

Section 2 Module 1 Reading Response

Through the digit response to the murder of Michael Brown, Bonilla and Rosa's paper reflects on the use of Twitter and digital activism in today's world. The authors first chronicle the effects of Twitter after the murder took place. News about the shooting went viral quickly and there were millions of posts on Twitter about Michael Brown's death.

Many tweets were linked together because they used a hashtag and wrote #Ferguson. Bonilla and Rosa claim that hashtags have multiple roles. First, they act like a library call number and can link related information together. However, since users are able to write their own hashtags, they are able to use them to add meaning to their tweets. Hashtags also allow many different points of views to be seen at once. The authors mention that people in support of the police officer who shot Michael Brown also used the #Ferguson. Since people can put multiple hashtags on tweets they can also link together other events or phrases like putting #HandsUp with #Ferguson. Since people can search for hashtags, they also contribute to the problem of a person's social media only portraying their point of view. The authors discuss how hashtag ethnography is difficult because hashtags provide no information on the actual tweets. They also note that with Ferguson, the hashtag was helpful in spreading news once the event happened and before the mainstream news media picked up the story.

In some ways Twitter is like other forms of technology because it spread a message to the world. However, one of the main differences is that in real time one can see countless points of views and how people are reacting to what others are saying. Twitter also creates a feeling of connectedness between users. The authors discuss how it allowed people feel like they were protesting even if they were not physically in Ferguson.

Hashtags have served an important role in pointing out the unfair representation of African-Americans in the media and police brutality towards African-Americans as well. The authors cite examples where phrases like #HandsUpDontShoot prompted thousands of people to post photos of themselves with their hands up. A similar situation occurred after Geraldo Rivera blamed Trayvon Martin's death on his hoodie. Twitter also allowed users to show posts that pointed out how African-Americans are portrayed in the media through the #IfTheyGunnedMeDown hashtag and how the media would choose certain pictures of African-Americans to imply they were 'bad.' The use of the hashtags also brought solidarity to many across the US.

While the length of time that a term could be trending on Twitter could be short, the hashtags did have profound effects on people. The authors talk about the case of a 25-year-old who found that the combination of Twitter and interacting with others created a deeper bond with others who were protesting. The group mentioned also uses Twitter regularly to spread messages about activism. To conclude the article, the authors emphasize the point that social media and Twitter is an important cultural part of the world and that anthropologists should be looking into 'hashtag ethnography' (in the proper way).

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