. The BLM movement in 2020 offers a useful lens for examining potential connections between social media engagement and real-world activism.

Specifically, this study aimed to understand how Instagram catalyzed the circulation of information and the organization of BLM-related events in 2020 (Chang et al., 2022; Haq et al., 2022; Wellman, 2022) by examining the relationship between information sources and recipients and the subsequent protest behavior of those recipients (Chen, 2021; Cornet et al., 2017; Haq et al.,

2022). This research contributes to the study of social movements, activism, and social justice by applying social network theory to examine how online information channels can mobilize offline action. Specifically, Granovetter's (1973) strength of weak ties theory provides the theoretical backdrop for identifying which relationships are most likely to lead to a particular behavior, in this case, offline activism.

To begin, I describe the essential features of digital activism, its relevance to this study, and the existing literature, and then justify focusing on Instagram specifically. Next, I provide historical and contextual information about BLM and the events that occurred during the summer of 2020. I then summarize relevant literature that provides a foundation for assessing the transition from online to offline activism before establishing social network theory as a guiding framework. Within this area of research, Granovetter's (1973) strength of weak ties theory emerges as a means of measuring relationships within social networks. In evaluating network relationships, I will measure tie strength (social proximity) and determine whether exposure to Instagram content from strong and weak network ties results in offline engagement. Finally, I will discuss methods of data collection and analysis, the findings, and their implications, including theoretical and practical contributions and areas for future research.

Literature Review

Digital Activism

It is important to understand the ways activists use social media, like Instagram, to promote, educate, and organize grassroots activism efforts. Digital activism combines traditional activism methods, such as petitions and protest demonstrations, with digital technologies that support or organize offline efforts (Mercea, 2011; Özkula, 2021).

While existing literature examines the role of social media in mobilizing social movements, there remains a lack of research on how online connections and networks formed in digital spaces translate into offline behaviors. During the COVID-19 pandemic, restrictions and social distancing measures increased people's dependence on social media to stay connected, making Instagram even more influential as a public space (Chang et al., 2022; Habermas, 1970).

Black Lives Matter and Activism on Instagram

Content on Instagram, a photo and video-sharing SMP, may bear similarities to those forms of more traditional media used in the past to promote social and political movements. Just as posters, banners, and other iconic imagery played a crucial role in historical demonstrations, Instagram's platform empowers users to share and spread their messages through compelling visual imagery.

The slogan Black Lives Matter, coined by activists Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi, gained significant traction during the summer of 2020. More than half of all posts with the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter were made between May and September 2020 (Bestvater et al., 2023). On May 25, 2020, a video was posted on Facebook depicting Derek Chauvin, a police officer with the Minneapolis Police Department, murdering George Floyd. Minneapolis PD confronted Floyd at gunpoint outside a convenience store, where Floyd had allegedly attempted to use counterfeit money. Floyd complained he was claustrophobic as he was forced into a squad car. Floyd was eventually removed from the squad car and forced to the ground, where Chauvin pinned Floyd to the

ground, kneeling on his neck for nearly 10 minutes. After 10 minutes of Floyd begging for his life, calling for his mother, and exclaiming, “I can’t breathe,” he took his final breath. A 17-year-old, Darnella Frazier, recorded the horrific encounter and posted the video to Facebook (Hernandez, 2021). This video would be key evidence against Chauvin, who was later sentenced to 22 years in prison for his crimes (Office of Public Affairs, 2022). This video also mobilized an estimated 26 million Americans to resist police brutality and racial injustices en masse (Burch et al., 2020; Carney & Kelekay, 2022), marking one of the largest social movements in U.S. history (Buchanan et al., 2020; Chang et al., 2022).

Importantly, the video of Floyd’s murder circulated during a time of tremendous unrest throughout this country. By June 2020, Americans had already been under lockdown for several months due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, the World Bank warned of a recession, unemployment was higher than it had been since World War II, and hospitals were operating far beyond capacity (CDC, 2024). There were clear racial disparities in how the COVID-19 pandemic affected communities (Shippee et al., 2020). For example, in Chicago, Black residents were dying of COVID-19 at a rate six times higher than white residents (CDC, 2024; Reyes et al., 2020). These factors operated in concert to produce a climate ripe for a strong call to action against police brutality and racial injustice across the United States.

During the summer of 2020, Instagram emerged as a significant digital forum for activists, fostering participation through story-sharing features that enabled the widespread circulation of calls for mutual aid and the distribution of information on protest logistics (Chang et al., 2022). On Tuesday, June 2, 2020, in response to

widespread protests and public outcry, two music industry professionals, Jamila Thomas and Brianna Agyemang, called for a cessation of business operations across the music industry (Coscarelli, 2020). Thomas and Agyemang specifically sought to draw public attention to the entertainment industry's massive profits derived from the successes and struggles of Black artists through a media blackout (The Show Must Be Paused Mission Statement, n.d.). The industry blackout quickly spread beyond the music industry. The day became known as #BlackoutTuesday. During #BlackoutTuesday, Instagram users were encouraged to stop using the app to post black squares in solidarity with BLM (Coscarelli, 2020).

Since Instagram is a visually focused platform, posting black squares on #BlackoutTuesday interrupted the usual flow of content (The Show Must Be Paused Tweet, 2020). On Instagram, users can share images and videos either permanently on their profiles or temporarily as story posts in the feed. These features enable users to quickly post and share information. They allow users to easily view, react to, and share a large amount of media from others. Because of this, during #BlackoutTuesday, millions of Instagram users saw call-to-action posts, making #BlackoutTuesday arguably the first time a visual social media platform played a major role in a social movement (Chang et al., 2022).

Although #BlackoutTuesday drew widespread attention to the BLM movement, questions arose about whether it effectively promoted the movement's core goals of meaningful racial justice and police reform. Some pointed out that the black squares silenced posts with hashtags like #BLM or #GeorgeFloyd. As millions of black squares

with hashtags such as #BLM or #BlackLivesMatter flooded Instagram, many posts, including resources and information from organizers, were effectively buried.

While BLM organizers asked users to modify their posts to address this issue, many ignored the requests to edit or delete them. This showed how some participants in #BlackoutTuesday engaged in performative activism and suppressed information (Valen Levinson, 2023; Wellman, 2022). Nevertheless, even as low-cost displays of allyship that offered little structural change spread, many posts shared vital information and calls to action.

From Platforms to Protests

Dahlberg-Grundberg (2016) and Coleman (2011) have shifted their focus from the online/offline dichotomy to digital movement networks, where activism is seen as a combination of online and offline practices. Here, new forms of organization and political imagination have developed through deep engagement with communication technologies (Coleman, 2011; Dahlberg-Grundberg, 2016). They emphasize the emerging complexities surrounding the disruptive potential of social media platforms that facilitate the mobilization of activist networks. All SMPs are interactive, enabling real-time engagement. However, Instagram is unique because it provides a platform for an entire web of networks to quickly mobilize by recording and reposting visual evidence, immediately calling others to act (Chang et al., 2022; Cornet et al., 2017). This interactivity is key to how activists use Instagram to promote engagement.

Social Network Theory & Strength of Weak Ties

Social network theory aims to map communication channels that exist formally and informally within organizations and in organizing practices. As such, social network theory has also enabled scholars to identify the role that SMPs play in offline organizing efforts (Dahlberg-Grundberg, 2016; Zang et al., 2009). These studies allow for an updated examination of how online interactions translate into engagement in the real world. Previous research based on social network theory, originally employed by social psychologists, has expanded to include digital interactions (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011; Gerbaudo, 2012; Lewis, 2021). Valenzuela's (2013) research on Chilean activists revealed that frequent social media users are 11 times more likely to participate in protests, indicating that SMPs serve as an effective instrument for encouraging offline engagement. Similarly, a study by Onuch (2015) that interprets survey data from Ukrainian protestors suggests SMPs are a powerful tool for information dissemination. Notably, Onuch's (2015) findings indicate that online networks supplement, rather than replace, offline protest participation.

The strength of weak ties network theory (Granovetter, 1973) was developed within the social network theory framework and offers significant insights into understanding various online connections and their potential influence on offline behavior. Consequently, social network theory provides a conceptual framework for comprehending the impact of online relationships and network connections formed on social media platforms on offline collective behavior. For this study, social network theory serves a dual purpose: first, it allows an exploration of how Instagram contributed to the robustness of

connections within digital networks; and second, it offers an analysis of how these online networks extend beyond the digital sphere and affect offline collective behaviors and social movements.

The Strength of Weak Ties

Granovetter's (1973) strength of weak ties hypothesis proposes that individuals form networks made up of weak ties, or socially distant relationships, and strong ties, which are more intimate or familiar. Weak ties are more likely to introduce individuals to novel information, while strong ties tend to circulate redundant information already shared within close-knit networks (Granovetter, 1983). Weak ties function as bridges between otherwise disconnected social groups, playing a crucial role in the spread of information (Granovetter, 1973). This suggests that informational homogeneity could limit networks of strong ties, largely stifling mobilization efforts and opportunities.

Much research on strength of weak ties theory has examined how individuals receive and perceive novel information from weak ties versus strong ties in various contexts, including within political campaigns and workplaces (Rajkumar et al., 2022). Rajkumar et al., (2022) found that individuals often find information about new employment positions via weak tie networks, such as those formed via engagement with professional social media platforms, such as LinkedIn (Rajkumar et al., 2022). Strength of weak ties theory also readily applies to activism contexts (Valenzuela et. al., 2017). There is limited existing literature that uses analyses of SMP engagement to understand how strong network ties and weak network ties shape protest outcomes. While evidence to support the strength of weak ties theory is mixed, many studies in

recent years report that weak ties promote low-cost, or performative activist efforts, whereas strong ties support offline activist efforts (Valenzuela et. al., 2017).

Research Gap

Previous research has operationalized tie strength using indicators such as relational closeness and frequency of contact (Marsden & Campbell, 1984), while others have examined the potential of social media as a networked environment (Boulianne, 2015; Chen, 2021; Dimitrova et al., 2011; Ha et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2009). For example, a mixed-methods study conducted by Mundt et al. (2018) reveals the coalition-building power of social media. While previous studies have investigated information exposure or online engagement, there is a notable lack of research examining how weak and strong ties affect the transition from online interaction to offline protest behavior. To address this gap, this study examines how tie strengths between social media users shape participation both online and offline. This study specifically inquires, "What types of network ties inspire offline protest participation?"

Quantitative Research Questions

The first research question seeks to understand the influence of exposure to activism-related content on Instagram, from weak and strong ties, on offline protest participation.

RQ1: (a) Does exposure to activism-related content on Instagram from weak ties influence offline protest participation?

(b) Does exposure to activism-related content on Instagram from strong ties influence offline protest participation?

The second research question examines how exposure to activism-related content on Instagram, through weak and strong ties, influences online activism behavior.

RQ2: (a) Does exposure to activism related content on Instagram from weak ties influence online activism behavior?

(b) Does exposure to activism related content on Instagram from strong ties influence online activism behavior?

Qualitative Research Questions

RQ3: (a) What kinds of SMP network ties influence online and offline protest participation?

(b) How do individuals make sense of their demonstrations of support for BLM online and offline?

Methodology

Participants

The sample size for this study was 62 U.S. adults ($N = 62$). Participants ranged in age from 19 to 44 years, with most respondents in their late 20s and early 30s ($M = 29.37$). Of the sample that provided their gender identity ($n = 40$), most respondents ($n = 28, 45.2\%$) identified as female, followed by male ($n = 7, 11.3\%$), non-binary/third gender ($n = 3, 4.8\%$), gender non-conforming ($n = 1, 1.6\%$), or prefer not to respond ($n = 1, 1.6\%$). The sample ($n = 40$) was predominantly white ($n = 30, 48.4\%$), followed by Asian ($n = 2, 3.2\%$), Hispanic/Latino/a/e/x ($n = 2, 3.2\%$), and African American/Black ($n = 1, 1.6\%$). On average, respondents were mid- to high-income, earning \$80,000 or more per year ($n = 9, 14.5\%$). The most common education levels achieved by participants were master's degrees ($n = 10, 16.1\%$), followed by four-year degrees ($n =$

9, 12.9%) and doctoral degrees ($n = 8$, 12.9%). This sample leaned politically liberal ($n = 13$, 21%) or very liberal ($n = 12$, 19.4%). The mean political orientation was $M = 4.40$ ($SD = 1.11$) on a 5-point Likert-type scale, where 1 indicated very conservative and 5 indicated very liberal.

Recruiting and Sampling

The data collected for this study was gathered from a Qualtrics survey distributed on Instagram. After consenting to the study, participants ($N = 62$) voluntarily completed a questionnaire asking them to report on how often they used Instagram to interact with posts related to BLM, protesting, and police violence during the summer of 2020. Participants were recruited via an Instagram post, and Auburn University's Institutional Review Board approved the procedures.

Procedure

Participants were asked how often they saw posts or received personal invitations from the Instagram accounts of people representing weak ties or strong ties. Participants were also asked a series of questions about their participation in online activism and offline protests. The survey included open-ended questions asking respondents how they learned about protest-related events and if and how they demonstrated support for the BLM movement. Following completion of these survey questions, participants were asked to provide their age, gender, race/ethnicity, annual income, education level, and political affiliation.

Quantitative Measures

This study aimed to examine the relationship between Instagram engagement (such as liking, sharing, and commenting on posts) and offline protest actions, such as attending events. To address RQ1, the survey asked participants about their use of Instagram to interact with protest-related content and their offline protest activities. To answer RQ2, the survey inquired how often participants saw activist-related content on Instagram, their relationship with the poster, and whether they engaged in online activism.

Online Activism

Online activism refers to the use of modern communication technologies to initiate and manage social movements (Ahuja et al., 2018). Therefore, to capture online activism as a multidimensional construct, this study employed both the social media activism and content engagement scales adapted from the Civic Engagement Tracking Survey (Pew Research, 2012). These measures, while related, analytically distinguish different forms of participation in digital political environments. The social media activism scale captures explicitly political and movement-oriented behaviors, such as posting about social issues, promoting events, or mobilizing others. In contrast, the content engagement scale measures lower-threshold, interactional behaviors, such as liking, sharing, or commenting on posts. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each scale.

Social Media Activism

Social media activism was first operationalized using a set of survey items adapted from the Civic Engagement Tracking Survey (Pew Research, 2012). The social media activism scale captures the frequency with which respondents engaged in

activism-related behaviors on Instagram during the 2020 BLM protests.

Respondents were asked, “How frequently did you use Instagram to”: (1) Post links to BLM related stories or articles for others to read?, (2) Post your own thoughts or comments on BLM?, (3) Encourage other people to take action?, (4) Repost content related to BLM that was originally posted by someone else?, (5) ‘Like’ or promote material related to BLM that others have posted? Participants responded to these questions on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = very often and 5 = never. These results were reverse coded to represent 1 = never and 5 = very often. Reliability analysis showed excellent internal consistency for the social media activism scale ($\alpha = .90$, $M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.07$).

Content Engagement

The content engagement scale, adapted from the Civic Engagement Tracking Survey, was used to measure online activism (Pew Research, 2012). Participants were asked: “For the following, please select how often you engaged with content related to BLM or the death of George Floyd in the summer of 2020” (1) I created social media posts about this issue whenever I had the chance., (2) I joined a group on social media that supports my viewpoint about this issue., (3) I uploaded content (e.g. pictures) related to this issue to social media., (4) I left a personal comment on a social media post about this issue., (5) I provided links to other information related to this issue., (6) I used hashtags that make it easier for people to search and share my perspective regarding this issue., (7) I reposted content about this issue if the content agrees with my viewpoint., (8) I shared posts about this issue with my friends on social media if the content agrees with

my viewpoint. Participants responded to these questions on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = very often and 5 = never. These results were reverse coded to represent 1 = never and 5 = very often. Reliability analysis showed good internal consistency for the content engagement scale ($\alpha = .88$, $M = 3.60$, $SD = .91$).

Offline Activism

Offline activism refers to any efforts taken to support a movement that occur beyond the confines of a digital space. For example, offline activism may involve attending a protest demonstration, signing a petition, or pledging money or resources to a cause (Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2018). To measure offline activism, I adapted the language from the Civic Engagement Tracking Survey (Pew Research, 2012), asking respondents to "Please indicate how often you participated in the following offline demonstrations in response to BLM or the death of George Floyd." (1) I attended a rally or demonstration supporting my view regarding this issue., (2) I attended a meeting of an organization supporting my view regarding this issue., (3) I became a member of an organization supporting my view on this issue., (4) I actively campaigned for an organization supporting my view regarding this issue., (5) I contacted a politician or government official supporting my view related to this issue by phone or letter., (6) I contacted activists supporting my view on this issue by phone or letter. Participants responded to these questions on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = very often and 5 = never. These results were reverse coded to represent 1 = never and 5 = very often. Reliability analysis showed good internal consistency for the offline protest behavior scale ($\alpha = .848$, $M = 4.186$, $SD = .877$).

Tie Strength

Tie strength is a measure of the closeness of two networked individuals (Granovetter, 1973, 1983). Tie strength was measured by respondents' indication of whether each information source was a strong tie (colleague, friend, family member, or significant other) or a weak tie (someone they have never met, an influencer, or a celebrity).

Weak Ties

To measure for weak ties, Q6 was adapted from the Civic Engagement Tracking Survey (Pew Research, 2012) and asked participants: "In the summer of 2020, how often did you see content related to BLM protests shared by people you have never met?" Each response was indicated on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from never to very often. ($M = 3.56$, $SD = .80$).

Strong Ties

For strong ties, Q12 was adapted from the Civic Engagement Tracking Survey (Pew Research, 2012) and asked participants: "Did you ever receive direct messages or personal invitations from people within your network to attend a protest or support a mutual aid campaign in the summer of 2020?" Each response was indicated on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 = very often to 5 = never. These results were reverse coded to represent 1 = never and 5 = very often. ($M = 2.31$, $SD = .90$).

Qualitative Measures

Open-ended survey responses were thematically analyzed to provide insights into participants' attitudes and to increase understanding of how participants view their online and offline efforts (Geer, 1991; Haddock & Zanna,

2011). Open-ended responses were analyzed to answer RQ3: (a) “What kinds of SMP network ties influence online and offline protest participation?” and RQ3: (b) “How do individuals make sense of their demonstrations of support for BLM online and offline?”

Thematic Analysis

Iterative thematic analysis provides a framework through which qualitative data may be readily assessed. While this approach is flexible, it generally comprises six key steps. As stated by Ahmed et al., (2023) these steps are, “(1) familiarization with data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) writing the report” (Ahmed et al., 2023). These steps allow textual data to be analyzed and synthesized so that meaningful patterns among participants may be recognized. Importantly, this approach allows for greater consideration of the lived experiences of participants, as it allows for data to be collected and understood outside of the confines of more traditional survey questions with pre-defined answers.

Both Geer (1991) and Haddock & Zanna (2011) have provided research findings supporting the use of open-ended survey questions to enrich studies that also use closed-ended questions or survey data. Braun and Clarke (2006) established thematic analysis as an accessible, flexible, pattern-based method for analyzing textual data. Specifically, reflexive thematic analysis emphasizes researcher subjectivity and theoretical clarity and offers guidelines for analyzing participants' responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, participant responses were analyzed using an inductive and iterative thematic analysis framework. Participant responses were manually coded, and the results of this coding allowed themes in the responses to be recognized and

organized. Initial codes were used to identify theoretically supported activist behaviors. However, by rereading the raw data, alternative patterns were identified, specifically in relation to whether participants self-identified their behaviors as demonstrations of support for the BLM movement.

Participants were asked the following questions to characterize their support for BLM and gather information about their participation in protest demonstrations: "If applicable, how did you demonstrate support for BLM and George Floyd?" and "Can you describe any specific Instagram posts that influenced your engagement with activism-related content during the summer of 2020?" Twenty-four (24) people responded to both questions, and the responses were generally several sentences in length. Twenty-four (24) responded to the second question with answers typically consisting of only a few words. These findings were formed from an iterative thematic analysis that revealed themes that addressed RQ3: (b) and RQ3: (a) respectively.

Results

Quantitative Analysis & Findings

A series of multiple linear regression models was used to examine the relationship between tie-based exposure to activist-related content (weak ties and strong ties), online activism behaviors, and offline protest participation. To answer RQ1, I conducted multiple linear regression analyses in SPSS to examine the relationship between online and offline activism. To answer RQ2, I conducted multiple linear regressions in SPSS statistical software to examine the

relationship between exposure to Instagram posts shared by strong and weak ties and online activism.

Exploration of Covariates

Correlations were conducted among political affiliation, frequency of Instagram use, and the three dependent variables (social media activism scale, content engagement scale, and offline protest behavior scale) to determine whether they should be included in the analysis as covariates. Political affiliation was not significantly correlated with content engagement ($r = -.167, p = .308$), social media activism ($r = -.223, p = .168$), or offline protest behavior ($r = -.236, p = .142$). Additionally, general Instagram use was not significantly associated with content engagement ($r = -.199, p = .206$), social media activism ($r = -.283, p = .066$), or offline protest behavior ($r = -.214, p = .173$). Because neither political affiliation nor general Instagram usage showed a statistically significant relationship, neither was incorporated as a control variable. The decision to omit these covariates is consistent with previous research practices, as including non-significant predictors can reduce statistical power in an already small sample (Groenwold et al., 2012).

Research Question 1

The first regression model tested exposure from weak and strong ties, as well as social media activism, as predictors for offline activism. This model was statistically significant ($F(3,39) = 6.44, p = .001$) and explained 33.1 percent of the variance ($R^2 = .331, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .280$). Social media activism was a strong predictor of offline protest behavior ($B = .450, \beta = .552, p < .001$). However, neither weak tie exposure ($p = .576$)

nor strong tie exposure ($p = .570$) was significant in this model. Full regression results are in Table 1.

The next model examined whether online activism predicted offline activism, using the content engagement scale, and was statistically significant ($F(3, 38) = 6.70, p < .001$), explaining 34.6% of the variance ($R^2 = .346$, Adjusted $R^2 = .294$). Content engagement significantly predicted offline protest behavior ($B = .573, \beta = .565, p < .001$). As also seen in the previous model, neither weak tie exposure ($p = .813$) nor strong tie exposure ($p = .636$) was a significant predictor of offline protest behavior. Full regression results are in Table 2.

Research Question 2

The first linear regression model was used to test whether exposure to activist-related content on Instagram, from weak and strong ties, predicted social media activism. The overall regression was not statistically significant ($F(2,41) = 2.89, p = .067$). Although not significant, the model explained 12.4 percent of the variance in social media activism ($R^2 = .124$, Adjusted $R^2 = .081$). At the predictor level, strong tie exposure (i.e., direct messages, personal invitations to participate) was a significant positive predictor of online activism ($B = .415, \beta = .338, p = .033$). Conversely, weak tie exposure was not significant ($B = -.052, \beta = -.040, p = .796$). Full regression results are in Table 3.

The second model examined predictors of online activism as measured by the content engagement scale. Again, model two was not statistically significant ($F(2,40) = 3.18, p = .052$), accounting for 13.7 percent of the variance ($R^2 = .137$, Adjusted $R^2 = .094$). Unsurprisingly, in model two, strong tie exposure was a

significant positive predictor for online activism ($B = .410$, $\beta = .382$, $p = .016$), whereas weak tie exposure was not significant ($B = .104$, $\beta = .090$, $p = .553$). Full regression results are in Table 4.

Qualitative Findings

Research Question 3: (b)

The following themes emerged from responses to the question, “If applicable, how did you demonstrate support for BLM and George Floyd?”: sharing of informational and financial resources, participation in protest demonstrations, “safe space” creation, and engagement in personal reflection.

Informational and Financial Resources

Several responses mentioned sharing Instagram posts related to informational resources and mutual aid funds. Those who reported financial contributions often mentioned an inability to attend a protest, as seen in this response: “Delivering supplies to protests - it didn’t feel physically safe to protest because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but I could support the movement through donating protest supplies and money.”

Protest Demonstration

The responses that mentioned protest participation also reported additional types of support, such as resource sharing and the creation of safe spaces. One participant reported showing support by “protesting, conversations, sharing resources, bail funds,” while another explained:

I support the Black Lives Matter movement, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor by informing people about updated information (especially misinformed people in my daily life), verbally and online amplified activists voices, called for justice

online and offline through protesting, boycotts, and contacting politicians. Most importantly, mutual aid was a must. I didn't have a lot of money or resources at the time, but I did my best to share mutual aid links to friends and family who did have the resources and always personally messaged the people needing the support as encouragement and support.

These responses mentioned all the observed demonstrations of support coded in the data.

“Safe Space” Creation and Personal Reflection

Responses that mentioned creating a safe space and personal reflection were related to uplifting others: “I tried to uplift the voices of my black friends and give them space to grieve and talk about how they felt.” Initially, micro or personal changes were not apparent demonstrations of support. However, one display of personal reflection allowed for this theme to emerge: “By personally reflecting and making supportive changes in my everyday life that were possible. I prefer micro-level changes as my approach to politics and social issues.”

Research Question 3: (a)

The following themes emerged from responses to the question, “Can you describe any specific Instagram posts that influenced your engagement with activism-related content during the summer of 2020?”: pressure to perform, advocating for activism, and inspiration to act.

Pressure to Perform

The emergence of this theme revealed that digital activist efforts can elicit adverse responses. Instead of promoting offline participation, some reported

feeling pressured or generally perceived low-effort supportive Instagram posts such as for #BlackoutTuesday as insincere. In a response to the question, “Can you describe any specific Instagram posts that influenced your engagement with activism-related content during the summer of 2020?” one respondent states that they even felt tremendous pressure to engage to avoid potential social or structural hardship:

The "blackout Tuesday" posts unnerved me due to the social contagion and public scrutiny for non-participation. I knew of several case where individuals weighed the risk-reward benefit (personally, socially, and most unsettling, professionally) of sharing or not sharing.

Interestingly, many of the responses to Q21 about specific posts mentioned posting for #BlackoutTuesday. Overall, most respondents did not view this type of participation as active support for the BLM movement but as participation in a trend, or as one participant put it, “...I remember that specific trend because it almost felt like a signal to others that I supported BLM.” This raises the distinction between how performative allyship and meaningful action may be determinants of online and offline mobilization.

Inspired to Act

Another theme revealed how Instagram offered an accessible and convenient way to promote BLM movement causes. One participant found information from Instagram to be useful and motivating, saying, “local posts by coalitions or loud voices who shared information in an accessible way helped me repost more, stay informed and become motivated to get out there where i lived. i sought out more information and people and organizations.” This type of information sharing left users feeling motivated to contribute what they have learned on Instagram and inspired many to continue

spreading the message online. Multiple participants reported following through on these feelings of motivation by providing resources and donations. One participant stated: “Don’t remember the poster but a post about supplies needed made me go to the store get those supplies and deliver them to a protest site.” Similarly, another participant reported, “I saw videos of George Floyd, the and subsequent marches that motivated me to donate and get involved in anyway I can.” Such responses reveal the advantages of online efforts in inspiring involvement in offline movement efforts as well.

Advocating for Activism

The final theme present in these responses is the fortuitous advantages offered by Instagram for BLM and social justice advocates and organizers who successfully utilized the platform to increase awareness of these issues as if it were prime-time television. One participant stated, “I remember an old colleague reposting a lot of posts from news organizations, BLM, and other related content from influencers or large organizations” while another stated “I remember some social justice influencers I followed would post a lot and I feel like that got me learning more and engaging more. I can’t remember specifics from then, but there were many posts that would share news happening and photos from protests, and also just discussions making good points about all the injustice happening.” Interestingly, participants' responses note that the advocates also offered contextual and foundational discursive resources to ground the BLM protests in 2020 within the civil rights movement writ large. For example, one participant reported, “There were some organizations posting graphics that broke

down some activist theory and history of civil rights that I learned a lot from.” Several participants noted that if they had not seen Instagram posts from such organizations, they may not have known about demonstrations, mutual aid funds, or other avenues for support from their networks of close ties alone.

Discussion of Quantitative Findings

The goal of this study was to examine how exposure to activism-related content from strong and weak ties relates to online and offline activism. In examining how exposure to activism-related content from strong and weak ties relates to online and offline activism, this study sought to generate a deeper understanding of how the ways in which individuals engage with online content may influence their subsequent willingness to participate in activism. As social media is an increasingly popular avenue for information sharing and interpersonal communication, understanding the influence of user interaction with peers is important for scholars seeking to better understand and predict the factors that motivate individuals to become involved in social movements.

The findings of this study did not suggest that tie strength directly influences offline protest behavior. However, the study determined that social media activism significantly predicts offline protest behavior. This study's quantitative results also found that while exposure to messages from weak ties was not a significant predictor of offline activism, exposure to personal messages from strong ties have a more significant impact in this sample. The open-ended responses provided insights into how information circulated within networks. Finally, this study found that participants view information and resource sharing and safe space creation as a demonstration of

support for BLM, but that they did not apply this interpretation to all forms of social media engagement, such as merely taking part in #BlackOutTuesday.

Online Activism

The quantitative results from models 1 and 2 indicated that personalized, direct, and actionable messages from strong network ties were more predictive of online activism than passive exposure through weak network ties. Although the overall regression models were not statistically significant, both models indicated that strong tie exposure was positively associated with online activism, as measured by the social media activism scale and the content engagement scale. These findings reveal that a pattern of active engagement (as exemplified by likes, shares, and comments) promotes similar behaviors within an online network, whereas weak ties appear insufficient to drive meaningful engagement. While these findings did not support Granovetter's (1973, 1983) strength of weak ties theory, they did support research that cites online activism as a viable function of modern-day social movement mobilization (Li & Luczak-Roesch, 2021; Mercea, 2012; Wallace et al., 2023; Tarafdar et al., 2021; Theocharis et al., 2022; Valenzuela et al., 2014).

Offline Activism

Social media activism was a strong predictor of offline protest behavior in both regression models. However, weak-tie and strong-tie exposure were both insignificant. Thus, while tie strength did not directly influence offline protest behavior, social media activism directly predicted it. These findings are not consistent with the strength of weak ties theory. However, these findings align

with the view that digital activism efforts, particularly on Instagram, serve as a mobilizing tool to promote organizing and participation in BLM protests (Li & Luczak-Roesch, 2021; Mercea, 2012; Wallace et al., 2023; Tarafdar et al., 2021; Theocharis et al., 2022; Valenzuela et al., 2014). Information shared online appears to result in offline efforts to demonstrate support and enact change.

Discussion of Qualitative Findings

Instagram: A New Tool for Social Movement Organizing

The open-ended responses seeking to determine where participants found information about protests and other events offered two valuable insights: (1) the local context of social movement organizing and (2) strong ties are central to understanding the relationship between online and offline activism. While place-based movement studies and information-seeking behaviors are beyond the scope of this study, responses to this question revealed that most individuals sought information about protest demonstrations through close network ties on Instagram. Each response to the question about information seeking mentioned using Instagram to obtain updates on protest events, situating this study within the body of research that legitimizes SMPs as powerful information-dissemination tools that support social movement organizing (Boulianne, 2015; Theocharis et al., 2022; Triezenberg et al., 2015).

The Weakness of Strong Ties

Qualitative responses indicated that personal invitations or requests for support made participants less inclined to engage in activism. Further, other responses indicated that participants who were already active in community efforts or had received messages about local efforts and organizations showed no change in affect or behavior.

Participants who were already actively attending protests or demonstrating offline support found that personal invitations had neutral or no influence on their behavior, with only a small minority reporting increased engagement in activism. These findings indicate that there is a limit to the efficacy of messaging from close ties in eliciting engagement, especially among individuals who are already engaged in local activist networks (González-Bailón et al., 2011).

Those participants who reported negative reactions to personal messages had seemingly already decided that they were unwilling or unable to attend demonstrations or engage in offline efforts to show support for BLM. There were two distinct types of negative responses: (1) accessibility concerns, and (2) the personal message was an imposition. One response mentioned “pressure” due to “life circumstances.” This participant mentioned they were at capacity in navigating the challenges they faced during the COVID-19 lockdown and could not take on any additional stressors. Whether this person desired to participate was not mentioned; however, they made it clear that they lacked the resources needed to participate in activism. One can consider whether that participant, if they had the resources to navigate their struggles, would have reported differently.

Demonstrating Support

The research findings suggest individuals understand and can clearly explain their limitations when choosing to participate in online and offline efforts. Specifically, respondents could coherently explain their rationale for the types of support they ultimately offered to the BLM movement. For instance, one

participant stated that they were able to contribute financial resources and mutual aid because they felt it was unsafe for them to participate in protests. Another participant noted that, while they lacked substantial monetary resources at the time of the protests, they offered support by attending events and sharing information on Instagram. These findings revealed that individuals must negotiate the types of social movement support they can provide, given the resources available to them (Earl, 2006; Field et al., 2022).

It is important to note that this research study positions information-sharing as a demonstration of social movement support. Paulo Gerbaudo in *Tweets and Streets* calls social media activism a “choreography of assembly” (Gerbaudo, 2012). This offered an apt jumping-off point for the current study and novel insights into how individuals understand their demonstration of support in a social movement. Many participants in this study reported that they showed support by sharing information and resources online and offline. In this research study, the act of information sharing is considered both an action itself and a catalyst for subsequent actions. This supports the strength of weak ties theory by understanding the sharing of informational Instagram posts as a function of weak network ties. Many responses offered insight into the underrepresented tools and mechanisms that promote social movement engagement. Information dissemination remains a linchpin of movement support through its role in organizing activist efforts.

Theoretical Implications

As discussed, the findings of this study did not support the strength of weak ties theory. However, the research findings indicated that even when information is passed within strong networks, the passage of those messages from peer-to-peer may deter

the recipient from acting. In other words, personal messages transmitted via social media, regardless of the relationship between sender and receiver, can be equally ineffective at motivating individuals to engage in activism. Nevertheless, the strength of weak ties theory remains a useful framework for understanding how messages circulate through social networks (Granovetter, 1973, 1983).

Practical Implications

This study contributes to modern-day social movement organizing by emphasizing the possibilities of digital activism to promote social engagement and change. This study also offers important insights into best practices for organizers, as it provides a more comprehensive understanding of how network ties contribute to information circulation in online spaces and how this circulation may ultimately lead to real-world participation in social movements. As COVID-19 and other periods of contemporary social, economic, and political crises have significantly influenced the organizational capabilities of activists (Ahmed, 2023; Chang et al., 2022; Özkula, 2021; Ponder et al., 2023), these results, specifically those related to how participants understand their demonstrations of support for BLM, provide insight into how digital tools can sustain social movements. There is an opportunity for further studies examining how access to resources such as time, financial means, social support, transportation, and childcare influences participation in social movements (Ahmed, 2023; Field et al., 2022).

By better understanding how social media engagement promotes, or even deters, individual participation in activism, organizers can more readily harness the power of SMPs to expand awareness and participation in social movements.

For example, with access to data showing which factors increase the efficacy of messaging in encouraging meaningful community participation, organizers can tailor their messaging for maximum impact (Earl, 2006; Field et al., 2022). This is especially true for grassroots movements that may face financial constraints, since engagement on Instagram and other SMPs is often free. Thus, organizers with limited financial support from outside groups can use SMPs as a cost-efficient means for growing engagement.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is the small sample size and the limited number of survey responses. Due to the small sample size and the lack of statistically significant relationships between covariates, including age, gender, and race, the study could not include these demographic measures as control variables. Increasing the sample size is likely to produce results with greater generalizability. Furthermore, increasing the sample size would likely generate responses from a more diverse range of participants. Researchers may uncover differences in protest engagement based on factors such as affiliation with certain political ideologies if there is greater diversity in participant representation.

Additionally, the study's limitation stemmed from its reliance on participants' recollection of Instagram posts and activities from five years ago. It may have proved difficult for participants to accurately recall their engagement on Instagram and their subsequent behavior in 2020. A similar study of a more recent or active social movement is likely to reach larger audiences and yield a better understanding of how SMPs, including emerging ones such as TikTok, influence activism.

This study used an exclusively digital survey. As such, participants were required to possess some technological skills and have access to an internet-enabled device in order to complete the survey. Due to these requirements, the sample for the study may not have captured a full spectrum of activists, especially those with limited familiarity with technology or those who presently lack the material resources to regularly access internet-connected devices.

Future Directions

Because the 2020 BLM movement occurred amid unprecedented social distancing measures, the behavioral patterns reported by participants may have been anomalous. Specifically, because face-to-face communication was limited, participants may have relied more heavily on Instagram to share and receive protest information than they would under ordinary circumstances. Researchers may use contemporary studies in this area to better understand whether these behavioral patterns persist now that many COVID-19 pandemic restrictions have been lifted.

The findings of this study indicate that messages from sources within their network, located in close geographical proximity, had the greatest influence on participants. While this phenomenon was not a focus of this research, a future study that does focus on place-based movements has the potential to promote a deeper understanding of the ways in which digital organizing efforts operate at the local level.

As a final note, activism scholarship must carefully protect the anonymity of research participants engaging in collective action. Participants may depend

on their belief that their privacy will be protected to provide candid insights into the factors influencing their participation in real-world activism, especially regarding movements that may challenge the prevailing political infrastructure. Fears of social or government reprisal for participation in activism, online or offline, may be a genuine concern for participants in the United States and abroad. Therefore, researchers must exercise the utmost caution when researching activism.

Conclusion

Overall, the results indicate that digital activism predicts offline activism. While exposure to Instagram content from weak ties does not predict outcomes in digital or offline activism, exposure to content from strong ties is associated with increased participation in both. While these findings did not support Granovetter's (1973) strength of weak ties theory, the thematic analysis revealed that personal messages were ineffective at influencing activism, suggesting that future studies should consider how individuals identify demonstrations of support for social movements and what drives engagement. These findings are beneficial to those engaged in organizing efforts, as they illustrate how digital tools can be used to strategically disseminate information that may lead to greater engagement in social movements.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter



EXEMPT DETERMINATION

May 3, 2025

Virginia Sanchez
Tichenor Hall 217
Auburn Univ, AL 36849
3348442727
vss0011@auburn.edu

Dear Virginia Sanchez:

On 5/3/2025, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Protocol Information	Submission Details
Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Network Ties That Mobilize: Exploring Instagram's Role in Empowering Social Movements
Investigator:	Virginia Sanchez
IRB ID:	STUDY00000568
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	N/A
Grant ID:	None
IND, IDE or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• DW Exempt Protocol.pdf, Category: IRB Protocol;• DW Information Letter.pdf, Category: Consent Form;• DW Survey Graphic (Instagram).pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;• DW Survey Promo.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;• Network_Ties_That_Mobilize.pdf, Category: Survey/Questionnaire;• Survey PDF view.pdf, Category: Survey/Questionnaire;

The IRB determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review. This determination is valid through 5/2/2028. The IRB has implemented a three-year determination period for Exempt submissions to better manage the active research portfolio.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in HRP-103 - INVESTIGATOR MANUAL.

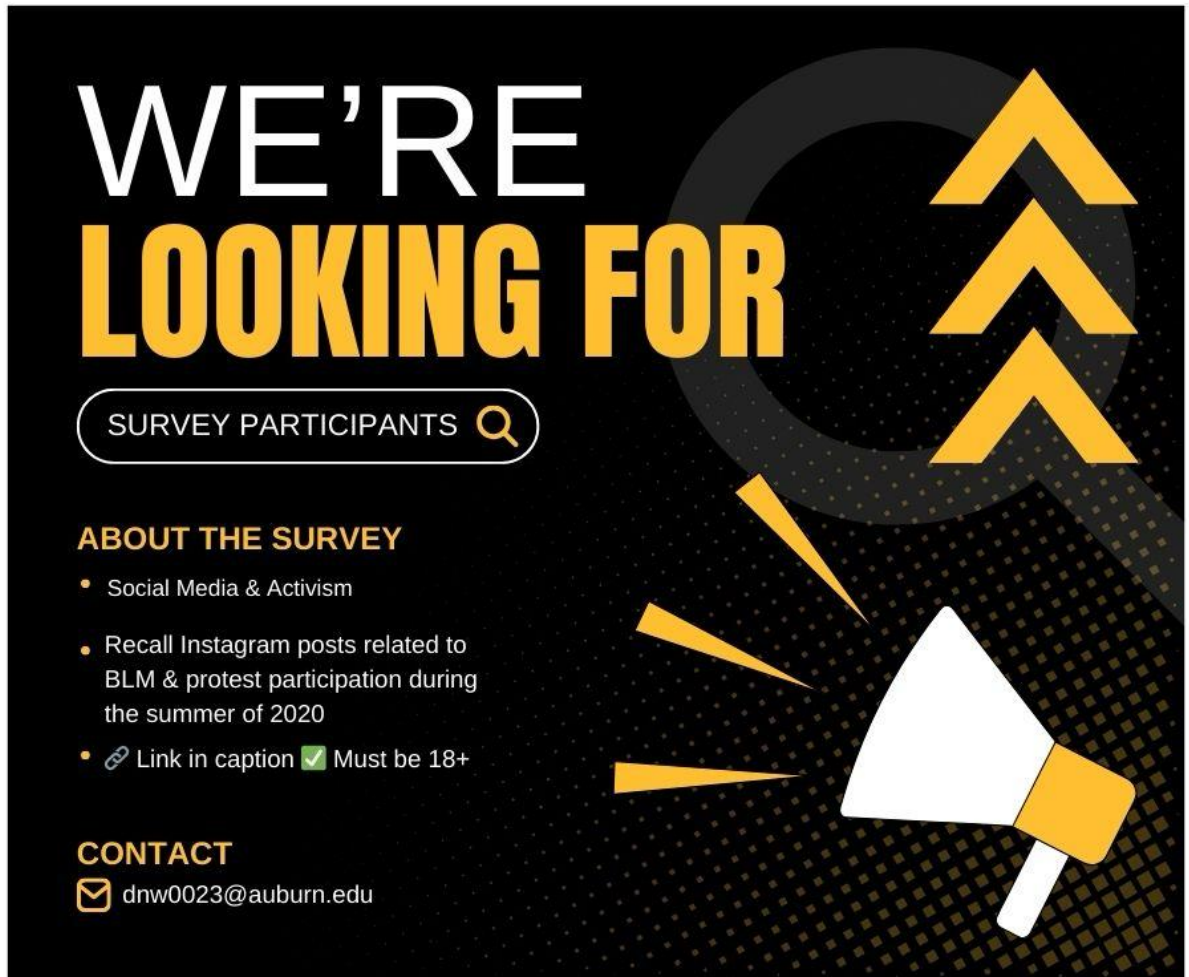
This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit a modification in the Endeavor system.



Sincerely,

IRB Administration
540 Devall Drive
Auburn, AL 36849
irbadmin@auburn.edu
(334) 844-5966

Appendix B: Promotional Survey Material



**WE'RE
LOOKING FOR**

SURVEY PARTICIPANTS 🔍

ABOUT THE SURVEY

- Social Media & Activism
- Recall Instagram posts related to BLM & protest participation during the summer of 2020
- [Link in caption](#) Must be 18+

CONTACT

✉ dnw0023@auburn.edu

Appendix C: Survey Guide¹

INFORMATION LETTER

Title of research study: Network Ties That Mobilize: Exploring the Role of Instagram in Empowering Social Movements

Investigators: Dr. Virginia Sánchez & Destiny Waldrop

You are invited to participate in a research study to examine the relationship between social media use and activism. This study aims to determine a relationship between social network tie strength, frequent exposure to activism content on social media, and the likelihood of offline protest engagement. The study is being conducted by Destiny Waldrop, Graduate Teaching/Research Assistant, under the direction of Dr. Virginia Sánchez, Assistant Professor in the Auburn University School of Communication and Journalism. You were selected as a possible participant because you are an active Instagram user who engaged with content related to BLM following the death of George Floyd in the summer of 2020.

What will be involved if you participate? If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to report your social media use at the time, the kind of content you engaged with, and how often you engaged with content from various members of your social network. Additionally, you will be asked if you participated in any forms of offline protest. Your total time commitment will be approximately 20 minutes.

Are there any risks or discomforts? The risks associated with participating in this study are related to the memory of potentially distressing media depictions of police

¹ Note: Several questions were asked in the survey that were not used in the analysis but were collected to help understand and characterize the data.

violence. To minimize these risks, we will not ask you to view any material or disclose any identifying information.

Are there any benefits to yourself or others? If you participate in this study, you are contributing to research that can improve our understanding of social media as a viable tool for support of social movements and the study of digital activism.

Will you receive compensation for participating? There is no compensation for participation.

Are there any costs? There are no costs associated with participation in this study.

Your participation is completely voluntary. Once you've submitted anonymous data, it cannot be withdrawn since it will be unidentifiable. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University.

Any data obtained in connection with this study will remain anonymous and unidentifiable. We will protect your privacy and the data you provide by Auburn Qualtrics and Auburn Box. Information collected through your participation may be used for a master's thesis, published in a professional journal, and/or presented at a professional meeting or academic conference.

If you have questions about this study, please ask them now or contact Destiny Waldrop at dnw0023@auburn.edu or Dr. Virginia Sánchez at vss0011@auburn.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact

the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334) 844-5966 or e-mail at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE IF YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, THE DATA YOU PROVIDE WILL SERVE AS YOUR AGREEMENT TO DO SO. THIS LETTER IS YOURS TO KEEP.

By clicking the arrow below you guarantee that you are at least 18 years old and are agreeing to participate in this study. Clicking the arrow will take you to the survey.

INCLUSION/EXCLUSION QUESTIONS

1. Are you active on Instagram?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

2. To the best of your memory, were you active on Instagram in the summer of 2020?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

If NO: the survey ends.

If YES: Did you encounter content related to police brutality, the death of George Floyd, or the Black Lives Matter movement?

If YES: Did you encounter content related to police brutality, the death of George Floyd, or the Black Lives Matter movement?

If YES:

3. To the best of your memory, how often did you use Instagram in the summer of 2020?

- a. Never
- b. Rarely (less than one time per week)
- c. Often (2-3 times per week)
- d. Daily (1 or more times a day)

SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVISM

4. How frequently did you use Instagram to:

Very Often (1)	Fairly Often (2)	Occasionally (3)	Rarely (4)	Never (5)
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Post links to BLM related stories or articles for others to read?

Post your own thoughts or comments on BLM?

Encourage other people to take action?

Repost content related to BLM that was originally posted by someone else?

'Like' or promote material related to BLM that others have posted?

CONTENT ENGAGEMENT

5. For the following, please select how often you engaged with content related to BLM or the death of George Floyd in the summer of 2020:

Very Often (1)	Fairly Often (2)	Occasionally (3)	Rarely (4)	Never (5)
----------------	------------------	------------------	------------	-----------

I created social media posts about this issue whenever I had the chance.

I joined a group on social media that supports my viewpoint about this issue.

I uploaded content (e.g. pictures) related to this issue to social media.

I left a personal comment on a social media post about this issue.

I provided links to other information related to this issue.

I used hashtags that make it easier for people to search and share my perspective regarding this issue.

I reposted or mention contents about this issue if the content agrees with my viewpoint.

I reposted or mention contents about this issue I shared posts about this issue with my friends on social media if the content agrees with my viewpoint

I left a personal comment on a social media post about this issue.

I provided links to other information related to this issue.

I used hashtags that make it easier for people to search and share my perspective regarding this issue.

I reposted or mention content about this issue if the content agrees with my viewpoint.

I shared posts about this issue with my friends on social media if the content agrees with my viewpoint.

OFFLINE ACTIVISM

6. Please indicate how often you participated in the following offline demonstrations in response to BLM or the death of George Floyd:

Very Often (1)	Fairly Often (2)	Occasionally (3)	Rarely (4)	Never (5)
----------------	------------------	------------------	------------	-----------

In the summer of 2020, I attended a rally or demonstration in response to police violence or racial injustice.

I attended a meeting of an organization supporting my view regarding this issue.

I became a member of an organization supporting my view on this issue.

I actively campaigned for an organization supporting my view regarding this issue.

I contacted a politician or government official supporting my view related to this issue by phone or letter.

I contacted activists supporting my view related to this issue by phone or letter.

Social Media Motivations

7. What did you consider when liking, commenting, and reposting BLM related content on Instagram?

- a. To show solidarity with the protesters in the streets,
- b. I was exasperated with bad governance and police brutality,
- c. I wanted to invalidate the protests,
- d. I wanted to validate the protests

- e. Other:
- f. To show solidarity with the protesters in the streets,
- g. I was exasperated with bad governance and police brutality, I wanted to invalidate the protests
- h. I wanted to validate the protests
- i. Other:

Tie Strength

8. In the summer of 2020, who did you see a majority of BLM related content from:

- a. Close Friends/Family
- b. Colleagues
- c. Public Figures/Organizations/Social Media Influencers
- d. Other: Write in

9. How likely were you to:

Very Unlikely (1)	Unlikely (2)	Neutral (3)	Likely (4)	Very Likely (5)
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Share or repost content related to activism if it was shared by someone close to you (e.g., friend or family member)?

Share or repost content related to activism if it was shared by someone you are not close to but has a relationship with a friend or family member?

Share or repost content related to activism if it was shared by someone you are not close to but has a relationship with a friend or family member?

How likely were you to share or repost content related to activism if it was shared by someone you are not close to but has a relationship with a friend or family member?

How likely were you to share or repost content related to activism if it was shared by someone you nor your friends and family are close to (e.g., influencers, celebrity accounts, formal organizations)?

How likely were you to share or repost content related to activism if it was shared by someone you nor your friends and family are close to (e.g., influencers, celebrity accounts, formal organizations)?

10. Did you ever receive direct messages or personal invitations from people within your network to attend a protest or support a mutual aid campaign in the summer of 2020?

- a. Yes
- b. No

(If yes): Write in

How did these personal messages influence your behavior?

Did this contact result in donating to any mutual aid funds?

Do you credit this contact as an influence in your decision to donate?

FREQUENCY OF EXPOSURE

11. In the summer of 2020, how often did you see content related to BLM protests shared by people you have never met?

- a. Never (Less than once)
- b. Rarely (Once or twice)
- c. Sometimes (Weekly)
- d. Often (Daily)
- e. Always (Several times a day?)

12. Were you ever asked on Instagram to get involved in the BLM movement?

- a. Never (0 times)
- b. Rarely (1-2 times)
- c. Less than once a week
- d. Weekly
- e. Daily

12. Can you describe any specific Instagram posts that influenced your engagement with activism-related content during the summer of 2020?: Write in

13. How frequently did you interact (like, comment, share, or repost) with content related to the murder of George Floyd and other instances of police violence during the summer of 2020?

- a. Never (0 times)
- b. Rarely (1-2 times)
- c. Less than once a week
- d. Weekly
- e. Daily

14. How often did you engage with the following types of content (like, comment, share, or repost) on Instagram in the summer of 2020?:

Very Often (1)	Fairly Often (2)	Occasionally (3)	Rarely (4)	Never (5)
----------------	------------------	------------------	------------	-----------

Protest demonstration information

News coverage of police violence (e.g., images, videos)

Personal stories related to the Black Lives Matter movement

Activist accounts or pages (e.g., organizations, influencers)

15. In the summer of 2020, how many activist accounts (e.g., organizations, activist influencers, advocacy pages) did you follow on Instagram? Estimate to the best of your knowledge.

- a. None
- b. 1-3
- c. 4-6
- d. 7-10
- e. More than 10

16. How often did you see the same information related to activism (e.g., Black Lives Matter, mutual aid, police violence) being shared by multiple Instagram users in the summer of 2020?

- a. Never (Less than once)
- b. Rarely (Once or twice)
- c. Sometimes (Weekly)
- d. Often (Daily)
- e. Always (Several times a day)

17. Did you interact with content shared by people in your immediate social network (family, friends, colleagues) more than content from public activist accounts or organizations during this time?

I engaged more with my immediate social network

I engaged more with activist accounts or organizations

I engaged equally with both

I didn't engage with content during this time

18. Were there any specific people or accounts (within your personal network or from activist organizations) that you saw consistently sharing content related to the protests or police violence in 2020?

- a. Yes
- b. No

(IF YES): How would you describe your relationship with them?: Write in

OFFLINE PROTEST BEHAVIOR

19. What factors did you consider when deciding whether to attend demonstrations advertised on Instagram (Select all that apply)?

- a. Personal relationship with the poster
- b. Connection to the cause referenced on the invitation
- c. Social reputation of the poster
- d. Covid Restrictions/Lockdown
- e. Other: Please Specify: _____

20. Who did you attend demonstrations with?

21. What influences you to attend or not attend a protest or demonstration in the summer of 2020 (Rank in order from most to least important)

- a. Close relationship with someone attending
- b. Personal connection to the cause
- c. Curiosity
- d. Show support

- e. Social reputation
- f. Event promoted on Instagram
- g. Covid Restrictions/Lockdown
- h. Work/School
- i. Other: Please Specify: _____
- j. Open response:

22. Do you feel your online engagement with activism-related content on Instagram influenced your decision (to participate in any offline protests)?

- a. It strongly influenced my decision to participate
- b. It somewhat influenced my decision to participate
- c. It had no influence on my decision
- d. I did not participate in any offline protests

23. Open-ended question: How did you demonstrate support for BLM and George Floyd?

24. Do you consider these things forms of protest: sharing pre-protest information (e.g., what to do if you are tear gas, legal aid, encrypted communication)

25. Which of the following statements closely align with your personal values? (select all that apply)

- a. It is important to spread the word about police brutality
- b. Humans beings should not be incarcerated
- c. Police in the US should be dismantled
- d. Police in the US should be defunded

DEMOGRAPHIC

26. Age:

27. Gender: I identify as (please select all that apply):

- a. Trans*
- b. Man
- c. Woman
- d. Gender Non-Conforming

- a. Gender Non-Conforming
- b. Other (or, prefer to self describe): Please specify: _____
- c. Prefer not to respond

28. Race/Ethnicity: I identify as (please select all that apply):

- a. African
- b. African American and/or Black
- c. Arab
- d. Asian
- e. Asian American
- f. Caribbean/West Indian
- g. European
- h. Hispanic and/or Latino/a/e/x
- i. Latin American
- j. Middle Eastern
- k. Native American
- l. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- m. South Asian

- n. Southeast Asian
- o. White
- p. Another race and/or ethnicity: Please Specify: _____
- q. Prefer not to respond

29. What is your individual annual net income from all sources (work, Social Security, pension, etc.)?

- a. \$0 – \$5,000
- b. \$5,001 - \$9,999
- c. \$10,000 - \$19,999
- d. \$20,000 - \$29,000
- e. \$30,000 - \$39,999
- f. \$40,000 - \$49,000
- g. \$50,000 - \$59,000
- h. \$60,000 – \$69,999
- i. \$70,000 - \$79,000
- j. \$80,000 or more
- k. Do not know
- l. Do not want to say

30. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- a. Some high school
- b. High school diploma
- c. GED
- d. Some college

- e. 2-year degree or Vocational Training (e.g. trade school, cosmetology, construction)
- f. 4-year degree
- g. Some graduate work
- h. Master's degree
- i. Professional degree (e.g. JD, MD)
- j. Doctorate (e.g. Ed.D., Ph.D.)

31. Political Views

Very Conservative (1)	Conservative (2)	Moderate (3)	Liberal (4)	Very Liberal (5)
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Appendix D: Regression Models

Table 1

Regression Model Predicting Offline Activism from Tie Exposure and Social Media Activism

Model	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	2.199	.775		2.839	.007
Weak Tie Exposure	.083	.147	.078	.564	.576
Strong Tie Exposure	.086	.150	.084	.574	.570
Social Media Activism Scale	.450	.114	.552	3.961	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Offline Activism Scale

b. Predictors: (Constant), Social Media Activism Scale, Weak Tie Exposure, Strong Tie Exposure

$R^2 = .331, p = .001$

Table 2

Regression Model Predicting Offline Activism from Tie Exposure and Content

Engagement

Model	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	1.806	.808		2.236	.031
Weak Tie Exposure	.036	.150	.033	.239	.813
Strong Tie Exposure	.072	.152	.068	.477	.636
Content Engagement Scale	.573	.139	.565	4.107	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Offline Activism Scale

b. Predictors: (Constant), Content Engagement Scale, Weak Tie Exposure, Strong Tie

Exposure

$$R^2 = .346, p = <.001$$

Table 3

Regression Model Predicting Online Activism from Tie Exposure and Social Media

Activism

Model	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	2.477	.947		2.617	.012
Weak Tie Exposure	-.052	.199	-.040	-.260	.796
Strong Tie Exposure	.415	.188	.338	2.213	.033

a. Dependent Variable: Social Media Activism Scale

b. Predictors: (Constant), Strong Tie Exposure, Weak Tie Exposure

$R^2 = .124, p = <.067$

Table 4

Regression Model Predicting Online Activism from Tie Exposure and Content

Engagement

Model	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	2.248	.807		2.784	.008
Weak Tie Exposure	.104	.174	.090	.598	.553
Strong Tie Exposure	.410	.163	.382	2.523	.016

a. Dependent Variable: Content Engagement Scale

b. Predictors: (Constant), Strong Tie Exposure, Weak Tie Exposure

$$R^2 = .137, p = <.052$$