2020

(Un)Social Media: A Content Analysis of the Centralized Self on Twitter

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Approval of the Dissertation Committee

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Julianna Jeanine Kirschner as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Studies with a concentration in Media Studies.

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Abstract

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This dissertation critically assesses the social media posts that create, give life to and finally abandon trending topics on Twitter. Drawing on Baudrillard's (1983) notion of simulacrum, the dissertation examines posts as performative discourse that reframes the trend within the personal simulacrum of the poster. Using digital humanities tools, a corpus of 102,532 tweets have been collected. A content analysis was performed to analyze themes and term frequency. Selected case studies indicated that posters persistently centered their online identity within content, reframing content as personal performance rather than dialogic engagement.

The first case study examines social media posts responding to *Je suis Charlie* or I am Charlie, an online meme that itself responded to the terrorist attack on the offices of a French satire magazine. In this case study, the "I am" proclamation is the most distinct rhetorical strategy. The place study discusses social media responses to controversial postings from the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, Germany. In this second case study, the self is visually represented in the form of photoshopped selfies and the process of public apology known as "undouching." The political argument section surveys the social media battle surrounding Native American protests over a proposed oil pipeline through North Dakota. In this third case study, users manipulated their geolocational marker to indicate they were in Standing Rock, ND when they physically were not.

The study found that social media content is represented through a series of performative poses. Rather than dialogic, as the term "social" media implies, the content on these platforms is monologic. The content may have been designed with a limited audience in mind: those that already agree with the author's sentiment and/or the author themselves. The content that does become traditionally "viral" is due to preexisting celebrity, as Boorstin (1987) conceived of it. These celebrity figures increase sentimental echoes and contribute to these phenomena being designated as trending in their respective time. Performative poses are amplified through likes and retweets or what Alhabash & McAlister (2015) called electronic word-of-mouth or eWOM (p. 1318).

Content on social media, whether it receives sentimental amplification or not, is left on a virtual bookshelf for others to find and use in the future. Even if nothing is done with them now, what is left behind in social media spaces should be considered by all who create and use social media. The dissertation provides suggestions for users, including methods for adapting in the ideological echo chambers they find themselves in and selecting the most empirically positive echo chamber for them. Social media creators should consider the algorithmic structure of their platforms, including a "catch up" feature from early Facebook and an opt-in function to allow users to see content that may have been filtered out from their view. Knowing the ways in which performative poses make up social media will benefit all involved, so the most can be made of these limited spaces.

Dedication

To my dad:

"You're gonna win, 'cause you're gonna win, *'cause you're gonna win*!"

I hope you know how proud I am to be your daughter. I wish I could celebrate with you.

This is your accomplishment, too.

Acknowledgements

There are so many people I want to thank. To avoid writing another dissertation in acknowledgements, I recognize that some will be left out. Mea culpa. I extend my thanks to all who have made this journey and accomplishment possible.

To my co-chair, Dan Durbin: When I met you in 2008, I had no idea I would pursue a graduate degree, let alone a Ph.D. Thank you for believing in me and for investing in my success. I know I will never be able to repay you for the time and energy you spent on revisions, but I will pay it forward. I promise you that. I look forward to the day when I can roll into your office and talk about the news, rhetoric, or anything else on our minds. When the coronavirus pandemic started, that is one of many things I miss. I am thankful for you, your mentorship, and your friendship.

To my co-chair, Eve Oishi: I am so fortunate to have started and ended my Ph.D. journey with you. You challenged me and meaningfully shaped my understanding of scholarship. You always had something new to share in class and during our conversations. I am thankful for your support and commitment to helping me finish the program. I look forward to keeping in touch!

To my committee member, Paul Faulstich: I appreciate your valuable advice about indigenous cultures, and your support of my work. Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your TA in the Ethnographic Field Research Methods class. I learned so much from you, and my teaching and research have been made better for it. I hope to have another opportunity to collaborate in the future!

To my friends at Claremont Graduate University: Francesca Gacho, Elaine Venter, and Kerri Dean-Bridges. You supported me throughout my time in this program. I appreciate your friendship, and I look forward to supporting you as you continue forward!

To Misty and Lucy: I know you will never read this, because, well, you are cats. However, I know I would not have made it through this journey without you. I have so many pictures of the two of you lounging on my legs as I wrote final papers, the dissertation proposal, and then the dissertation itself. Thank you for choosing us.

To my siblings and their families: Thank you for supporting me in your own way. Hey, your sister has that "doctor thing" now!

To my sister, Jessica Nelson, and her family: Thank you for always being there. I know I can always count on you, and I appreciate you letting me vent when I needed it. I cannot wait to celebrate this accomplishment with you when things go back to normal, or whatever normal is after a pandemic. I love you!

To my mom: Thank you for always believing in me. Although I never contemplated giving up, you made it possible to keep going. You listened and nodded along when I talked about theory or waxed poetic about my latest library haul for the dissertation. I know you would have wanted to celebrate with dad, but I know he is there in his own way. I am counting the days until we can celebrate and have you at our house for a visit. Your room is ready for you, but you may have to duel with Misty to get access to it. I love you!

To my David: I consider this your accomplishment as much as my own. In all the years I have known you, sixteen years to be exact, this is the first time I will not be in school. You have supported me through four degrees: A.A., B.A., M.A., and now Ph.D.! I know I would not have made it this far without you. Your advice, kindness, and love have kept me afloat more than you know. I am so proud to be your wife. But, you should know that I will insist on being called Dr. Kirschner instead of Mrs. I am sure you would not have it any other way. I love you so much! Here's to many more years together!

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Chapter 1

Introduction

"Web 2.0 designates nonetheless the surprising truth of computer-mediated interactions: the return of the human. Differently put, the matter of the Internet has less to do with bits, screens, code, protocol, and fiber-optic cables than it does *with people*."

-Jodi Dean, *The Real Internet*

"Now, tweeting happens to be a modern day form of communication. You can like it or not. Between Facebook and Twitter, I have 25 million people. It's a very effective way of communication."

-Donald Trump, Second Presidential Debate, October 9, 2016

Social media content represents performative poses. This chapter will develop this idea through an extended discussion of communication and cultural studies research that has examined the nature of public discourse and the nature of social media posting that purport to be public discourse. Of necessity, this discussion will be far-reaching and complex. Social media have proven to be perhaps the most dynamic and quick changing media in our history. For forty years, from the mid-1950s through the mid-1990s, major network television, the dominant medium of its time, remained fundamentally unchanged (Danna, 1992, p. 15). Since their inception in the mid-2000s, social media have changed radically again and again. Within a very brief time, landing points became social media sites themselves (e.g., Facebook pages, Twitter feeds, Instagram posts). Social media sites, such as MySpace, that have not quickly adapted have just as quickly disappeared. Given this swift-changing environment, my discussion of social media will draw in many often seemingly tangential subjects in order to create a clear understanding of how social media functions in performative and monologic ways.

I hope to show that my terse opening statement has proven true in previous theory and research. This chapter will argue that social media exist in a series of tensions. These tensions include their claim to be social networks when, in fact, they incentivize staged individual performances. A second tension will be shown between social media's claim to be a place for "free speech" and their practice of so limiting communication options that speech is largely predicated on repeating the sentiments of others. These tensions would seem to make true interactive or self-critical communication impossible in social media. The various case studies presented in this dissertation will indicate that the social media system does, to a great degree, militate against and make difficult interactive or self-critical communication. However, I hope to show through my analyses of these cases that, at times, competing ideological echo chambers, the self-contained communication cycles on social media, can directly interact and create change in the beliefs and actions of some parties of users. The goal of this dissertation, then, is to trace the inception, life, and consummation of various communication cycles on social media to show (1) the seemingly intransigent nature of ideological echo chambers as they grow and branch out, and (2) the ways in which competing echo chambers can, at times, interact and create change. Demonstrating that interaction is challenging, I will offer ideas for navigating the performative tableau of social media platforms.

The notion that social media are comprised of performative poses is not altogether new. In his seminal work on convergence cultures, Henry Jenkins (2013) noted that the very nature of online communication engendered a discourse of display rather than interaction. The goal of online communication for fans of television shows, celebrities and sports was to display "inside knowledge," that is, to show that the communicator had special insights regarding the subject of the fans' adoration and, hence, that communicator's posts were worth reading (Jenkins, 2013).

That special knowledge began with expressing the "correct" views regarding the subject. Throughout their posts, fans would show that they took the subject seriously, that it was important to them, and should be to any reader of the post. So, fan posts would gain credibility by displaying special knowledge and appropriate sentiment regarding the subject. Fans whose posts were particularly successful would become part of the ongoing public discourse of the subject (e.g., they would extend the marketing, public sentiment, and demonstrate the significance of the subject for other potential audiences).

The rise of social media has significantly accelerated this process. Communication on what we call, "social media," creates a seeming paradox. That communication purports to engage in a pseudo-interactive procedure in which individual users express their "opinion" regarding the communication of others by marking those communication acts with, "likes," "retweets," and other forms of prescribed terms and visuals. Yet, those communication acts are not interactive. Like the fan communication described in Jenkins's (2013) research, they are displays, self-referential communication of users who do not directly communicate with others but enter images—both visual and written—of their own values, beliefs, and ideology.

As with Jenkins's (2013) fan cultures, these expressions demonstrate insider knowledge or in-group membership first by displaying the appropriate sentiment regarding the subject. Hence, sentimental echoing, for instance, re-displaying the tweets of others or clicking on a symbol indicating a "like," becomes the closest imitation of interaction in social media (Moe and Schweidel, 2014). Social media users use prescribed tools (e.g., retweets, like symbols) to display their own sentiment regarding the subject. In doing so, they echo the sentiment of other "fans" or users. Social media sites encourage this sentimental posturing by offering users a limited set of communication tools to express themselves regarding the ongoing discourse on the

social media site. Given these limitations, social media users cannot engage in a truly interactive process, such as interpersonal communication, in which they can gauge the verbal and nonverbal signals of the other and respond accordingly. Social media users are prompted to respond with displays of personal sentiment and limited comment, particularly comment within the stroke limitations of the site. Hence, social media communication has more in common with classical public speeches of display than it does with interpersonal interaction.

Of course, performative communication of display has a long tradition in the study of human discourse. In several of his major works, such as *Gorgias, Phaedrus, Protagoras*, Plato criticized the Sophists, with some cause, for promoting solely speeches of public display that had no philosophically significant content. In truth, Gorgias, the greatest of the sophist rhetoricians, did create many speeches solely as display pieces, speeches displaying the qualities of the speaker as both communicator and intellectual superior. Gorgias concluded his famous "Encomium for Helen" by stating that he wrote the speech for his own personal entertainment and to show that he could convince the reader of the truth of a proposition that everyone (presumably including Gorgias himself) knew was false. The Encomium was an epideictic speech, that is, a speech of praise or blame regarding the qualities of Helen, its subject. Later, Cicero would dismiss all epideictic discourse as similar displays of speech skills, displays that demonstrated a given sentiment regarding the subject and a seeming special knowledge regarding that subject by the speaker—but, speeches that ultimately argued nothing.

Social media sites purport to be places of public discourse, not unlike the street corners of ancient Athens or Olympia, where Gorgias and others delivered their famous speeches. But, unlike truly public spaces, social media sites radically delimit the number, type, and volume of responses users may offer. A user cannot "work a crowd" for an extended period of time in

order to build up interest. As mentioned, the user is offered specific prompts (retweets, likes) and very limited textual response as the primary means of communication. Moreover, the communication is not "live." Tweets and posts are not direct or immediate forms of communication. They are communication remnants, sentimental poses, left online by users.

As Barthes (1980) described photographs, tweets, and other forms of social media communication experience a kind of mortification:

> "I constitute myself in the process of 'posing,' I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image. This transformation is an active one: I feel that the Photograph creates my body or mortifies it, according to its caprice" (Barthes, 1980, p. 10-11).

Tweets are dead the moment they are expressed. They presume absence, users leave them online as representations of their beliefs, values, and/or sentiment. They exist as dead, not continuous dialogic communication. Hence, social media truly are not social. They are posting sites for individual displays of sentiment in which users demonstrate their "knowledge" or in-group identity through posting and reposting the echoed sentiment of other users. Within the limited confines of social media, this sentimental "pose" becomes the identity of the user within the online community. Your retweets (both your retweets of others and theirs of you), your likes, your posts become your accredited identity on that site. Your social media identity, then, is the sum of sentiments you post on a given site.

This dissertation examines the expression of identity and the way that expression shapes social media discourse on controversial topics. It focuses on specific tweet cycles surrounding an event, a place, and a political argument. The event cycle examines social media postings responding to *Je Suis Charlie*, an online meme that itself responded to the terrorist attack on the

offices of a French satire magazine. The place study discusses social media responses to controversial postings from the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, Germany. The political argument section surveys the social media battle surrounding Native American protests over a proposed oil pipeline through North Dakota. These subjects offer a varied field for examining ways in which the particular form of display communication engendered by social media can both create and resolve controversy within the social media communication context.

Given the points made above, this study will argue that over time social media responses to these controversies become less thoughtful and more sentimental. At first glance, it might seem to the casual viewer as if rational discourse and reasoned responses were occurring, but I will assert that even responses that profess special "knowledge" or reason largely remain sentimental echoes. As noted, while it may appear as if a user is given the opportunity to provide a reasoned response, the social media system encourages pre-programmed sentimental responses. To pursue this analysis, I need to offer some more specific definitions of sentiment and the ways in which social media users are motivated to offer simple expressions of sentiment.

Of course, sentiment as a fundamental component of human expression is not a new concept. But, the discussion of it has grown significantly with the rise of social media. Halpern (2011) described the sentimentalist as "a self-deceiver," and concerned with only uncritical emotional response (p. 53). Halpern's (2011) description is especially apropos regarding social media communication. Social media users are encouraged to become sentimentalists through the framework of social media platforms. Likes and retweets are simple ways to demonstrate these sentimental responses.

Likes refer to the number of people checking a heart-shaped icon, which indicates their approval or support of a tweet. Likes are used to express a sentimental echo, a self-referential

expression that says “I” (e.g., the authoring user) like this tweet for one reason or another; therefore, others should as well. They should like it *not* because the tweet itself deserves it, but because the user is the authorizing agent saying it is worth liking. Hence, the focus of my sentiment is, in the end, me.

Retweets refer to the sharing function on Twitter. A retweet reposts a user’s tweet on another user’s account. A retweet can be done with no commentary or with an additional message attached to it. Retweeting enables the original tweet to reach a new network of users. This is significant because, ultimately, the goal of competitive social media, like Twitter and Instagram, is to gain as many “followers,” that is, as large an audience as possible. Retweets and other social media tools promote building larger and larger audiences for your content by re-echoing or extending current sentiment.

Through an original tweet, retweet, or a comment, users can tag other users’ Twitter handles to increase the reach of their messages. A Twitter handle is a marker for a user typically beginning with the @ symbol (e.g., @twitterhandle). Using a Twitter handle to call on another user furthers the illusion of dialogic communication. The illusion that one is speaking directly to another user can create an emotional connection to a preexisting sentiment. But, the end goal of these “interactions” is not to directly engage the specific user but to display one’s involvement within the discussion, one’s recognition of the “proper” sentiment, and one’s knowledge of the discussion so far. Social media sites do not exist to build intimacy between users through self-disclosure. They exist to display expressions of “appropriate” sentiment, displays that will, hopefully, build audiences for future displays.

Sentimental responses in social media are expressions of pathos, the emotional component of Aristotle’s (2015) rhetorical proofs. Pathos is concerned with visceral responses,

the “feelings” or state of mind one has due to the rhetorical act. Aristotle also explained two other proofs, ethos and logos. Ethos, the ethical rhetorical proof, is concerned with the moral imperative to do what is right and is most closely identified with the authority or expertise of the communicator (Aristotle, 2015). Logos refers to the reasoned or logical appeal that supports reason (Aristotle, 2015). For Aristotle, pathos should be used alongside ethos and logos to ensure that expressions of sentiment are not manipulative or disorderly. Yet, social media communication, grounded in the immediate sentimental response to the very limited public posts of others (which are often the immediate sentimental responses of other users to previous posts), would seem to conflate all public discourse within its purview into the category of pathos. Communication grounded in prefabricated expressions of sentiment directs the user away from rational interaction and response, filling the void with oversimplified expressions of personal sentiment.

Aristotelian proofs indicate a core concern with “social” media. Communication has been defined as a “transactional process whereby two or more individuals exchange information through the assignment of meaning” (Marston, 2012). If social media are to be more than a collection of performative poses, they should promote the transactional aspect of communication in order to be truly *social* (Lomborg, 2014). They do not. The very structure of social media make meaningful dialogue impossible.

Conveying meaning is a highly cultural act (Skyrms, 2014, p. 81-82). Meaning requires shared symbols, or what Marston (2012) called “the assignment of meaning.” In addition, shared meaning should be exchanged. Something new should be presented, expanded, and deliberated. The shared meanings in social media are already prescribed by the site creators and cannot be meaningfully modified in order to create new meanings grounded in open communication.

Sentimental messages on Twitter simply repeat what was already said and advance a generic term such as "like." They do not add or create anything new through the interchange. So exchange, in the way Marston (2012) explained communication, does not occur. Without exchange, dialogue fades into monologue.

Meaningful communication occurs because of a mutual desire to understand another person's perspective (Skyrms, 2014). Social media amplify existing sentimental content and, hence, function in ways antithetical to interpersonal communication. Mobile technology has made it challenging to truly engage. According to Marston (2019), we have moved beyond the Age of Information into an Age of Interruption:

> "Notifications, alerts, alarms, updates and pop-ups are more prevalent in our day-to-day experience than the information we access through technology. The simplest example of this is the very common experience of unlocking one's phone to obtain some particular information (a sports score or just the time), being distracted by notifications, and then putting the phone away *without even getting the information we set out to retrieve*. Interruption trumps information" (Marston, 2019, emphasis original).

Meaningfully engaging with content, much less with other persons, becomes the exception rather than the rule. Meaningful dialogue encourages different ideological perspectives having true interaction outside of their respective intellectual silos, a practice which mobile technology does not support (Sinclair, et al., 2017). Social media users, constantly distracted by the latest notification on their mobile device, respond as extensions of those devices rather than as communicators employing those devices as channels for communication.

Without meaningful dialogue, sentimental content on social media makes building a cultural space challenging. A culture necessitates a community, some form of agreement, which

then leads to exchange (Aouragh & Chakravartty, 2016; Skyrms, 2014; Dery, 1993). Social media create posting sites, places for posting social poses, mediated environments without a culture. Communication becomes monologic in an environment of encouraged sentimental echoes. Social media challenges cultural studies as a category, because what we acknowledge as culture is lost in social media. As my discussion so far has indicated, social media is communicatively restrictive and maintains ideological silos. Content is amplified, not meaningfully engaged. Echo chambers inevitably result from social media's design. Despite these challenges, millions of users access these digital spaces daily and regularly contribute sentimental responses. Thus, these spaces, hostile to real communication, have become important to millions of users as sites of personal address. As this address is directed toward users who express the same sentiment as the user, think of the same content as important, comment in similar ways regarding subjects of perceived importance, the person addressed by the user is, ultimately, an extension of her or himself. Social media guide users to speak to their own selves, celebrate their own comments, and embrace their own values.

This project recognizes the pervasive nature of social media and the degree to which many people feel compelled to contribute to these platforms. In a political moment when the President of the United States persistently exploits Twitter and when social media platforms are the dominant source of news consumption by young working professionals (Combi, 2015; Moe & Schweidel, 2014), research on social media is critical. "Social media have decentralized the information network," wrote Moe & Schweidel (2014), "Now we have an abundance of information sources from which to choose. Anyone with a social media account can provide up-to-the-minute news and opinions. The only question is whether or not anyone chooses to listen" (p. 83). Of course, this is the very point. The cacophony of voices makes understanding

information on social media a challenge. But, more important, the persistent raising of my own voice and the manner in which posting my own sentiments codifies them as right from my ideological perspective raises my communication above the communication of all others. In a world of too many voices, the only voice I can pick out and the only opinion that matters is my own (and the echoes of that voice across social media).

Despite their shortcomings, social media are immensely influential. "Twitter's impact is such an overwhelming fact of modern American politics that it has obscured attention to how it impacts politics" (Galdieri, et al., 2018, p. 4). The ubiquity of social media suggests opportunities for multiple meanings and a diversity of perspectives. However, the illusion of democracy veils the reality of isolation (Marietta, et al., 2018). Social media present a space for sensory overload. Rather than engaging in a public dialogue, users find their devices blasting back at them a seemingly endless array of bright symbols meant to catch their eyes and direct their responses. It can be challenging for a user to sift through the ideological and political layers within which the supposed dialogue exists. Finding echoes of one's own ideology can be a means to sift through that noise in order to create meaning.

Despite the sensory overload, Twitter and other social media platforms have successfully maintained attention, albeit partial attention (Brummette, et al., 2018; Brody, 2018; Hill, 2012). Due to divided attention, many users' hours are lost to social media, which can be disorienting (Marietta, et al., 2018). Users remain "stuck" in mediated spaces, having been attracted to one sentimental echo after another as if they were shiny objects. Sticky environments "create content that attracts attention and engagement" (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013, p. 4; Gladwell, 2000). The ubiquity of outrageous content and troll-like behavior demonstrate it is possible to successfully gain attention from a large collective of users of Twitter, often termed the

Twittersphere. Though, this attention, again, is chiefly brought from those who strongly agree (echo) the outrageous content or those who strongly disagree with (echo condemnation) the content. The attention created by sentimental responses contributes to the illusion that Twitter is a culture or collection of subcultures. But, that sentiment may simply reflect constant repetition, repetition motivated by the nature of the environment. Even measuring that sentiment involves measuring repeated responses to a given environment, something social media theorists have termed "stickiness."

Stickiness is "a measure of how interested an audience member is in a media text. . . . content remains sticky even as it is spread" (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013, p. 9). Stickiness suggests how many times a user clicks on a link, likes a tweet, or retweets. Twitter's metrics have made it possible to assess the stickiness of its sentimental content. Analyzing Twitter metrics can help determine how far a sentimental echo has traveled or its degree of stickiness. However, Twitter metrics do not indicate the presence of dialogue or information exchange, per Marston's (2012) definition of communication. Further, stickiness does not demonstrate the intensity of motivation or interest regarding content. It only measures the repetition of prescribed responses to content.

Spreadability demonstrates "the importance of the social connections among individuals, connections increasingly made visible (and amplified) by social media platforms" (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013, p. 6). In other words, social media require networks of users to disburse sentimental content. Effective spreadability takes advantage of existing stickiness and encourages users to share materials widely. Spreadable content supports sentimental echoes that already exist, with the goal of magnifying their echoes.

To make these sentimental noises louder, spreadability reflects how well users "retrofit material to the contours of their particular community" (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013, p. 6). Retrofitting content includes adding new captions and/or photoshopped elements, as one would in the case of memes. The material is essentially the same with each magnification of a sentimental echo. But, a user's adaptation of the echo with their own caption on a meme creates the illusion of novelty. Retweeted memes are copies of copies and echoes of echoes.

Benjamin (1969) explained the aura of mechanical reproduction, the sense of unique expression that a mechanical reproduction exhibits. Yet, Benjamin's entire point was that the mechanical reproduction does not, in fact, create its own expression. It simply codifies the original production. In codifying and repeating, in the same way, retweets do not create new content. They create an aura of new content. But, in fact, they simply codify the original content. With every retweet, like, and repetitious comment, the aura of a sentimental echo is more distinguished. It seems as if new dialogue is being created. In fact, only the aura of expression is created. The mechanism simply reproduces the same content over and over again.

When a specific message is amplified vis-à-vis spreadability, other sentimental echoes are hushed. Sustained online communities tend to isolate those who disagree. As potential critics are marginalized, the content becomes even more homogeneous. Dissent is disallowed and repetition of sentiment becomes the only acceptable means of retaining a place in the social media "conversation." In many cases, "members are subject to confirmation biases that cause members to over-emphasize the shared opinions of others in the community while ignoring the dissenting opinions of non-community members" (Moe & Schweidel, 2014, p. 84). This circuitous communication space does not permit disagreement, so the only ideas expressed are those with which everyone in the online community already agrees anyway.

> "Social psychologists have long argued that positive, intimate contact between members of rival groups across an extended period can produce compromise, but that is not what Twitter offers. Its character limits – combined with the anonymous, spontaneous nature of so many exchanges on the platform – simply may not be conducive to mutual understanding" (Bail, 2018).

Having no room for disagreement, social media sites allow only reproduction of accepted sentiment. This repetition makes it appear as if users have come to a mutual understanding. But, as this discussion has shown, that agreement was already presupposed before the expressions were posted and acknowledged. In fact, no mutual understanding of contesting parties is possible because contesting parties are largely disallowed in posting streams. As social media further the segmentation of interests and ideas, the public square is being replaced with an echo chamber.

Communication on Twitter

Prior wisdom favored the soap box approach: If you called to them on the street corner and your ideas were compelling enough, they would come. The central square of competing voices and ideas had been effective in the past. Those who spoke with conviction and conveyed their claims the loudest would have a greater likelihood of gaining followers (McMillan, 2010, p. 826-837). The street corner also delimited a communication hierarchy. Anyone could step onto the soap box and say their piece. However, those shouting from the street corner had to change their tactics whenever the fervor waned (McMillan, 2010, p. 836-837). Shifting tactics in the moment to seek commonalities was a hallmark of face-to-face communication. Street corner speakers had to perfect the art of impromptu communication to find outlets for connection with their audiences that prepared messages might have missed.

This notion was embraced in the "marketplace of ideas" context of mid-twentieth century Western thinking. The communication marketplace gave rise "first to one set of ideas then another" as rhetoricians were offered a free and open space to present and test their ideas (Wrage, 1947, p. 451). The entire logic of the "marketplace of ideas" was grounded in the notion that all communicators have access to the important communication channels (classrooms, laboratories, public service media, and so forth) and that these channels offer the most open-ended means for public discourse (Wrage, 1947, p. 452). Limiting or censoring responses would destroy the very marketplace that would allow these ideas to arise and succeed.

As the internet pervaded our lives and social media displaced various forms of "street corner" discourse, political activists and communicators in general considered how they would employ these new tools. Twitter and other social media platforms offered the potential for engagement with others that was previously impossible. On the street corner, one might address tens, hundreds, or even thousands. On Twitter, one might address the world. However, this potential for engagement has not been realized. As noted, the structural inputs that encourage likes and retweets only further the agenda of existing sentimental echoes. Creating impromptu messages that invite communication are not incentivized on the platform. In fact, the messages that gain traction on the platform are outliers. The vast majority of messages appear and disappear with little or no notice. As I have mentioned, meaningful communication involves cooperation. Ideally, messages are given an equal hearing. In an idealized Twitter, messages that offer meaningful contributions to discourse would gain attention, regardless of the user's followership or the level of presupposed agreement regarding the message.

However, in practice, content on Twitter has proven repetitive and empty, repetitious expressions of preordained sentiment that create an individualized ideological echo chamber. A

user's preconceived notions and recorded likes and dislikes make them an accepted part of the message stream. To address this cyclical form of communicative feedback, Bail (2018) suggested removing the character limits, which can unnecessarily curtail discourse. The character limit was expanded from 140 to 280 characters in November 2017, but this kind of brevity failed to address the nuance that can be captured in longer messages, complete arguments, and full interactive discussions (Collins, 2017). It has also been suggested that forcing people to view content of the opposing party might help increase understanding, but that has only resulted in a reinforcement of existing echo chambers (Bail, 2018). Echo chambers repeat back one's own voice. They do not create a communication interaction or environment. They create a reinforcement of already held prejudgments.

Echo chambers create an insular environment. But, online networks have intervened in some preexisting cultural circles (Aouragh & Chakravartty, 2016; Carah & Angus, 2018; Shao & Wang, 2016). In a few outlying cases, social media can make connections with other users that would not have been possible otherwise. Marginalized groups have used these spaces to extend their cultural practices. This potential was partially realized by the Garifuna people, an Afro-indigenous people from the Caribbean island of St. Vincent (Johnson & Callahan, 2013). The focus of the Garifuna posts was to establish connections with other identified Garifuna people, which in turn created a digital diaspora. One of Johnson & Callahan's (2013) respondents explained that their online friends were primarily Garifuna: "The only exceptions are a couple of people from work, but I don't really communicate with them much. It's mostly Garifunas" (p. 331). This kind of segmented cultural exchange is exceptional on the internet. Such an environment creates opportunities to expand one's ideological bubble, as the Garifuna people have to some degree done. Though, the group mostly operates as a separate, self-contained

community with few outsiders allowed in. Expanding echo chambers in this manner may be a place to start a radical shift in online content. But, as the Garifuna story indicates, the expanded audience generally agrees with and expresses the same sentiment already expressed within the online community. Hence, they function as an extension of the echo chamber effect.

Given this extended discussion of the social media environment, it would seem that social media communication exists within a tension between the appearance of creating unique and personal messages (something the environment promotes, giving each user the opportunity to create a unique name or "tag" and a history of "personal" messages) and a reality of echoed sentiments posted within highly proscribed limits, a depersonalized identity that only gains traction within a given message stream because it reinforces the ideologies already accepted as true within those streams. Twitter and other social media sites use the very tools of conformity to create a feeling of personal expression within their sites. Users are invited to use hashtags, likes, and retweets to create a "unique" signature message stream on their wall or posting board. Yet, hashtags, likes, and retweets are all expressions of identification with pre-existing sentiment. Hashtags identify the user's content with the same hashtag and its use by other users. Likes and retweets express positive sentiment regarding other users' content. Yet, these tools are offered as a means to expand the user's audience and hence the reach of their "individual" communication. Given this tension, we might ask how hashtags, likes or retweets might be used to, on the one hand, expand user audience and, by this, the reach of the communication and, on the other, in expanding that reach expand the echo chamber effect of the discourse.

Hashtags could be one way to accomplish echo chamber expansion. Hashtags organize posts to potentially increase readership. Twitter was the first to implement them. Using a word or phrase beginning with the # symbol renders it easily searchable by other users (e.g.,

#hashtag).[1] Hence, a hashtag might readily expand a particular conversation, expand an echo chamber, and, in the case of out-group response, might create a backlash of social media communication from a competing echo chamber.

This dissertation project is interested in the role social media communication tools, such as hashtags, play in developing public discourse regarding controversial subjects. To trace the evolution of social media communication on these topics, this study will use hashtags to identify topic-specific content. The tweets collected for this project present a hashtagged narrative of a particular moment of time—between 2015 and 2017—and the many narrative strategies used during that time. As Fisher (1989) noted, even the most highly stylized (or, in this case, delimited) narratives create identification through fidelity with the narratives that are already present within our communication environment. When narratives agree with the stories we already accept, they carry immense rhetorical force. Tracing the way in which hashtags create a narrative space of accepted values and norms should help us understand how these repetitions create powerful motivation for those users who take part in social media postings.

The following questions were posed for this project:

RQ 1: How important is the hashtag to the communication of the user's ideology and politics?

RQ 2: How do hashtags shape the expression of ideology within online message streams?

RQ 3: How are hashtags used to create competing echo chambers?

RQ 4: How can these competing content streams be turned to create meaningful communication, if at all?

[1] This was a form of content categorization was widely used between 2015-2017, when the data from the upcoming case studies were collected.

Challenges to Meaningful Connection

"Respect is not censorship," writes Twitter user Mikelodeon, "Censorship is not respect." The message is followed by a series of hashtags, including #IamCharlie and the French counterpart #JesuisCharlie.

Figure 1.1: Twitter user Mikelodeon makes a seemingly "bold" statement.

In the limited comments to Mikelodeon's tweet, users agreed with the statement, but the content of the tweet received only a few replies. A few likes and retweets followed, but that was the extent of the magnification of this sentimental echo. No one asked Mikelodeon what they meant by this statement.

During the summer of 2015 when this tweet was published, many users attempted to engage Twitter as a space for conversation about the Charlie Hebdo attack that occurred in Paris months before. Mikelodeon's tweet stands out as one of the earliest points of interest for this project, because the content seemed to be communicative. However, the statement contributed to the existing sentimental echoes. In fact, the statement was meaningless, and its emptiness made it easy to fill the gap with any ideological preference. The tweet referred to no specific message, no specific censorship, no specific social context. It was likely this emptiness that led other users to comment, "Absolutely" and "You couldnt (sic) be more right." Twitter has a lot of content like this, content which furthers the illusion of dialogic interaction. Yet, the content, even when vague, is immediately turned to sentimental self-echoes by other users.

Tweets around the same topic experience various degrees of amplification of their sentimental echoes. Twitter systemically asserts that the significance of a tweet directly correlates to the number of users who respond to it. "Online success" is rooted in viewership, combined media forms (e.g., photographs, artistic renderings, written commentary), a multi-platform focus (e.g., Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc.), and platform-specific community responses (e.g., retweets, shares, comments, likes, etc.) (Alhabash & McAlister, 2015, p. 1318; Learmonth, 2011). Yet, none of these data points indicate anything beyond a valuation of sentimental echoing.

Even though it may indicate some level of competitive success in the Twitter universe, a widely dispersed sentimental echo does not necessarily lead to viral content. In fact, the methods behind certain sentiments becoming viral are mysterious. A user cannot set out to create "viral" content and be successful (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013). Further, the overvaluation of outlying viral content is often conflated with effective communication (the more response, the more "effective" your communication). This, of course, wholly flies in the face of communication theory. Since the time of Plato and Aristotle, effective communication has never been demonstrated by volume of response (the simple number of responses, clicks, restatements, and so on to a message). Effective communication has been defined by its ability to convince opponents of the truth of one's statements, reinforce that truth to supporters, and convince those who are on the fence about the subject. And, ultimately, none of this matters unless the communication actuates those listeners, gets them to act based on their conviction that the message was true and right. Yet, like the poor person who buys a weekly lottery ticket convinced that, sooner or later, they will win, social media users are pressed to believe that their

communication success will be guaranteed when they publish content that "goes viral." But, as noted, virtually *all* content on the internet does not "go viral."

Tweets and other social media content that do become viral typically do not do so because the communication itself was effective. Instead, the content gets retweeted or liked because the user is a preestablished celebrity with a preexisting large audience that is already likely to respond to the user's tweets. This audience is more likely to connect the user's celebrity or "well-knownness" with the "human greatness" of celebrities of yore (Boorstin, 1987, p. 45-47). Anything considered viral typically has what Alhabash & McAlister (2015) consider to be high levels of eWOM, or electronic word-of-mouth, specifically in the form of likes and retweets (p. 1318). The celebrity's "well-knownness" translates into high quantities of eWOM but not necessarily high-quality content. Therefore, viral content is generally predicated on preexisting fame or celebrity status.

A majority of the content without the "well-knownness" of a user appears alongside trending topics due to their hashtag and language use. These posts serve as their own echo chambers or monologic devices. Users do not respond to an initial tweet in a dialogic manner seeking response. In fact, they repost the hashtag(s) within their own tweets that express their likes and dislikes to a presumed third audience who they hope will respond with likes and retweets. But, these posts are ultimately expressions of sentiment that they, the user, would retweet. Hence, their posts, in every respect, are performances to themselves. They become their own ideal audience.

Many of the tweets contained in this research appear to seek a particular type of stickiness. As previously mentioned, Electronic word-of-mouth, or eWOM, refers to the most convenient form of amplifying a sentimental echo, such as likes or retweets (Eckler & Rodgers,

2014; Welker, 2002; Golan & Zaidner, 2008; Alhabash & McAlister, 2015). eWOM involves "focusing on content sharing, while disregarding other behavioral responses" (Alhabash & McAlister, 2015, p. 1318). eWOM is the process of dispersing a sentimental echo simply to get the message further out into the Twitterverse. Unlike offline, face-to-face word of mouth that generally invites engagement from outside parties, eWOM is monologic. eWOM does not invite communication and reasoned response. Instead, it amplifies existing echo chambers.

eWOM is quite similar to what Humphries (2018) calls an online public diary. These tweets are usually limited in meaning, and they rarely garner any interaction. They become a string of phrases repeated to create significance by the simple act of repetition. Although Mikelodeon's message received some acknowledgement on Twitter, it created neither meaningful dialogue nor spreadability. It gained minimal repetition and was quickly forgotten. As Twitter's character limit prevented an author from elaborating on an idea in a single tweet,[2] Mikelodeon's tweet proved to be an exemplar of a staged individual performance.

Mikeolodeon's intention was unclear, and the content did not clarify their intention or meaning. Sometimes, intention is immaterial, especially when it is dissimilar from the content of the message or media form. An empty message, such as Mikelodeon's tweet, may pale in comparison to filling an empty space with problematic content. In the case of some selfies, as we will later see, the intention may contrast with the context of the photos themselves. "I didn't mean to offend anyone. . ." writes one of the subjects featured in the Yolocaust collection, a series of photoshopped selfies taken at a memorial to Jewish victims, "That was not my intention. And I am sorry. I truly am" (Shapira, 2017). This sort of admission is rare.

[2] At the time that Mikelodeon posted the tweet, single messages were limited to 140 characters.

However, knowledge of how virtual messages operate is crucial to our understanding of online communication and its place in today's world.

The Ubiquity of the Internet

To contextualize this discussion, it will be valuable to discuss the pervasive role the internet plays in current communication and culture. Over half of the world's population has internet access (United Nations International Telecommunication Union, 2015). A study on internet use conducted by Cole, et al. (2017) found that 92% of the United States population has access to the internet, and they spend an average of 23.6 hours per week online (p. 5). That is almost an entire day of the week devoted to internet use. Over a fifteen-year study, Cole, et al. noted, "Internet use at home has increased by more than 500 percent since 2000, and more than 100 percent since 2005" (p. 7). To maintain relationships, 62% of people believe that internet channels, specifically social media, are important (Cole, et al., 2017, p. 72). The impact of the internet and social networking is undeniable. With mobile technology in its relative infancy, there is still much to learn about how this medium influences, guides, and problematizes human experiences. Media scholars Jenkins, Ford, & Green (2013), Nakamura (2002, 2006), Bruns (2012), and many others suggest that research on the internet through media studies inquiry will continue to broaden our understanding of its effects, and it will also lead to improved interfacing and connections with those who regularly engage with it. Those who were born and raised in a world without the internet have a different relationship with the online world than those who have grown up with ubiquitous access to it.

Our ability to access anything digital with a quick search is an unprecedented freedom for media scholars and laypeople alike. For digital natives, this is part of everyday living that seems to have *always been there* (Combi, 2015; Marwick & boyd, 2011). "It has been said that brevity

is not the soul of wit; crudity is," wrote Marietta, et al. (2018), "Twitter has at least two outstanding characteristics as a form of campaign communication: it is brief and situated within an entertainment medium. Each of these characteristics shapes its political potential" (p. 9). If social media are ubiquitous, crude, and entertaining, dialogic communication becomes problematic. We cannot fully digest one message before another comes our way. For many young people, this sense of inundation is not only the status quo, but also the expected form of engagement. This rapid-fire communication also permits problematic exchange under the guise of democratic ideals, especially when there are far more interlocutors than there are moderators (Brody, 2018). It is not clear that anyone moderates exchanges on Twitter.

Most cases of moderation intervention come from violations of Twitter's terms and conditions, and even then, little regulation is imposed. Cesar Altieri Sayoc harassed former congressional press secretary Rochelle Ritchie on Twitter, and nothing happened after she reported the threats to Twitter, according to Lee (2018). Ritchie brought the threats to light again after Altieri Sayoc was found to be sending package bombs to Democratic party leaders. Twitter responded to Ritchie after this second attempt, saying "The Tweet clearly violated our rules and should have been removed. We are deeply sorry for that error" (Lee, 2018). Even when moderation is requested, it is not always rendered in online spaces. In fact, an extraordinary event often seems to be necessary to spur any review or moderation of content.

In other cases where moderators are present, too much regulation of speech is deemed problematic by users. In some virtual communities, such as Reddit, moderation is seen as an infringement on a user's rights. In fact, 57% of online users consider it acceptable to express extreme views online (Cole, et al., 2017, p. 139). The door remains open for content that would likely not be said aloud in public, face-to-face settings. Many websites promote anonymity in

communication. Ask FM is one such site. Anonymous users post anonymous questions. It is similar to Reddit's Ask Me Anything, in which a series of questions is directed at one user. In the case of Ask FM, the person answering questions remains known, while those who ask questions are unidentified. This anonymity can lead to troubling behavior as a fifteen-year-old girl named Sally[3] of Gloucester, UK discovered:

> "I did get into Ask FM for a while, but it gets so nasty on there, I stopped. You will get death threats, rape threats and jokes all the time. People constantly tell you on there to go and kill yourself, to go and self-harm because your life is worthless. I already feel like that, so I don't need to hear it all the time. I try to stick to what is safe" (Combi, 2015, p. 190).

Facebook has some moderation, particularly on group pages. However, Ask FM, Twitter, and other "open" platforms do not actively regulate content. Posts or tweets in these forums are often "self-regulated" through the editing tool and/or deletion, because users are "mostly interested in discussing matters of personal interest or making abusive comments" (Canter, 2013, p. 605; See also Singer, 2009). Safe spaces can be places of reprieve for people who need it, like Sally. She was seeking a place to interact online without the all too common bullying of trolls. While withdrawing from social media sites might seem like a simple solution to this problem, most users find social media a necessary part of their lives. Finding a solution that fits a user's needs is more realistic. For media studies scholars and practitioners, online content should be contextualized. This allows respective safe spaces and productive venues for dialogue to be found or created.

[3] Name has been changed to protect interviewee privacy.

While safe spaces and respectful cultural exchange certainly pre-date the internet, Combi's (2015) research convincingly shows that unique challenges exist in online content. Among other challenges, a sense of anonymity and the form of information gathering have transformed with mobile technology. Media scholars have been investigating the challenges of anonymous bullies and trolls for quite some time (Stryker, 2011; Black, Mezzina, & Thompson, 2016; Armstrong, Thomas, & Smith, 2017). These findings make media studies a unique point of theoretical intervention. Although bullying preceded the internet, it is becoming more common for people to have experiences similar to Sally's (Cole, et al., 2017, p. 138-140; Singer, 2009). Through the exploration of these case studies, it may be possible to revisit the humanity that *appears* to have been lost from virtual distance (Kittler, 2006). This is no easy task, and the possibility for such an endeavor to come to fruition is a challenge. However, the first step would be a reevaluation of choices made online and a revised set of *strategies* or rules for engagement for online content.[4] At the outset, it is easy for anonymous contributors to forget that they are addressing a living human being with feelings.

The complexity of social media and their pervasive role in Western culture bring the potential to greatly impact communication and culture, but that has not been realized. In an interview conducted by Combi (2015), seventeen-year-old interviewee Ryan[5] from Chelmsford, UK described this phenomenon:

> "I'm on my phone 24/7. But everyone is. The older lads in the company I'm training in still read the paper in the morning, but none of my mates do. . . You just get the news on the phone, *if you're interested*" (p. 185, emphasis added).

[4] For de Certeau (1984), strategies are rendered by those in power, while the disempowered utilize tactics. The resources and skills that one needs to communicate on the internet is a degree of power.
[5] Name has been changed to protect interviewee privacy.

Users like Ryan employ a faster-paced form of digital browsing not possible with newsprint. Many young people report social media as their primary source for news and current affairs. If this is a widespread practice, the respective bubbles we all live in online may grow further and further apart as our consumed content becomes exceedingly segmented and narrow. Since the 2016 election, the emergence of "fake news,"[6] and labeling opposing opinions as such, has led to these bubbles growing smaller as well (Brummette, et al., 2018). Yet, according to Cole, et al. (2017), 37% of users consider online information to be reliable (p. 28). In fact, this "environment affords political actors and institutions significantly more leeway in how and where they promote a favored narrativization of events" (Knüpfer, 2018, p. 595). Political actors may target audiences with news those audiences presuppose as true rather than "fake." Audiences may then have their own prejudices fed back to them as "true" news—further solidifying silos and making the prospect of finding commonalities more and more unlikely. Online cultural exchanges illustrate a similar form of narrativization in an immediate sense, which was not possible to this scale prior to the advent of the internet.

This section has reviewed the ubiquity and often pernicious effect of internet technology on personal and public discourse. The universal nature of the internet as a communication platform demonstrates the significance of a study examining the nature of specific social media tools and their impact on online discourse. This discussion has also illustrated the growing impact of self-referential bubbles and ideological echo chambers. If movers of mass opinion (such as politicians) may rely on branding opposing opinions as "fake news" to reinforce the

[6] Kathleen Hall Jamieson coined the term "viral deception" to replace fake news (Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania, 2017). Jamieson considers the term apropos to what is happening in communication. She also wants people to respond to the idea with disgust. It is no coincidence that viral deception has the same abbreviation as venereal disease.

ideological commitment of followers, it is imperative that we examine the communication tools (such as hashtags) that allow for and even promote these echo chamber effects. To carry out this analysis, I must weed out the sentimental echoes that made up the social media narratives in past controversies.

Resurrecting Social Media's Past: Suspended Sentimental Echoes

Social media is a very fluid field. In the mid-2000s, Twitter and Facebook were dominant posting forums and it seemed as if that would remain the condition for the foreseeable future. Suddenly, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and any number of other challengers crowded into the same space. With this constant fluidity, noting a single dominant site is now problematic at best. Today's dominant site may soon be yesterday's MySpace, a once seemingly universal site that has been largely discarded. Examining social media discourse in discrete and coherent conversations, then, will best be done within an historical context. Yet, even these contexts remain fluid.

Scholarship has indicated that cultural frames or ideological interests, much like "ideas" in the mid-twentieth century, tend to trend quickly then fade in the public interest. What is intriguing today may not attract the same interest in the future, due in part to obsolescence and/or more pressing concerns (Zhao, et al., 2018, p. 28). On the other end of the spectrum, the messages that were stagnant during and after their cultural moment has passed will likely remain in that state, because they possess weak ties and no degree of urgency (Valenzuela, et al., 2018, p. 120; Granovetter, 1983). Disillusioned users also withdraw entirely due to social media lacking the interaction they purportedly offer (Brody, 2018, p. 76).

However, in rare cases, content is engaged well after it is posted, even when the original moment necessitating the message's inception has already passed. #MeToo is one such example.

Tarana Burke created this hashtag ten years before the Harvey Weinstein sexual assault scandal and other similar cases helped it become a viral meme.[7] Remaining in line with Burke's initial goal, the #MeToo message was designated as a space for discussing sexual assault on Twitter and other social media platforms (Garcia, 2017). This exceptional case created a movement that transcended Twitter and into offline, "real world" consequences. Yet, as important as #MeToo has been for promoting important social discussion, it too has quickly faded into the social media background, seen far less often than it once had, and often on satiric posts ("Bill Clinton: 'I Thought #MeToo Was A Pokemon,'" 2018).

Another rare case of online content being engaged years after its inception is the term "stan" in fan culture. A stan is "an overzealous fan, and has come to describe anyone who takes their love of a particular artist or entertainment franchise to new extremes" (Gaillot, 2017). Stan originated from rapper Eminem's (2000) eponymous song, which followed the increasingly disturbing letters written by a fictional fan. In the bridge of the song, the fan committed a murder-suicide that he described in the last letter addressed to his idol. In the final refrain, Eminem started to write back, and realized halfway through the reply that Stan's death was reported on the news recently. He stops writing, and ends with a sharp, "damn."

In the years after the song's popularity, the term stan remained suspended until it was retrieved by fan culture. To stan represented a form of fan commitment that was in line with Eminem's character of Stan. However, the violence of the character had been washed away from current use of the term (Gaillot, 2017). Twitter user Aura was the first documented user to use stan as a verb (See figure 1.2). Although the term was suspended in a 2008 tweet that received no likes, no retweets, and no comments, stan has picked up steam recently as a slang term. Stan

[7] In March 2020, Harvey Weinstein was "sentenced to 23 years in prison for rape and sexual abuse" (Dwyer, 2020). Shortly thereafter, the COVID-19 crisis dominated lived reality for many people in the United States.

is on the watchlist for potential inclusion in the Oxford English Dictonary (OED), but it is listed on OED's Oxford Dictionaries, their free service (Gaillot, 2017).

Figure 1.2: @AuraAintGotTime's 2008 tweet describing her preference for singer Santogold over MIA, a performer in the same genre. This is the first documented use of stan as a verb.

The #MeToo and stan examples are both outliers. However, they represent the potential for any tweet to gain users, even if their eWOM measurements (e.g., likes and retweets) are nonexistent. Twitter functions as an archive in which users can retrieve old sentiments, and amplify those sentiments weeks, months, or years from their inception. These amplifications tend to reframe the old sentiment into an expressed sentiment consistent with the user's ideological perspective, sometimes because the old sentiment really was consistent with the new one. In other cases, the old sentiment is wholly reframed to fit within the new expressed sentiment (as with the vague Mickelodeon post in figure 1.1).

Based on our current technology, it is unclear how many people actually read tweets that had no measurable eWOM amplification, such as likes or retweets (Moe & Schweidel, 2014). Even when dispersing urgent information that might be newsworthy, important facts and observations are often lost in the shuffle. Content that receives no comments, retweets, or likes is not always problematic or empty in nature. It simply may not have been first expressed in the right place or at the right time.

Social media collect and document these musings.[8] And, it has a near monopoly on this informal form of communication. According to Simanowski (2016):

> "Changing media is even harder than changing societies. Apart from the social realm from which they emerge, media have their own inherent agenda that they are determined to fulfill. With respect to computers and the Internet this implies calculating, connection, regulating. Big-data mining is not a byproduct of media development; it is its logical consequence. It radicalizes the Enlightenment impulse for mapping and measuring" (p. xvii).

Twitter, for instance, incentivizes the very goals its creators have for their site. As Simanowski (2016) indicated, the end goal for Twitter is to gain as many users as possible. The platform structures its user incentives to achieve that end. Users are pressed to seek as many "followers," retweets and likes as possible. As the users succeed in gaining a larger following, Twitter itself succeeds in gaining and maintaining more users. Tracing success by sheer mathematical repetition reinforces the rightness of this value scheme. These goals shape the very structure of social media.

Social media platforms shuffle content based on what they *think* users want to see in what appears to be an attempt to establish some order in the chaos (Simanowski, 2016, p. 19).[9]

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[8] Although this dissertation project primarily focuses on Twitter, what happens on other platforms is important for our understanding of social media's impact on our communicative and cultural processes online. Functions of other platforms have extended over into others, such as *stories* that were originally launched on Snapchat but now also appear on Facebook and Instagram. This function allows the user to construct a narrative using consecutive images and videos, each with a comment or description serving as a marquee across the frame. The adoption of this communication style on non-Snapchat platforms was due in part to a corporate feud when Snapchat refused to be sold to the Facebook conglomerate in 2013 (Shinal, 2017). Although Snapchat has not been put out of business due to this tactic by Zuckerberg and Co., Snapchat stocks have fallen somewhat according to the current trading trends available at the time of this writing.

[9] It has been discovered that Facebook was misusing user data, and additional connections have been made to disinformation shared by Russian bots and trolls during the 2016 election. The sharing of user content with corporate entities has also been brought to light (Picchi, 2018). Users can access the information shared about them in the settings options, and one's political categorization by Facebook (on a scale between very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, and very liberal) and other personal details are listed. Facebook's Help Center

That shuffling, itself, has an impact on user perceptions. The changing social media landscape demonstrates the ebb and flow of cultural content, and the hierarchies that are built and maintained online as much as in the offline world.

Social media is not without its critics. Social media defectors and "internet non-users have increasingly negative views about the role of communication technology in the world. The percentage of internet non-users who said that communication technology made the world a worse place has increased to 43 percent," according to Cole, et al. (2017), "up from 36 percent in 2015" (p. 23). The data collected for this dissertation project was posted during this seven-percentage point surge. The political climate during this time was polarized, so users filled social media with polarized content that they deemed important. Given the discussion so far, we would expect the content to reflect sentimental echoes of predigested beliefs and values. Yet, scholars warn that blaming this all on the medium would over-simplify the situation and too quickly relieve users of responsibility for their own content production. Brody (2018) posits that "technology should be seen as having no inherent value, good or bad. Rather, users and non-users project their own values onto a technology as part of the adoption decision process" (p. 76). Thus, Cole, et al.'s (2017) "worse place" is made up from the collective sentimental echoing of the humans behind their respective keyboards.

A conscious collective shift away from the monologic toward dialogic could make social media more communicative. Social media make it possible to interact with people one may not otherwise have had the opportunity to engage. If these connections are strategically approached with dialogue in mind, the new social media sphere might be formed to promote a true exchange

(2018) makes a brief blanket statement addressing these claims: "No, we don't sell any of your information to anyone and we never will. You have control over how your information is shared. To learn more about the controls you have, visit Facebook Privacy Basics."

of ideas. "Social media publics are publics represented by their social media accounts," wrote Zhao, et al. (2018), "Moreover, social media allows publics the same level of influence as organizations, by rendering them the voice" (pp. 26-27). In addition to viewing and echoing sentiments of our friends, family, and strangers, social media provide a shortcut to content that prior methods did not have the means to present before.[10]

Smaller social media spheres make the development of a realistic strategy plausible. Social media represent a platform for the everyday reporter, specifically the person who can capture the events as they unfold:

> "Citizens' active engagement in reporting of incidents may help challenge mainstream news institutions' gatekeeping and sense-making functions, prompting some commentators to name citizen journalism as the 'fifth estate.' Perceived shortcomings of mainstream news media, including biased coverage and lack of coverage damage the 'watchdog' function of mainstream media while contributing to this perception of online media as the fifth estate" (Bal & Baruh, 2015, p. 214).[11]

Bal & Baruh (2015) argued that social media spheres have split off into self-contained cycles.

Bal & Baruh's (2015) analysis suggests that news consumption on social media is preferable over traditional sources, particularly for digital natives. These preferences may also reflect a greater concern for entertainment, rather than accuracy and reliability. Bal & Baruh (2015) echo the substance of Ryan's commentary in Combi's (2015) interview. But neither

[10] Social media and online communication platforms serve as a space for the fifth estate. In pre-revolutionary France, the first estate was designated for the clergy, while the second estate includes nobility. The third estate is comprised of the bourgeoisie and commoners. The press is known as the fourth estate. While the French system preempted the medieval English approach, these estates have been used to address representation in Parliament.
[11] The notion of social media as the fifth estate is still a relatively new characterization at the time of this writing, and this project may offer some insight into the validity of this proposal, and it will be explored further in chapter two. Ryan's account discussed earlier suggests the pervasive nature of the fifth estate in news consumption; it's an intriguing exemplar of the fourth estate being usurped in many ways by the fifth.

suggests that accessibility equates with reliability. The question of truthfulness in online content is difficult to answer. Current arbiters of online "truth" such as Snopes, a "fact-checking" site, are themselves online collectives whose claims to authority are grounded simply in their existence and self-claims. They do not have the authority of the academy or governmental agencies behind them, and they run on their own ideological assumptions. Thus, despite the widespread reliance on them, testing accuracy and reliability in online posts remains problematic at best.

As the case studies from Combi (2015) and the cautionary statement from Twitter user Mikelodeon illustrated, much may be gained in informal "interaction" across social media. However, we should not mistake these pseudo-interactions for anything beyond performative poses. Posters do not engage in dialogic interaction seeking interpersonal response. Rather, they post brief representations of self, representations for which they seek positive reinforcement within the allowed responses of the social medium.

Communication and cultural research assert that we learn who we are through our interactions with others (See Suwinyattichaiporn, 2016; Moore, 2017; Yilmaz & Peña, 2015; Kitzinger & Mandelbaum, 2013). However, social media reframes this experience by motivating users to post brief comments and images and to seek echoes of preferred sentiments from other users. Social media algorithms create these narrow political spaces, taking data that users provide and recycling it back in returned content (Wright, et al., 2013). Not enough is known about the coding and structure of the algorithms used by social media platforms to fully examine all the ways they delimit communication, because the creators keep this information hidden from public view. However, the effects of these algorithms are tangible.

Social media platforms "enhance or extend face-to-face support networks by providing greater access to the increased social capital available in a larger, easier to maintain, network of individuals who are often geographically separated" (Wright, et al., 2013). As these circles are created, it is evident that mutual likes and affiliations steer the exposure of social media material for individual users based on these criteria. Hence, the community created by our communication is no longer tied to regional interests so much as agreed upon ideological frames.

The framing of the exposed content and the narratives that accompany them can have a powerful influence on our perceptions (Imai & Dailey, 2016). For instance, Sally's Ask FM experience led her to abandon the platform entirely; the framing pushed beyond Sally's limits of acceptability. Sally found the questions and comments users directed at her intolerable. 14% of respondents in the study conducted by Cole, et al. (2017) "have been bullied or harassed online," and 23% "received unwanted sexual attention online" (p. 72). These estimations are likely low estimates due to limited reporting (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Yet, they remind us that online ideological frames can unnecessarily harm users seen as vulnerable or outside of the accepted frame.

While online bullying and misconduct can impact high frequency users of social media, digital natives are particularly vulnerable. They are the first generation of users to be fully immersed in this world from birth onward. The issues suggested by Sally's account are not bound to one particular generation, and one challenge for this project is that little demographic data is available about contributing users. It is difficult to discern generational differences in online communication unless the message indicates affiliation, or a user directly acknowledges their membership in a generational group. However, for this project, that kind of detail may not

be necessary. The conclusions drawn in this work will offer insight into the cultural moment and modes of participation.

A challenge to the status quo would require more voices to be heard in online content. However, the massive number of tweets and posts on platforms make this effort too arduous for the casual social media user. Julia[12], an interviewee of Combi (2015), offered this account of participation:

> "So many teenagers, including my friends, don't have any interests any more outside of the web. If they go to dinner, they have to Instagram it. Any funny thought they have, they have to tweet it. I don't think it's healthy. We are definitely a generation completely dependent on the internet" (p. 196).

Julia described narcissism broadly in her account, a narcissism enabled by message distribution across the internet. This form of narcissistic participation suggests, even helps justify, the user's experience. Those in their segmented social media sphere echo the same sentiment back to them, reinforcing their centrality in the communication experience and the rightness of their comments. These online exchanges have stickiness, but they promote neither spreadability outside of their immediate circle nor amplification through eWOM (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013). Instead, the stickiness is rooted in the ideological appeal of like-minded users and algorithmic feedback loops. Stickiness, in this case, is an outgrowth of the fundamentally repetitious nature of social media echoes.

This section has reviewed several key factors in the examination of social media content within a given historical context. It has included discussions of content framing, the possibility of certain messages gaining new life after the immediate life cycle of their "conversation" has

[12] Name has been changed to protect interviewee's privacy.

ended, the potential for true communication, the responsibility of users in creating and recreating messages of pre-existing sentiment and the impact of circumstantial factors in creating opportunities for true communicative exchange. The discussion has indicated immense challenges in trying to achieve real communication and real change in this environment. When the creation, function, and success of social media sites are contingent, the volume of users are engaged. When those sites incentivize users into seeking the same ends, the final product almost necessarily becomes an exercise in ideological echoing. Some illustrations do suggest a possibility for engagement beyond ideological bubbles. Yet, this engagement would seem to be in spite of rather than because of the structure of social media.

Ideology and Social Media

Ideology takes on the fishbowl effect. We take it in much like a fish experiences water. We cannot move beyond or past the limits of our ideology, because it sustains us. As Kenneth Burke (1941) wrote of ideological frames, these frames allow us to see and interact with our world. However, they do so by not allowing us to see the world from any other frame (Burke, 1941). The accounts from Sally, Ryan, and Julia support this assertion. Combi (2015) alludes to a thematic connection of addiction among the interviewees, an addiction to ideological affirmation. The internet may be construed as "a social phantasm that contains the logic of our relation to the Other and the 'object a' (the source of anxiety)" (Stein, 2012, p. 291). This dual form of existence makes it difficult to pin down the origination of the operative ideologies we experience, and it also creates a feeling that one may never escape the fishbowl and possess an outsider's view.[13] The perverse nature of ideology may be revealed when examining one's own

[13] If we are to consider the instance of the anti-Semite, this duality becomes clearer: "[T]he anti-Semite does not react to the real Jew. He reacts to his own fantasms. Central to these fantasms is the subject's fascination with the abjection (represented by the Jew). None of this makes sense, however, unless people see that ideology. . . structurally depends on this dialectic combination of an ideal and abject object and that it works best when it puts

relationship to it and engaging in a personal form of archaeology. Although we may never truly escape the fishbowl—such attempts may result in an ideological death, like the cessation of breathing air—we can still access our ideology in fragments through reflexivity and self-analysis. Ideology represents the expectations and consistencies that support our lived experience; it makes categorization and stereotyping possible. These shortcuts allow us to operate in a less noisy environment, one which does not require the concentrated analysis of every object we encounter. Yet, ideology enforces an already accepted set of perceptions concerning that environment.

Ideology is most challenging when it functions unexamined, when self-awareness and critique are not at the forefront. Combi's (2015) work drew forth some of these taken-for-granted assumptions. Drawing these ideological assumptions out in the cultural moments of each case study included in this project will further contextualize the new social media public sphere (Zhao, et al., 2018). Ideology may be found in many commonly accepted behaviors and expectations, and the silence surrounding its presence allows it to make the most fundamental of changes.

Social media may offer an even more compelling platform for the extension, enforcement, and hiddenness of ideology. The echo chamber effect I have discussed may help create a sense of inevitability concerning ideological prejudices, a sense that they are not only right but universally and absolutely right. In Baudrillard's (1983) terms, social media may be most effective at creating a complete simulacrum.

The constant proliferation of media content online speaks to an internal desire to be idolized and liked, a simulation of sorts. Baudrillard (1983) referred to simulations as

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people as close to the 'object a' as possible. . . . [I]t also generates a fear of getting too near the real" (Stein, 2012, p. 291-292).

"feign[ing] to have what one hasn't" (p. 5). For instance, like keeping up with the Joneses, a simulation puts on the image of having wealth, fame, or other desirable qualities. Although the image corresponds with the idea of idolatry, the person in question could have spent his or her last dime on the clothes or jewelry worn. In this example, the person in question exemplifies a simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 1).[14] A simulacrum is a finished simulation in which the simulation becomes so complete and self-contained that it functions as its own reality (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 6).

In expressions on the internet, simulacra can take on a fragmented form; we are limited by our ephemeral existence to share only what we can manage in the time we have available. How much time we spend in virtual realities, such as social media, can determine how much reach our ideologies may spread. Moreover, the communication limitations inherent in the media further fragmentize our online simulacra. Online roleplaying games offer a fascinating example of the ways in which such a fragmentation can materialize, because actions taken in these games serve as an extension of one's offline, lived reality.[15] Roleplaying itself does not change one's ideology or central identity-producing process, but it does reflect the person in part rather than in whole (Robinson, 2007, p. 100). However, these online fragments are neither indicative as representative of, nor replacements for, the whole: "I can play any number of online characters without suffering fragmentation of my 'archived' self. 'I'—that is, my 'self'—can play any number of different personae online and off" (Wertheim, 1999, p. 250). The "I" in this equation is the original source of these fragmented online personas. It remains intact even in

[14] Although Baudrillard (1983) does not distinguish it as such, this example represents first order.
[15] The online-offline divide can easily become a hindrance if we rely on these categorizations too much: "Building on the findings of empirical research, Internet scholars are nowadays convinced that we should focus on the relationships between the online and the offline dimensions, instead of considering them totally separate spheres. Jensen, for example, considers this divide between online and offline dimensions 'may have been a necessary step for theory development' in early years, but it 'has become increasingly counter-productive in methodological terms'" (Comunello & Anzera, 2012, p. 457).

these varied settings. However, we highlight specific images of ourselves, while simultaneously—whether through intention or necessity—omitting others. We choose only what we believe to be the better part of ourselves or our ideologies to showcase in our fragmented online participation.

Social media, such as Twitter, rely on this fragmentation. Yet, Twitter's very structure leads us to create an archived self from the fragmented images and statements of sentiment we post. A specific tweet offers an ideological echo of a whole that defines our frame as a Twitter user. My Twitter self is the aggregated whole of the various likes, retweets, and posts I submit.

Content on Twitter poses another issue with brevity. Dery (1993) suggested that communication with as few words as possible speaks to the nature of the culture we live in. Specifically, Dery (1993) reconsidered Cohen's (1991) definition of aliteracy, or the concept of people "who know how to read but choose not to." The term aliteracy is a portmanteau of apathy and literacy, and it suggests that people want to do as little work as possible to understand current issues and world events. "We also live at a moment of deep ignorance, when vital knowledge that humans have always possessed about who we are and where we live seems beyond our reach," explained Dery (1993), "An Unenlightenment. An age of missing information." While Dery's (1993) conclusions may falsely idealize information flow in past ages, it does point out a challenge with tightly limited communication such as that found on Twitter. As it reduces user content to headlines and short descriptions repeated in sentimental echoes, Twitter may further embolden our "unenlightenment" and reduce our opportunities for gathering much needed information. Interlocutors may expand echo chambers, not as truth seeking rhetorical acts but as further expansion of echoed sentiment. Twitter offers a response

to the speedy nature of online contributions, and the 140-character limit[16] gives users a short and direct means to engage in timely content with others with the same disposition.

The notion of stepping outside of the echo chamber may be unrealistic. Baudrillard (1983) described this phenomenon as "not unreal, but a simulacrum, never again exchanging for what is real, but exchanging in itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference" (p. 11). Echoed sentiments reinforce the structural integrity of the ideological echo chamber, which equivocates the chamber with a simulacrum. Baudrillard (1983) continues:

> So it is with simulation, insofar as it is opposed to representation. The latter starts from the principle that the sign and the real are equivalent (even if equivalence is utopian, it is a fundamental axiom). Conversely, simulation starts from the *utopia* of this principle of equivalence, *from the radical negation of the sign as value*, from the reversion and death sentence of every reference. Whereas representation tries to absorb simulation by interpreting it as false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation as itself a simulacrum. This would be the successive phases of the image:
>
> —it is the reflection of a basic reality
>
> —it masks and perverts a basic reality
>
> —it masks the *absence* of a basic reality
>
> —it bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum" (p. 11, emphasis original).

The simulacrum becomes a referent of and for itself. Social media are structured to maintain and perpetuate simulacra, and the segmentation is intentional by design.

[16] The data collected for this dissertation still had a 140-character limit at the time they were written. In November 2017, it increased to 280 characters (Collins, 2017).

Although it is not possible to step outside of the infrastructure of the simulacrum, it is possible to assess a user's magnification of the sentimental echoes. Content that may help them see their ideological poses for what they are and critically assess their own echoes, we must examine past conversations to identify points at which narcissistic self-expressions broke down in the face of oppositional tweets and allowed for reconstruction of the ideological self into something new. This project explores the construction of various selves in three social media controversies, seeking points at which ideological echo chambers reinforced assumptions, points at which competing echo chambers challenged each other and, finally, points at which some users modified content and behavior in the face of competing ideological perspectives (something that will be of special importance in the Yolocaust chapter). Drawing on these analyses, I hope to offer some suggestions regarding ways in which social media users may be able to bridge the gap between echo chambers and exchange in some critical, if still delimited, dialogue.

Media Studies and Praxis

Jenkins, Ford & Green (2013) have challenged media scholars to deal with the important changes and adaptations impacting media and society of the current historical moment. "Media scholarship needs to be as clear as possible about what it is fighting for as well as what it is fighting against" (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2018, p. xii). In a time when Twitter and social media occupy so much of their users and lurkers' attention but not their commitment, as posited by Galdieri, et al. (2018), scholars have an open opportunity to comment on the changing media landscape as well as the enduring human challenges these changes bring to the front.

This dissertation speaks to a fast-evolving moment in social media discourse. The project pursues publicly accessible communication, and analyzes it from examples of 2015, 2016, and

2017 trending topics. This analysis may help us understand the paradoxical nature of media that seems to gain more and more participants even as these participants express less and less commitment to participate. As noted in the previous section, even as more users sign onto and participate in the social media "conversation," fewer users *meaningfully* participate:

> "Online opinions reflect the vocal minority. Selection effects can shape the composition of the social media community by systemically encouraging some individuals to participate while discouraging others and silencing their opinions" (Moe & Schweidel, 2014, p. 48).

Social media platforms, such as Twitter, give the false impression that they represent an egalitarian marketplace of ideas. Twitter's claim that it is a space for open exchange makes it an ideal candidate for this project. "We believe in free expression and think every voice has the power to impact the world" ("Twitter Values," 2018). This claim seems empty when the overwhelming volume of content on Twitter becomes repetitive white noise.

Twitter (2018) promotes a cacophony of voices as its demonstration of "free expression." But, the echo chamber/simulacrum effect of its likes and retweets functions has led to an environment of sentimental poses and echoes. This environment, as Moe & Schweidel (2014) note, in which a small set of repeated phrases and symbols represent the ideology of a small minority of users is repeated over and over again until it becomes normative truth. By its very nature, Twitter functions as an ideological posting board, not a channel for human interaction or social networking.

Twitter claims to provide functionalities that promote their vision of social media. Users can use hashtags—the # symbol—to participate in conversations with people they do not know and to shape a new public sphere. However, the act of posting a hashtag would suggest that its

sentiment expresses your ideology. Still, the hashtag offers the illusion of being open to other voices. This is not true on other platforms. Although Facebook has the hashtag feature, it is difficult to access Facebook posts without a preexisting friendship or an advanced piece of software, and the structure of Facebook limits interaction with strangers unless a post is public and shared with a wider scope of friend lists. On Twitter, not only can messages be shared in hashtag enabled conversations, but Twitter also allows for direct posting between users without the prerequisite of an established online "friendship." "Twitter users have also developed a similarly simple mechanism for addressing their public tweets specifically at particular users," according to Bruns (2012, p. 1324). The at symbol or @ followed by a specific Twitter handle[17] is often used as an acknowledgement feature. Including the Twitter handle of a particular user in a tweet is a form of direct messaging, so users can communicate directly with anyone on Twitter while still keeping the messages public. Although directed at someone specific, others may still offer their perspective given that anyone can technically access these messages. Hence, Twitter likely offers the most fertile platform for examining the exchanges within and, particularly, between ideological echo chambers.

Summation and Steps Forward

This chapter has extensively reviewed the challenges of communication in online and social media networks. Drawing on a significant body of current and past research, it has suggested that social media sites do not create social networks or interaction. In fact, social networks create ideological siloes, echo chambers in which a limited set of symbols and terms signify sentimental uniformity regarding subjects. Users express fragmented selves in tweets, likes, retweets, hashtags, and the other tools allowed on social media platforms.

[17] Twitter handles are the same thing as usernames.

These fragmented messages and symbols create a projected self, a self that exists within the ideological siloes created by the various posted expressions. It is especially hard for this self to step outside of the ideological echo chamber and critically examine its own place or ideas, because the entire chamber repeats its own sentiment back to the self as if it was a universal truth. The longer one engages in this environment, the more likes, retweets, etc, one creates and that are created about one's own content, the more fully an individual is bordered by the ideological reinforcement of the social media context. This is a very troubling notion for a critical scholar.

One way to break out of these siloes might be for a sufficiently compelling counter narrative to be posed to a user. A handful of studies have suggested this might be possible. But, none have offered complete studies of message streams in which ideological poses were both reinforced and challenged. This study will fill that void.

This dissertation will closely analyze three social media controversies, controversies in which a set of ideas was given rise by a series of posts and either challenged or, over time, faded. I will examine the inception, life and consummation of these controversies through a close analysis of specific social media "tools" as they were used to spread and stick messages. Messages using # and @ are the primary sources of information for my dissertation research and project.

As I have mentioned, the cases I will study are historical, rising and fading between 2015 and 2017. These case studies were selected, because they occurred during the moments leading up to, during, and after the 2016 United States Presidential Election. It was a period notable for clashing ideologies, and all these cases occurred at approximately the same time. These cases also employ some form of first-person reference. Rajadurai (2010) and Atton (2002) argued that

first-person framing is demonstrative of group and ideological affiliation. This framing makes the selected case studies unique opportunities to understand how first-person referencing can create ideological poses using multiple forms of communication online, including the written word, visual portrait captures, and geolocational markers. "This ideological space must then appear permanent, natural, and common-sensical, even as it is continually contested," claims Atton (2002), therefore, "we can examine radical media practices for examples of how naturalised media frames and ideological codes can be disrupted" (p. 493).

Atton's (2002) description of "media frames and ideological codes" connect to *I am* statements generally attributed to the first-person speaking position (p. 493). This form of online proclamation is addressed in the first case study. The first case focuses on the online response to the Charlie Hebdo attack in 2015, and Twitter's hashtagging of the statement *I am Charlie*, its French counterpart, *Je suis Charlie*, and the subsequent metamorphosis of this declaration. These hashtags include:

(1) #JesuisCharlie

(2) #IamCharlie

(3) #JenesuispasCharlie

(4) #IamnotCharlie

(5) #IamParisian

(6) #JesuisParisienne

(7) #PrayforParis

The usage patterns of these hashtags will be analyzed, and common words accompanying them will be examined.

The second case study concerns visual counterparts to *I am*, as extensions of the first-person. This analysis tracks the Twitter conversation following the release of a collection of images known as *Yolocaust*, wherein selfies taken by visitors of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin were recreated with superimposed images of Holocaust victims in the background. The primary marker in this case is #Yolocaust. The images in the collection and the subsequent Twitter response are categorized and visually rendered.

The third case study focuses on the geolocational version of *I am*, and it follows the Twitter dialogue in response to the Facebook check-ins at Standing Rock, North Dakota, which is the site where anti-Dakota Access Pipeline protests occurred. Three hashtags are applicable here:

(1) #NoDAPL,[18]

(2) #WaterisLife

(3) #StandingRock

The act of centering oneself either as a communicator or critic of other people's cultural messaging is critical to understanding how social media shapes our conceptions of self and the world. This analysis will also lend insight into the ways in which digital natives construct online narratives with prior generations and how the feedback loop operates alongside cultural production on Twitter. These case studies will give us a glimpse into the virtual reality existing beyond our casual interaction with it.

Such cultural messages can be discovered through an accumulation of Twitter data, also known as Twitter scraping. Twitter scraping the data needed for this project was not as simple as logging on to Twitter and copying and pasting the content, especially in seeking data from

[18] An abbreviation for No Dakota Access Pipeline.

thousands of contributors and their tweets. Although there were many free options available for Twitter scraping, none of them retrieved content older than seven days from the initiation of data collection.[19] In order to gain access to the wealth of information needed to conduct such an analysis, I used a Twitter scraping service called Octoparse. This program sought out Twitter data using the particular hashtags mentioned above. When the collection process concluded, a total of 102,532 tweets were available for analysis. Each tweet was accompanied with additional data points, such as:

(1) The username of the tweet's author

(2) The content of the tweet itself

(3) The hashtag use flagged by the Octoparse system

(4) The date it was posted

(5) The total number of retweets

(6) The total number of likes

(7) The total number of comments or replies

(8) An image URL, if one was included with the tweet.

Twitter scraping and the above data points made the content of 102,532 tweets decipherable. It broke through the white noise of the Twitterverse.

To make this possible, tweets have been collected and scrubbed. This required taking the collected content and converting it into quantitative forms. Content analysis was the methodological approach used to accomplish that. Alongside this process, content from each tweet was organized in a manner that was readable by digital humanities tools (Long & So,

[19] At the time of this writing. Since this research has been conducted, some free programs have been released to include a wider date range feature, but they still have issues with reliability.

2016). The pattern recognition of this approach not only determined what users were saying, but *how* they were saying it.

Visualizing the established connections between people and their relationships with one another—especially those who would not have communicated with one another otherwise—is an important step toward understanding how online communication unfolds on a cultural and personal level. Following the accessibility of digital humanities projects before this, it is crucial to make the information of this project accessible to anyone with internet access. Visualizations are a means to make the findings apparent. Using the visualizations generated from digital humanities tools will help make these findings clear to audiences both within and outside of the academy.

The warning that social media destroy the quality of human communication has validity (Brummette, et al., 2018; Canter, 2013; Combi, 2015). The performative poses of social media solidify users further into their ideological positions. Their subsequent content assumes these ideas as natural. The upcoming chapter investigates contributors to ideological illusion:

(1) Digital fragmentation

(2) Hashtags as unacknowledged ideological markers

(3) Online performances that routinize ideological assumptions.

This complicated dynamic is not new in the digital world. Instead, social media consider the human condition as naturally isolated from others. Social media only make our fragmented existence lonelier.

Of course, the goal of human communication is to bridge our ideological horizons, ease our isolation, and give meaning to our fragmented existence. Ideological criticism may suggest that this is an illusion. Yet, it remains the goal of human interaction.

This chapter has suggested a series of tensions: a social media is represented as a series of performative poses, a form of free expression that is more wholly delimited than any previous expression, a form of "global" communication, a communication that was supposed to break down social and national barriers and that has only engendered tighter and tighter ideological siloes, a communication that is supposed to bridge our isolation and has only succeeded in locking us into narcissistic echo chambers, isolating us out of all human contact.

Is it possible to find within these tensions some step forward? Is it possible to find ways in which social media might offer opportunities for actual social engagement? Is it possible for social media to offer users the opportunity to step outside of their ideological bubble and see the world from the point of view of the other?

The thesis of this dissertation is that this possibility is limited or nonexistent. We must acknowledge the fundamentally narcissistic nature of social media content and examine controversies in which narcissistic visions conflicted in order to find suggestions for steps forward, ways to move beyond the isolation chambers and simulacra we create for ourselves.

This dissertation will examine three controversies drawing on ideological and critical approaches to weed out the echo effect of discourse within these controversies and to see ways in which participants created ideological extensions of the self as "true" experience. These extensions will be critically assessed. However, while critical approaches offer means for assessing the ideological bubbles participants may not see around themselves, they do not always offer the means for stepping beyond those bubbles and engaging the other in true dialogue. Periodically, I will draw on theories of rhetoric to clarify illustrations of isolation and opportunities for engagement to reach beyond that isolation. These concepts will become especially important and useful as we trace the ways in which conflicting ideological echo

chambers or simulacra competed with each other and, in some cases, modified the behavior of some participants.

Chapter 2 of this dissertation will discuss some of the analytic tools used in this critical study. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 discuss, in turn, the controversies surrounding #JesuisCharlie, #Yolocaust, and #StandingRock. Chapter 6 summarizes my findings and offers some directions for future research.

Chapter 2

Critical Approaches to Digital Content Analysis

"Digital media technologies have ushered in a communication revolution that has fundamentally changed the nature of media and power relations among organizational and grassroots communicators."

-Linda Hon, 2016

"New information and communication technologies as well as internet are changing Habermas concept of public sphere (in the case of ideal conditions, it avoids domination, manipulation and uncertain arguments), because social networking websites . . . support a unilateral position and [do] not recognize the opposing arguments."

-Rūta Sutkutė, 2016

Ideology, Fragmentation, and Digital Communication

Ideological echo chambers are perpetuated through silos on social media. Content analysis and digital humanities may help us analyze these communicative barriers. Ideology offers familiar comfort to ease modern loneliness at the expense of sociability. The ideological self offers context and ephemeral knowledge, which roots people in the current moment. This groundedness gives human experience meaning, but there are limits to what individuals can express. Therefore, multiple perspectives are needed in order to arrive at a more holistic point of view. Our partiality motivates us to communicate with others and explore what it means to be a cultural being.

From the beginning of human symbolicity, cultural ideas have been predominately passed down through face-to-face communication (Fisher, 1989). This trend continued even after we began to outsource message sharing and storing into the written word, print text, and eventually, virtual text. While it may be argued that the majority of these exchanges are intended for person-

to-person transference, data processing is a different analytical activity from communication, one that does not necessitate a human interlocutor. Interlocution between human and machine makes digital humanities possible.[20]

While human-to-object communication is not a new concept, reframing cultural discourse from this lens will offer us greater insight than if we were to maintain the traditional communicative model. Balibar (2015) described Althusser's writing as interactive between author and object, with ideology serving as the context rather than a distant influence:

> "they are in fact essentially descriptions of singular experiences resulting from an 'encounter' with a work or a group of works, an 'event' in other words, but from which general consequences are drawn for a much larger field. This proves particularly adapted (but also uneasy, from an epistemological standpoint) in the case of a reflection on the issue of ideology, ideological domination, and the 'dominant ideology' because, in a symptomatic circularity, such a reflection requires both a description of the processes or procedures of subjection and subjectivation that form the essence of ideology and a 'performative' gesture allowing for a 'subject' to become located, as interpellating interpellator, within the ideological mechanism itself in order to reveal its coherence and insecurity. This is, Althusser seems to suggest, something made possible not by art in general, as an institution or a cultural phenomenon, but only by specific works of art in specific circumstances" (p. 3).

This specificity speaks to our groundedness and a nuanced knowledge base that comes from first-hand experience. Our *Geworfenheit,*[21] or thrownness according to Heidegger (1979),

[20] Put simply, digital humanities refer to the processing of data rooted in the traditional humanistic fields. Digital humanities refer not to a method, but a set of tools one uses after accumulating data through another method. This will be discussed further later in the chapter.

[21] Heidegger (1979) advanced the idea that we are thrown into the time in which we live.

pushes us into a current circumstance, and our interactions with machines render the same quality to them as well. Machines are of our own making, but they also serve as both a middle and end-point for virtual content. The human condition is necessarily fragmented, because we cannot be privy to everything going on around or even within us (Heidegger, 1979).[22] We are thrown into the specific time within which we live from birth to death. Our senses focus on what they consider to be important (and, of course, this focus creates the importance of those objects in our construction of meaning), while neglecting that which does not meet a specific standard or is outside of one's view.

Kittler (1990) contended that words only have meaning when we use them: "[I]t is the differentiality that precedes all meaning: the naked, elementary existence of signifiers" (Kittler, 1990, p. 209). Prior to learning a language, we can absorb the signifiers merely as empty vessels; they offer us nothing new beyond an empty visual or aural experience. When learning a language, we acquire the parts, or words, before we can combine them into a larger whole. A person can become acquainted with the definition and pronunciation of particular words, but that alone does not result in reasonable fluency. That is merely one step forward. "If signifiers obey laws that are as fundamental as they are incomprehensible, it is essential to have the test material expressed in strict, statistical terms" (Kittler, 1990, p. 209). In an analysis of Ebbinghaus's work on syllables, Kittler (1990) suggested that rote memorization moved beyond typical human faculties and into the realm of absurdity. Human reading capacities are also directed toward efficiency, so words, and even groups of words, can be read over in pursuit of something new. These patterns are useful for understanding communicative exchanges, because the emphases

[22] We cannot *know* first-hand what is needed for our bodies to develop and thrive, unless we look at it from a distance and as an object. When we finish eating food, our minds are free to focus on other things; none of our conscious thought is required for the stomach acid to do its job.

created by linguistic nuances will be more distinct. The significations created in social media tend, by their nature, to be pretty obvious. This is likely due to the need to give social media signifiers the easiest possible and most universally accessible meanings in order to engender the broadest use of them. Signifiers more complex than "likes" or "retweets" might be too complex with too many potential meanings for users to easily and clearly employ. Yet, these very tools create inflexions and (even on a simplistic scale) nuances regarding messages. On the most basic level, they show the user is familiar with (an "expert" in) the medium. The user knows the language. Though, each tool carries other nuances and meanings, as well. I will now discuss some of these meanings as displayed in hashtags and other social media tools.

Hashtagged Media

Hashtags serve as indexical markers, and they are Twitter's built in metadata. "Tweets with hashtags are more likely to be retweeted," explained Chandler & Munday (2016), "On Twitter, hashtags are an index of trending topics. The symbol is often also used casually to express a mood (e.g., #sarcasm)." Hashtags are even more complex in that they go beyond simple organizational structures. Zappavigna (2018) considered hashtags an important interpersonal resource that have the potential to create connections between like-minded individuals. This poses problems as well as opportunities. Because hashtags may help create connections with like-minded individuals, they can tend to conversationally marginalize those who are not like-minded and further embed users in ideological silos. As the first chapter of this study noted, hashtags have become a means for repeating and enforcing the ideological frame of a social media echo chamber.

Hence, hashtags do indeed serve as signifiers in a larger rhetorical act. In theory, they should signify meanings or ideas that ground (and pre-exist) the ideological echo chamber they

inhabit. However, as research has indicated, the first and most important signification of a hashtag is the agreed upon sentiment that hegemonically creates and enforces the echo chamber, itself. Hashtags, then, may be seen as self-referential, creating the very echo that gives them meaning as hashtags.

So, as hashtags exploit electronic word-of-mouth, or eWOM, audiences, others who act as ends or goals for communication, functionally disappear. Alhabash & McAlister (2015) considered eWOM to be the amplification of narcissistic ramblings without much regard for possible and existing audiences (p. 1318-1320). The motivation for eWOM places speaking first and meaningful connection second. The primary goal of hashtagging and posting is display, a pose, an image of self created specifically to appeal to that same self. Of the many forms eWOM takes, hashjacking and tweetjacking are the most significant for this dissertation project.

Hashjacking can complicate meaning-making and sense-making. It is a form of distraction in originally authored tweets. Hashjacking involves "the use of a hashtag which diverts attention away from the conversation with which it was originally associated," posited Chandler & Munday (2016), "Hashtags are public property, and popular hashtags frequently lead to such diversions." Mikelodeon's tweet was one such example: "Respect is not censorship. Censorship is not respect. #IAmCharlie #IAmSandy #JeSuisCharlie #SayMyName." As discussed in chapter one, Mikelodeon's message was too general to render any reliable sense-making. Mikelodeon used hashtags focused on a variety of topics, two of which were metadata markers for the #Jesuis case study (See Zappavigna, 2018). These hashtags highjacked the various runs in which they appeared and moved attention to Mikelodeon's account. Hashjacking, then, indicates one of the ways in which hashtagging functions as self-referential

communication, needing no immediate, direct or intended audience, but creating meaning through its repeated appearance.

Tweetjacking happens when a user retweets a message after they have manipulated the original content to serve their own ends. Chandler & Munday (2016) describe the manipulation of an embedded website link to reroute to another site as a common form of tweetjacking. Zappavigna (2018) considered this rerouting as another branch of hyperlinking, which can quickly become tangential. Tweetjacking is an illusion, one performance existing in place of another, at least until the viewer realizes they have succumbed to clickbait. Thus, tweetjacking relies on the unattached nature of hashtags as signifiers. Tweetjacking manipulates the hashtag in such a way that a new meaning overtakes the presumed "original" meaning and becomes the accepted meaning of the term. The act of tweetjacking, then, dislodges the notion of "true" or "actual" meaning from hashtags, allowing us to see them as signifiers that can be shaped to create meaning within any given context by reassigning meaning to the hashtag within that context. Hashtags function first and last as ideological tools, constructing and enforcing meaning within a given context.

Performances in Online and Offline Worlds

The three case studies in this dissertation offer different perspectives and performances, as measured by hashtags, word frequency, likes, comments, and retweets. Online performances take on different forms than offline performances. However, the self-referential tendency of online performance can result in distraction, as in the cases of hashjacking and tweetjacking. Tweets function not as interactive communication but as ideological poses. The upcoming chapters will reveal tweets that make no meaningful connection between the body of the tweet and their subsequent hashtags. Others have the appearance of a connection, but these

appearances are superficial. Thus, in each case, the hashtag does not function as a logical conclusion regarding a reasoned point but as a pose, a means for signifying preferred sentiment. Baudrillard (1983) would consider these false performances, or "feign[ing] to have what one hasn't" (p. 5). As noted, the sum of these false performances become a simulacrum of the user, a performance of self for the audience of self—creating the narcissistic personal echo chamber Alhabash and MacAlister (2015) criticized. The upcoming case studies reveal the unique complexity of the mediated selves, the ideological poses, created on social media.

Social media complicate the dramaturgy that is carried out online. According to Hogan (2016), dramaturgy that occurs in online spaces is nearly parallel to offline performance, in that online spaces "are bounded in space and time, and represents the instantiation of specific roles" (p. 378). However, what roles users play and how they play them require different tactics in online spaces. The celebrity figure on social media can strategize what they present to their preconceived audience, and they can generate buzz to maintain the audience's interest. This process is maintained through the myth "that fame—well-knownness—is still a hallmark of greatness" (Boorstin, 1987, p. 47). One can perform the expert without providing credentials, share images of perceived authority, and/or engage in trolling, which refers to transgressive behaviors.[23] Some, if not all, of these roles may not be commonly carried out and are often far more difficult to sustain in offline communication. For the non-celebrity, social media provide space to become someone else, should a user choose to enact another identity, one that does not match the reality of their everyday existence. For the celebrity, social media provide opportunities to project a specific image of their well-knownness, as Boorstin (1987) conceived it, to convey a performance of celebrity that fits the narrative they want to disseminate.

[23] Trolling behavior may be perceived as mildly annoying, unacceptable, and everywhere in between.

> "[I]deology is always already a dramaturgy. History appears not only as a succession of 'modes of production' but as a series of 'productions' in the sense of performances, where one staging (or mise-en-scène) can become corrected and its effects transformed only through another mise-en scène, and so on indefinitely" (Balibar, 2015, p. 19-20).

Hence, every tweet that addresses #IamCharlie, #Yolocaust, #NoDAPL and their counterparts comes with a particular framing or staging that ideally leads to another frame or meaning. However, the immense volume of content on Twitter makes it difficult to engage everything in a meaningful way. Baudrillard (1983) suggested simulacra as dense as this to be pure simulation, the fourth and final phase of the image (p. 11). Many of these hashtags, then, take on floating significations, significations supplied by their context or use and not by the original "conversation" that supposedly gave them their meaning.

As such, some messages stand on their own and require little intervention. Others open the door for dialogue and engagement using vague language, and still others speak for speaking's sake. For the latter, the messages users produce have been constructed with a particular audience in mind: an audience that does not exist, and/or the author as an audience of one.

> "We may wish to blame the technology for creating self-absorbed people, but it is probably more likely that egoists love social network sites because these services support their desire to exhibit oneself for the purposes of mass validation" (boyd, 2008, p. 241).

This narcissistic ideology seeks to be spread through terms rather than remain simply sticky (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013, p. 6). Ideas have been spread since the spoken and written word; however, spreadability is most prevalent in media sharing spaces that encourage users to distribute sticky content to their followers (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013).

As these tweets and other media forms are transmitted to larger and larger audiences, they take on many of the qualities of a meme, or a form of spreadable media. Viral content is content that has spread far beyond its original context and often has created a signification that stands on its own without clear referent to the original context. Memes often repeat themselves, and they frequently take hold of the cultural moment when something is slightly altered. Baudrillard (1983) identified this as the first phase of the image or sacrament (p. 12). The amount of subliminal or overt hold this may have on consumers of these messages is unknown, but as we explore the upcoming case studies, the findings will offer insight into their cultural reach. As they spread beyond their own ideological borders, viral content and memes may offer potential intersection between competing echo chambers. These intersections may open the possibility for users within competing echo chambers to actually engage each other, even with the limited communication tools of the social media site. This study will draw on content analysis to examine these areas of both echo and reach.

Modes of Practice: Content Analysis and Digital Humanities

Content Analysis. To arrive at a greater understanding of nuance, specifically in terms of ideological influence, the material for each case study in this dissertation project is organized using content analysis, and it is subsequently processed using digital humanities tools. This series of steps creates a space in which word counting is not antiquated, but necessary: "To count words--in the days of romanticism this was the ridiculously outmoded fixed idea of a Fixlein with his kabala of the Bible," wrote Kittler (1990), "in the age of media it becomes a primary and elementary necessity" (p. 190). The analysis of content, specifically when it comes to tweets, is often considered a mechanical registration of zeros and ones. Human intervention creates meaning and understanding among a collection of numbers. So, the collection and processing of

data as a practice of the arts and humanities may bridge a disciplinary gap. Kittler (2006) described the separation between numbers and numerals as an unnecessary division, which can "hinder thought. In other words, mathematics only exists in cultures in which numbers are present as numerals. Everything else – to quote the Wisdom of Solomon, which simply parrots Philolaus of Croton and his covert student Plato – remains in the domain of measuring, counting, and weighing" (p. 53). The intervention of transdisciplinary inquiry is essential to bridging such a gap.

Content analysis is one way to address this challenge. Music illustrates the number-numeral divide, a separation Kittler (2006) found not only unnecessary, but also problematic. He turns to the Greek language to reposition our view of a communicative code that includes both numbers and letters. Musical notes have a numeric position on the scale. For instance, a C-note is in the same place for every octave, and the patterns of letter arrangements creates a sense of consistency that aids in learning sheet music and playing an instrument. The numbers that correspond to these letter arrangements are the notes on the staff. The number/numeral divide here would be nonsensical; the C-note and its corresponding marking on the scale are one and the same. Discourse on music uses both of the number and numeral forms equally and in concert with each other. When combined, the notes on sheet music offer a coherent musical narrative that distinguishes it from others; a single C-note cannot do that on its own. "In other words, it is not the meaning of signs to make any sense, they are there to sharpen our senses rather than ensnare them in definitions," explained Kittler (2006), "It is not the meaning of media to transmit meaning; rather, they are to pass on to the senses of others what would otherwise fade away in the present" (p. 57). Therefore, an analysis of media content, specifically social media

communication, and even when that analysis necessarily engages enumeration, can provide insight into the ephemeral moment of the recent past.

The current content analysis will be conducted through the process of Twitter-scraping discussed in chapter one. Twitter-scraping accumulates tweets during the time frame of each respective case study.[24] Collecting this data using markers, such as #IamCharlie, #Yolocaust, and #NoDAPL, requires the separation of certain cultural content for analysis. First, the content is collected through Octoparse's identification and collection of tweets using the relevant hashtags. Then, another Twitter scraping activity is conducted to locate tweets using the terms and phrases for each of the case studies (e.g., Charlie Hebdo, I am Charlie, Yolocaust, No Dakota Access Pipeline). These two data sets are compared and culled for redundancy. The timeline for each case study is also narrowed to their respective time periods in which Twitter marked them "trending." This process of separation leads to a sample size that is more practical for the digital humanities tools through which they are later processed. Content analysis offers an opportunity for data to *speak*.

The data has been considered thematically. In the subsequent chapters, specific tweets have been selected based on both human and machine analysis. There is a distinct process involved:

(1) The data is collected and culled using Octoparse, as mentioned above.

(2) A frequency analysis is conducted on Voyant, a data processing tool. This determines which terms are used most often in the entirety of the corpus, and the tweets are then grouped together based on these frequencies.

[24] As mentioned in chapter one, the program Octoparse collected this data for analysis using particular hashtags.

(3) The groups of data are then processed on Tableau visualization software to illustrate their patterns during Twitter's established trending period.

(4) Some tweets serve as outliers and move beyond sentimental echoes. I have read all tweets and select these examples to demonstrate their exceptionality.

This process is conducted for all case studies, and they are examined in later chapters.

Numbers and Numerals: Methods by the Numbers

Data on its own is a corpus. Content analysis marks and organizes nodal moments creating a body of data that can then be analyzed according to content and rhetorical impact. Similarly, "It is the transformation of numbers into numerals, this culturally highly advanced magic wand, which separates signifieds (a matter of reading and writing) from signifiers (a matter of hearing)," explained Kittler (2006), "Storage and transmission media are therefore an indispensable part of mathematics" (p. 53). The pattern of storage and transmission, the enumeration and grouping of hashtags may inform us about the ideological borders being constructed within the tweet cycle. Thus, the tweets examined in this dissertation project may help us crack the surface of ideological influence on individual identifications.

Digital Humanities. Digital humanities tools create a space for further inquiry and visual representation of the data collected in content analysis. This requires mathematics to transform the material into something easily understood and represented. Through the Twitter-scraping data collection via Octoparse, 102,532 tweets have been collected spanning all three case studies. On their own, the data may have been considered incomprehensible without the current digital humanities tools. Trends in the data would neither be immediate revelations nor would they be seamlessly processed. Kittler (1986) asserted the digital humanist should "arrest

the daily data flow in order to turn it into images or signs" (p. 3). This translation process moves raw data into the language of the human and the machine, one that can be understood by both.

Larger datasets, or big data, influence how one might contextualize the findings. "Big Data has emerged [as] a system of knowledge that is already changing the objects of knowledge," explained boyd & Crawford (2012), "while also having the power to inform how we understand human networks and community" (p. 665). When using advanced software for processing large quantities of information, big data suggests the possibility of a wider scope for analysis, which is enabled through both numbers and numerals. Combining both numbers and numerals in meaningful ways can render unique findings regarding the digital representation of online content.

> "At a certain moment in time, man learned to emit and place the discourse of mathematics in circulation, in the real as well as in the [virtual] world, and that discourse cannot function unless nothing is forgotten. It only takes a little signifying chain to begin to function based on this principle, for things to move forward as if they were functioning by themselves" (Lacan, 1986, p. 236).

In other words, digital humanities tools allow us to rediscover the "signifying chain" of each respective case study, so they preserve "the senses of others what would otherwise fade away in the present" (Kittler, 2006, p. 57). This project also memorializes the vestiges of cultural moments that might have otherwise been lost, so we may learn from them in the future.

Critiques of Content Analyses and Digital Humanities

Just as Heidegger (1979) described the human condition as fragmented, the same may be said of the tools we use. Drucker (2012) cautioned scholars in the humanities to avoid over-relying on visualizations to represent work we have been doing for decades and even centuries.

She argued that, "While it may seem like an extreme statement, I think the ideology of almost all current information visualization is anathema to humanistic thought, antipathetic to its aims and values," (Drucker, 2012). She continued: "The persuasive and seductive rhetorical force of visualization performs such a powerful reification of information that graphics such as Google Maps are taken to be simply a presentation of 'what is,' as if all critical thought had been precipitously and completely jettisoned" (Drucker, 2012). Drucker (2012) was concerned with the inflation of the visual as superior to other academic forms until it became a universal representation. Selected research methodologies for projects should seek to answer the question at hand. They should not be intended to serve as a reflection of ephemeral trends. To address the more extreme backlash, Kirschenbaum (2014) referred to digital humanities as "a term of tactical convenience" (p. 49).[25] A research tool should be used, because it offers the best fit for answering the research question at hand. While the concerns advanced by Drucker (2012) and Kirschenbaum (2014) have general merit, content analysis and digital humanities tools are appropriate for understanding how social media create and reinforce ideological frames. As my earlier discussion indicated, quantity becomes volume in social media and volume becomes relevance (the number of retweets you achieve marks the accepted "relevance" of your tweet). Hence, a content analysis focused on the repetition of hashtags should inform us about the ways in which ideological echo chambers evolve and grow in twitter streams.

[25] Kirschenbaum's (2014) argument recalls de Certeau's (1984) distinction between strategy and tactics. A "strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper (propre) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it" (de Certeau, 1984, p. xix). By rendering itself invisible, strategies for appropriate scholarly research has come to a head after the postmodern turn. Older, traditional methods have been placed at the top of the scholarly hierarchy, and newer approaches like digital humanities have been placed near the bottom. As de Certeau (1984) posits, those relegated to the bottom of academic hierarchies experience agency in limited ways. These actions refer to tactics, particularly "a calculus which cannot count on a 'proper' (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a border-line distinguishing the other as a visible totality. . . the place of a tactic belongs to the other" (de Certeau, 1984, p. xix).

Digital humanities tools streamline content analysis work that could technically be done by hand if a researcher chooses. However, these tools provide "an affordance of networked digital spaces, because [they] constitute an architectural feature of networked structures encouraging sharing rather than withholding information" (Papacharissi, 2012, p. 1992). Although something may be new or in a different form than it was originally, there is value in reconsidering how things are done and analyzed:

> "One cannot blame all the ills of the intellectual world on this historic struggle for professional hegemony, but the conflicts have contributed to contemporary confusion by repressing realization of a holistic sense of self, by subverting formulation of a humane concept of rationality and sane praxis, by rendering personal and public decision making and action subservient to 'experts' on knowledge, truth, and reality, and by elevating some classes of persons and discourse over others. The moral I would draw is this: some discourse is more veracious, reliable, and trustworthy in respect to knowledge, truth, and reality than some other discourse, but no *form* or *genre* has final claim to these virtues" (Fisher, 1989, p. 19).

The same may be said of new respective technologies, specifically digital humanities tools, in applied research such as this dissertation. Although all research methods and tools have flaws, as Drucker (2012) posited. In particular, while content analysis may allow us to trace the growth of ideological repetition and echo chambers, this dissertation asks larger questions, such as asking if and when content may break free of an echo chamber and modify the beliefs or behavior of users in a different echo chamber.

This dissertation, then, will take up a multi-pronged approach. My core analysis will be a content analysis grounded in repetition and placement of hashtags. This analysis will

demonstrate the evolving ideological frames that twitter conversations engender. As I trace the inception, life and consummation of these frames, I will critically examine the ways in which twitter interactions open (and more often close) opportunities for rhetorical interaction. As I engage in this part of the analysis, I will draw on ideological and rhetorical theories to clarify the ways in which competing message streams may create opportunities for suasory impact and change.

The multiple means of inquiry used in this dissertation project should offer a balanced critical perspective. As the analysis in the subsequent chapters demonstrates, a minority of tweets make meaningful contributions to the online conversation in which they engage. Sometimes these messages are rewarded with retweets, comments, and likes. However, just as often, they are not. Most tweets do not experience any significant degree of response (in the Twitter world, retweets, likes and so on). I hope to show that, while most content appears and disappears with little impact, some content may actually have the ability to break out of the endless twitter stream and create engagement, impact, and change. Identifying content that has modified behavior (whether it has achieved the numerical success associated with Twitter) may help us see ways in which social media might be used to create meaningful communication and social change.

Case Studies

Prior to the discussion of each study's findings, the first section of each chapter provides historical context to explain the cultural setting of each case. Each historical narrative is often repeated in some form in the data, and the nuance of spreadability and memes may be seen in the additions users make to these offline narratives. This exposition will include the circumstances surrounding the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe and the fight for indigenous land

rights in North Dakota. But we will begin with Muslim experiences in France up to and after the *Charlie Hebdo* attack.

Chapter 3

Je (ne) suis (pas) Charlie: Speaking in First-Person

"[T]here is no specific evidence and reasoning to confirm the allegations in the discourse of "Je suis Charlie" ("I am Charlie") movement, contrary, they use abstract information that Western audiences could deliberately create the image of violence as natural phenomenon underlying the existing social order in the Muslim society."

-Rūta Sutkutė, 2016

#JesuisCharlie first appeared in response to the murder of staff, editors and writers of Charlie Hebdo, a French language satire magazine, by terrorists. The hashtag was first represented as a message of solidarity with the murder victims and a call for freedom of speech and of the press. Of course, the issues and messaging, as so often is the case, proved far more complex than this simple ascription would indicate. A wide divergence of ideological expressions soon appeared surrounding the case. As the preceding chapters indicated would likely be the case, when distinct groups in this controversy disagreed with each other on Twitter, their expressions tended to stay within their respective silos. This is especially true when using first-person language. In the case of #Jesuis, this division was exacerbated by the historical context of the events.

This historical experience of Muslims in France was complicated and challenging. Like many historical narratives, it has been marred with intolerance. As people from the Middle East and North Africa migrated to France and other European countries in the early twentieth century, their various cultures were exposed to one another. France represented a convergence of cultures, and Muslims living in France experienced discrimination much like their non-dominant counterparts. "North African immigrants were not victims of the vicious and lethal racism that

targeted French Jews," explained Davidson (2012), "But it was nevertheless during the Vichy years that the tendency to characterize Islam as inherently physical, a central element of *Islam francais,* was given full rein" (p. 87). This connection to the physical was often a justification for subjugation, and it was one that has been extended to marginalized groups throughout history. It referred to a sense of disturbing carnality, that one only followed the psychological id and desire. This perspective dismissed the cultural and religious significance of daily prayer and other physical embodiments of worship, which were in opposition to carnality. However, disciplined devotion was structured and served to break through the cacophony of modern life (Davidson, 2012; Cogeanu, 2015). These physicalities allowed followers to feel connected with their religious center. If only the dominant view of *Islam francais* was considered, however, Muslims continue to be othered and distanced by the dominant group (Cogeanu, 2015, p. 19).

Creating physical markers for spaces and places of Muslim practice may be considered a mode of self-preservation. Shunted as a carnal or sensual "other," places of worship might afford Muslims a space to create a separate personal and theological identity. "By the *space* of Islam, I mean the aesthetic and architectural frames for particular embodied practices," wrote Davidson (2012), "The *place* of Islam, on the other hand, refers to the geographical location of these Muslim spaces: in the center of the city or on its outskirts, in a 'Muslim' neighborhood or in a 'French' one, in the capital or in a provincial city" (p. 86). The preservation of traditional Muslim spaces and places was critical in France, because it spoke to specific human experiences and traditions of a large community. The dominant group persistently reasserted the notion of assimilation to promote the master narrative. However, this only resulted in further societal fragmentation.

Muslim diaspora was and continues to be a worldwide phenomenon. A divorce from original or native practices was not typically necessary in order to operate within the new culture.[26]

> "'Hybridity' and 'syncretism' allow negotiation of the multiplicity of identities and subject positions that result from displacement, immigration, and exile, without policing the borders of identity along essentialist and originary lines" (Shohat, 2006, p. 244).

French Muslims often inhabited this hybrid space, especially those who migrated to France from other countries. As their religious practices became regulated by the French government, this sense of hybridity was challenged:

> "In October 2005, the French-Muslim population erupted into riots throughout the streets of France. The riots were in response to the death of two Muslim youths who were accidentally killed while hiding from police. The riots were also a response to the French government's passage of a ban on the wearing of religious symbols in public schools, which was regarded by the Muslim population as an attack on Islam and religious freedom of expression" (Croucher, et al., 2010, p. 315).

Often regarded as the headscarf debates, the conversation about bodily adornments demonstrated the French master narrative reasserting itself. "In the French context, debates over the headscarf largely reaffirmed existing understandings of the French national narrative," wrote Korteweg & Yurdakul (2014), "They build on historically rooted understandings of French nationhood to either include or exclude Muslims from being French" (p. 18). This separation demarcates the

[26] Clifford (1997) and Appadurai (1996) agree. Globalization "is not the story of cultural homogenization. . . . But anthropology brings with it a professional tendency to privilege the cultural as the key diacritic in many practices (that to others might appear simply human, or stupid, or calculating, or patriotic, or something else)" (Appadurai, 1996, p. 11).

division between citizenry and religious expression; one cannot truly be both. To become part of French society, Muslims were forced to symbolically deny some part of their religious identity.

Ridicule and Defamation

French law created an environment where satirical publications like *Charlie Hebdo* were given the latitude to publish highly offensive content. The sense of belonging a person had in France was limited within the boundaries enforced by the judiciary, and conservative influences in the country's leadership maintained this sense of division (Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2014, p. 25). These boundaries further deepened the religious divide, while free speech laws allowed publications like *Charlie Hebdo* to ridicule Muslims and other groups without institutional persecution. "The French judges have on several occasions afforded a right to ridicule a religion in order to criticize its institutions and consider that the ridiculing of a religion forms part of a free debate of opinions" (Janssen, 2015, p. 249). While impinging on the rights of Muslims to express their religious faith, the law enforced the rights of others to ridicule the faith, particularly those who were not part of marginalized groups that suffer the greatest consequences. The legal code had limitations in this regard, but the consequences of the "qualification pursuant to the offence" remained (Janssen, 2015, p. 249).

Despite being considered one of the most difficult set of laws to apply by the European Court of Human Rights, according to Janssen (2015), the French judicial system had varied outcomes when it came to cases against the satirical publication, *Charlie Hebdo*. The contributors to *Charlie Hebdo* insulted groups across the political, religious, and cultural spectrum. Among 48 of these high-profile cases, nine ruled against *Charlie Hebdo*. Although the same legal precedent was applied in these cases, the outcomes tended to be different when individuals and smaller groups went against larger conglomerates. For example, when

community organizations sued *Charlie Hebdo*, the courts rarely found the publication at fault. *Charlie Hebdo* won three out of every four cases in which it was involved, "thanks in particular to French legislation very protective vis-à-vis the freedoms of the press" ("'Charlie Hebdo,' 22 years of all kinds of trials," 2015). Insults were predominately the reason for *Charlie Hebdo* losses. In one such case, *Charlie Hebdo* described Marie-Caroline Le Pen[27] in 1995 as "deputy of 'Buchenwald dog'" ("'Charlie Hebdo,' 22 years of all kinds of trials," 2015).

However, in the court of international public opinion, *Charlie Hebdo's* language and imagery led to intense backlash, particularly as they pertained to Muslims. The prophet Muhammad was depicted in several compromising and problematic positions, which resulted in criticism of *Charlie Hebdo's* statements outright. To mitigate this problem, French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe announced a new plan in March 2018 to address racist or hateful speech online, where many *Charlie Hebdo* readers consume their content. Gobry (2018) wrote of the distasteful speech targeted by the new legislation:

> "It might be flat-out wrong and despicable, as I believe it to be, but a nation of adults should be confident enough in its capacity to defeat terrible opinions in an open marketplace of ideas rather than through heavy-handed and counterproductive means" (Gobry, 2018).

The proposal further extended the reaches of French law into the transnational space of the internet.[28] As a result, *Charlie Hebdo*, and other publications like it, experienced more litigation from insulted groups. Despite the backlash, insulting content continued to be produced, and its

[27] Marie-Caroline Le Pen is the sister of 2017 French presidential candidate Marine Le Penn, a conservative who lost to Emmanuel Macron.

[28] It extends into the algorithmic code used by popular search engines: "Google was once fined under the law because its algorithms suggested the word 'crook' next to a businessman's name in search topics. This was deemed an insult" (Gobry, 2018).

impact reached well beyond the legal system. In the terrorist attack on the *Charlie Hebdo* offices, a radicalized few targeted those they believed were responsible for the insulting content.

Charlie Hebdo and the Beginning of #Jesuis

On a Wednesday morning, the *Charlie Hebdo* editorial board gathered for a meeting in an unmarked building in Paris. Nearby, two men approached an office and asked, "Is this *Charlie Hebdo*?" The occupants explained that they were at the wrong address. One of the gunmen then fired a shot, which shattered the glass of the front door. Shortly thereafter, the men approached the correct building. They found *Charlie Hebdo* contributor Corinne Rey outside, and they forced her to enter her access code at gunpoint. "It lasted about five minutes," recounted Rey, whose penname is Coco. In those fleeting moments on January 7, 2015, several of Rey's coworkers were mortally wounded after being hit by gunfire from Saïd and Chérif Kouachi, who proclaimed their allegiance to Al-Qaeda (Alderman & Bilefsky, 2015). Amid the chaos, the Kouachis asked, "Where is Charb? Where is Charb?" Stéphane Charbonnier, or Charb as he is professionally known, authored and contributed to many features in the *Charlie Hebdo* publication that ridiculed the prophet Mohammed. One of the Kouachis spotted Charb in his office and shot him point blank (Alderman & Bilefsky, 2015).

The attack on the *Charlie Hebdo* office that day was covered by major news outlets and the latest updates spread across social media. Many online responses focused on information gathering, a collective attempt to understand such a tragedy. Across social media, similar inquiries were posed: Are there going to be more attacks? Is Paris safe? Have the perpetrators been taken into custody?

Figure 3.1: H A K I M inquires for more information.[29]

"It's a shooting or what?" asked user H A K I M, "I do not understand what is going on!" With each new question came a volley of tweets from users speaking in circles and asking if someone, anyone, knew anything.

The circuitous dialogue began repeating one hashtag: #JesuisCharlie, meaning, "I am Charlie." Very quickly, communicators aligned themselves with the victims of the attack. It is unclear how many, if any, of this first wave of participants understood the context of the attack. However, the ubiquity of #JesuisCharlie grew very swiftly from the viral spread of popular terms. These terms reached beyond followers and friends, and they were soon recognized by those not actively contributing sentimental content.

On the internet, a user may have the illusion of privacy based on settings enabled on the user's accounts. However, these settings could not fully block a user's communication with the world outside of their "friendship" circle (Acquisti & Gross, 2006). Twitter was unique in that a user's messages have the potential to reach an audience of an unknowable size to the user, particularly when one uses hashtags. As discussed in chapter two, rarely has this potential been realized.

Hashtags collected data into a sentimental repository as metadata, so users may have accessed these flagged messages as a group (Alam, Ryu, & Lee, 2017). These users almost

[29] The time and dates for all tweets in this dissertation project are in Pacific Daylight Time.

never met others who used #Iam markers. However, by choosing to be called Charlie (or not), they were connected on the level of ideas, those that may be expressed in 140 characters on Twitter. This connection created a sphere of rhetorical identification, a discursive world in which participants who may have had no relationship otherwise were suddenly an ideological body, tied together by a single expressed symbol. The fact that the symbol may potentially have had wholly different meaning for each participant did not change the fact that they had symbolically identified with each other around a single (extremely simplistic) ideological frame.

The Spread of Information and Opinions

As messages similar to H A K I M's tweet began to spread, users responded with information about the safety of friends and family in the vicinity of the incident. Some reported what they could see from windows in their home or office. Reports of sirens and images of people in the streets were also circulated. Many tweets simply expressed speechlessness and tweeted only the marker #JeSuisCharlie. But, as mentioned before, the primary vehicle for online content was the proclamation of one's relationship with or as Charlie, a personification of the satire magazine. Although personally expressed feelings about the hashtag were mixed, using the hashtag presented a greater possibility for a tweet to be seen within the sentimental echo chamber. The circulation of #JeSuisCharlie in this fashion led to Twitter classifying the terms as trending.

The tweets demonstrated an interplay indicative of virtual spaces with its various pockets of anonymity. The internet was particularly concerned with information (e.g., zeroes and ones). "Information spreads and diffuses; there is no law of the conservation of information" (Donath, 1998, p. 29-30). While users appeared to support larger causes on the internet, Donath (1998) argued there were always traces, or signatures, that mark each person (p. 30-33). These small

but detectable marks represented the people behind the computer, those who moved awkwardly in the virtual shell they created (Nakamura, 2006). While users may have created different selves in social media, traces of the person remain in their linguistic consistencies, patterned messages, abbreviations, and even misspellings and grammatical errors.

The unique positionality of each user and their contributed tweets created a wide variety of content for inclusion in the corpus. As we will see, significant disparities exist between the number of tweets that were spreadable and those sentimental echoes that remained communicatively stagnant. Although many users claimed Charlie as their own, they did so in a variety of interesting and sometimes contrary ways. These sentiments influenced the #JesuisCharlie echo chamber in ways that were both nuanced and decisive. Therefore, tweets that gained traction through recirculation or retweets of #JeSuisCharlie and its counterparts were outliers representing amplified ideological echo chambers or had high eWOM. The remaining tweets were neither social nor did they experience any eWOM amplification.

To explore the communication dynamic of tweets following the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting, all tweets using #JesuisCharlie and its variants were collected between January 7 – December 31, 2015. These tweets provided insight into the impact of the conversation on a collective psyche. This impact was varied and uneven. Of the many tweets posted during this timeframe, an interesting semantic distinction is that #JesuisCharlie and related hashtags speak in first-person rather than third. The individual tweets were a means through which the Twitter community collectively asked the same question: What happened?

Sentimental contributions to the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting were varied, but their thematic similarities were notable. In many cases, exclaiming oneself as Charlie was used to share a pro-Charlie Hebdo message.

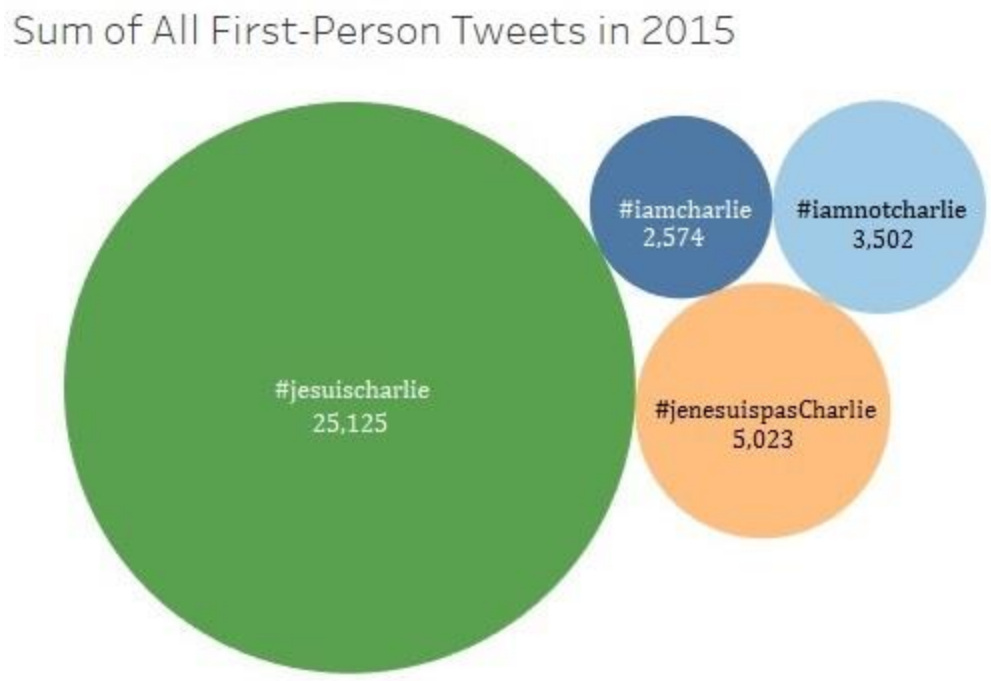

Figure 3.2: The #Jesuis echo chambers had a relatively small amount of originally authored tweets.

These messages often advocated for freedom of speech. Across all the accessible 2015 tweets on *Charlie Hebdo*, #JesuisCharlie was the most popular marker used. In fact, original messages using this hashtag total at 25,125, not counting the many retweets and repeated content posted by other users. The English counterpart, #IamCharlie, was disseminated in 369 original iterations; hence, the French hashtag outnumbered this marker by 68 times.

Some Twitter users expressed opposition to the content published by *Charlie Hebdo*. Their expressed opinions were content based, rather than focused on freedom of speech as `with the pro-Charlie tweets. The predominate method used for advancing this position on Twitter was through the inverse of #JesuisCharlie, or #JenesuispasCharlie and #IamnotCharlie. As before, the French hashtag outnumbered the English corresponding marker in overall 2015 use. But this time, the difference was 1.4 times. #JenesuispasCharlie original posts totaled 5,023. Whereas, #IamnotCharlie was used in 3,502 original tweets. Although these groupings were based on

users' linguistic choices, specifically their decision to include the hashtag(s) mentioned above, the additions and/or amendments they made to the message indicate how viewers might have perceived their position and that of others on the same side. As news of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack began to spread, a curious phenomenon occurred. Pro-Charlie messages were not advanced quite as much as those of the opposition. Virtual street corner activists started to gain a following, and certain hashtags gained prominence over others.

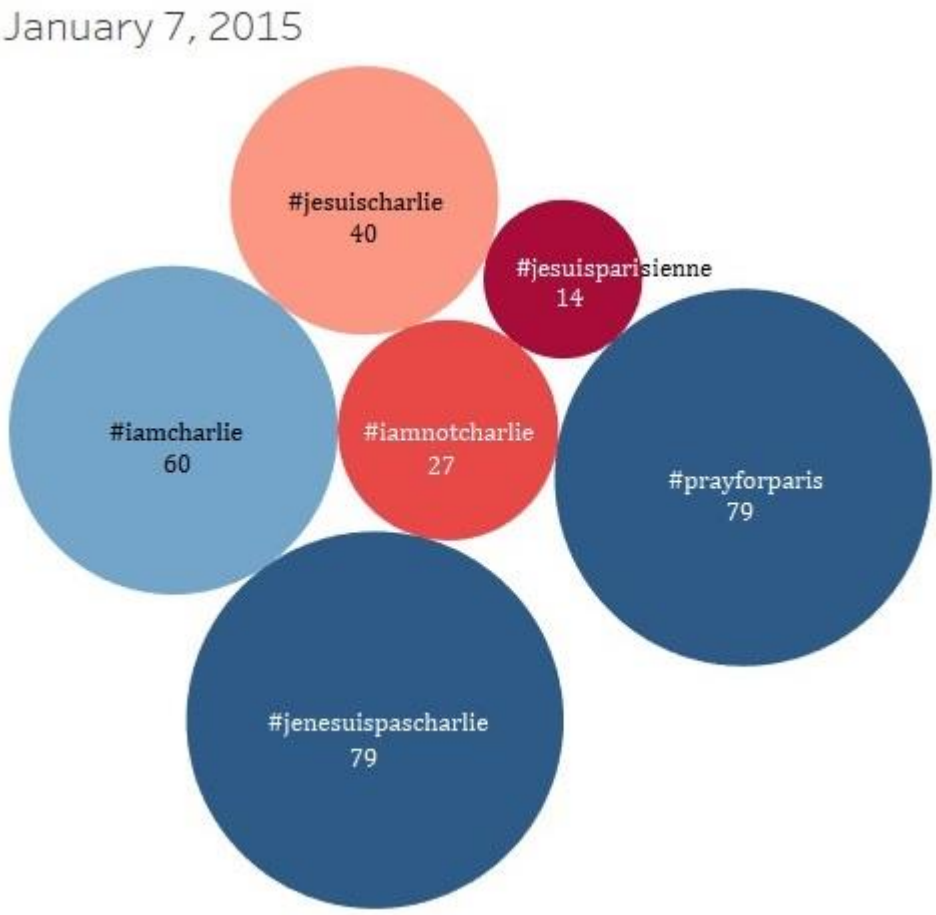

Figure 3.3: Original tweets on the day of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack.

The anti-Charlie messages, or #JenesuispasCharlie, totaled 79 posts on January 7; while those marked by #JesuisCharlie totaled 60 posts in the hours following the attack. In fact, #JenesuispasCharlie was used 1.3 times that of #JesuisCharlie, and #JenesuispasCharlie was also

attached to an equal number of messages as the #PrayforParis marker. The low number of original #JesuisCharlie posts on January 7 was surprising, because the broader interpretation of online content was particularly pro-Charlie (Alderman & Bilefsky, 2015; *#JeSuisCharlie: Signs of solidarity after Paris terror attack*, 2015). The inverse relationship between #JesuisCharlie and #JenesuispasCharlie could be seen both in terms of content—on the surface, they clearly disagreed with one another—and in summary data. This would indicate the rise of two distinct ideological siloes, one that broadly expressed support for *Charlie Hebdo* and one that broadly expressed opposition. The #JenesuispasCharlie rose quickly and, in many respects, overtook #JesuisCharlie. One would be tempted to see this as indicating the conversation surrounding *Charlie Hebdo* might have become more nuanced in social media. However, the content of the discrete ideological siloes continued to largely echo agreed upon sentiment and, even as #JenesuispasCharlie rose, #JesuisCharlie posts increased in the days, weeks, and months after the *Charlie Hebdo* attack.

As mentioned earlier, #JesuisCharlie significantly outnumbered the other #Jesuis variants in *overall* 2015 usage, including #JenesuispasCharlie. With the scope widened, the only time in which #JenesuispasCharlie outnumbered #JesuisCharlie was in the earliest moments of the case study. From that point on, #JesuisCharlie continued to outpace #JenesuispasCharlie, with the latter never again reaching the peak it established in early January 2015. Hence, the ideological alternative represented by #JenesuispasCharlie, while it had short term impact in challenging the dominant #JesuisCharlie ideology, failed to displace it or even create a longstanding ideological balance in social media discourse.

Retweets and Challenges to Spreadability

The aforementioned data represented only the original posts that users created, and it did not consider the frequency of retweets or a tweet's potential for spreadability.

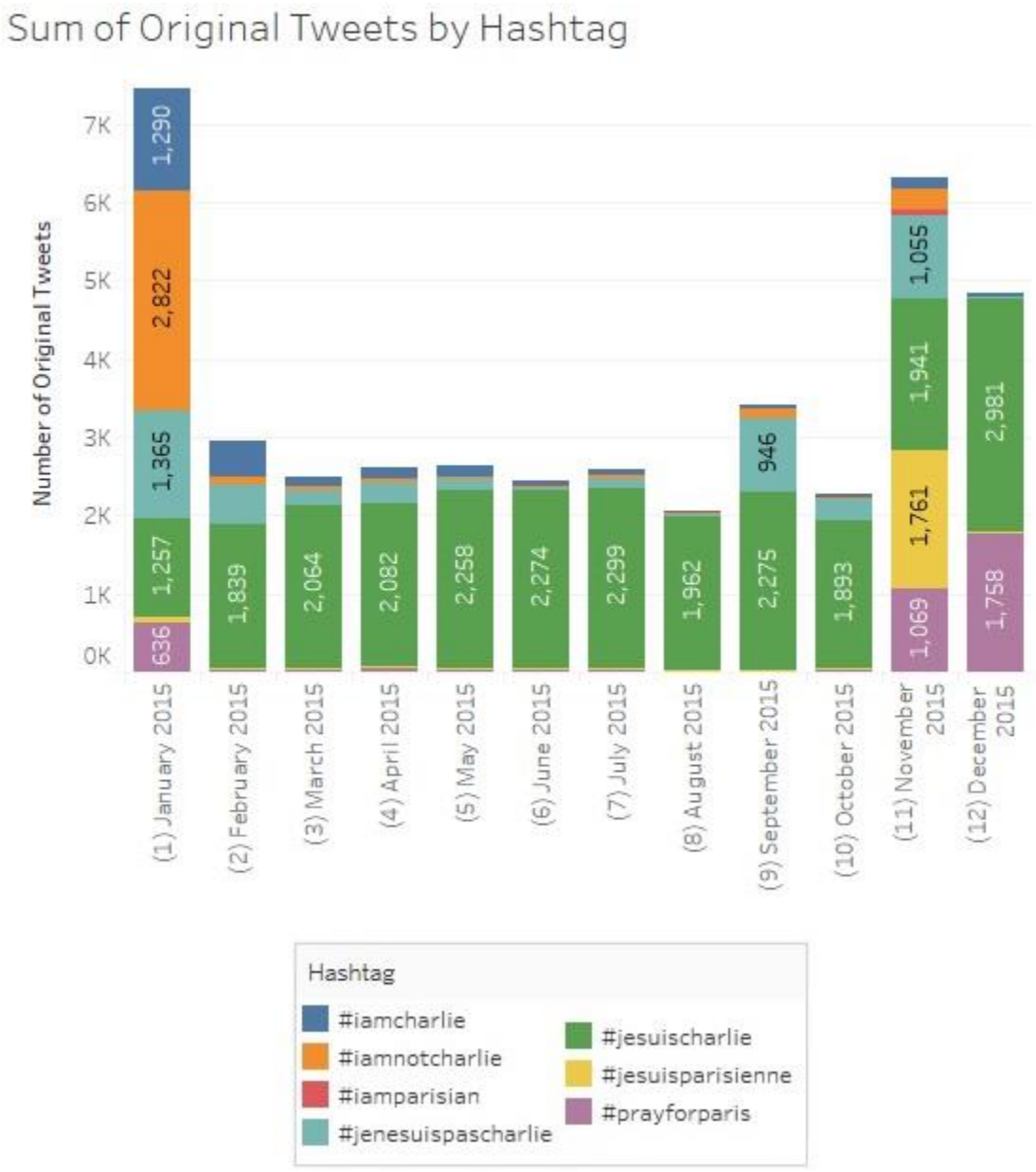

Figure 3.4: Original tweet totals per hashtag between January – December 2015.

A tweet generated greater staying power in a virtual communicative landscape when it was visible to as wide an audience as possible, which required both stickiness and spreadability

(Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013). The more exposure a message received, the higher the chances that it would be considered by its target audience. However, *considered* is the key word here, because a message that inundates its audience can be a resounding failure. So, the question to answer, here, focuses on the potential impact of the tweets through, in particular, spreadability. Like a virus with no host, did the tweets appear then die? Or did they demonstrate social media impact by resurfacing and spreading through contact and repetition?

Twitter's metadata made pro-Charlie and anti-Charlie content distribution seamless, and the propensity for messages to gain trending or viral status grew as the retweeting process continued. The data represented before only suggested the point A in a journey toward online impact and retweeting was one of the significant points in between.

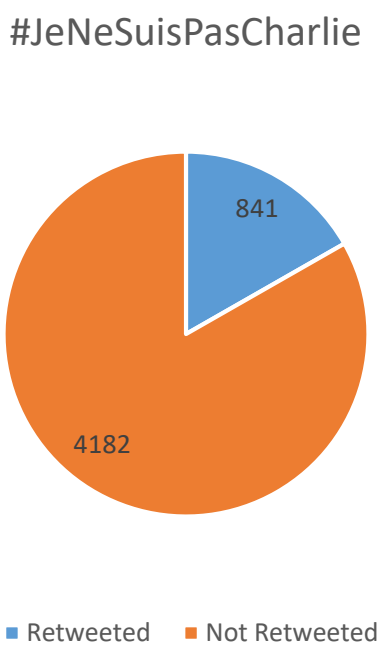

Figure 3.5: #JeNeSuisPasCharlie Retweets

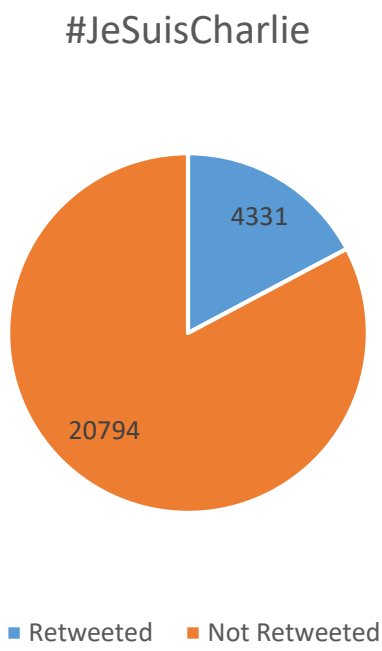

Figure 3.6: #JeSuisCharlie Retweets

Of the 5,023 original posts using the #JenesuispasCharlie marker, 4,182 messages were not retweeted, meaning they experienced zero net gain in spreadability. The number of people who viewed the tweets in this group is unknowable, but their messages had the least reach due to

the lack of forwarding response by the Twitter community. However, 841 of the remaining original #JenesuispasCharlie posts were retweeted, some more often than others. For instance, 582 of the 841 were retweeted only once; whereas, 2 of the 841 were retweeted 67 times. In total, #JenesuispasCharlie was retweeted 1,842 times. On the other hand, 20,794 original tweets marked with #JesuisCharlie were not retweeted, which means 4,331 of the original 25,125 original #JesuisCharlie tweets were recirculated. When considering every original #JesuisCharlie post in 2015, they were retweeted a total of 7,945 times.

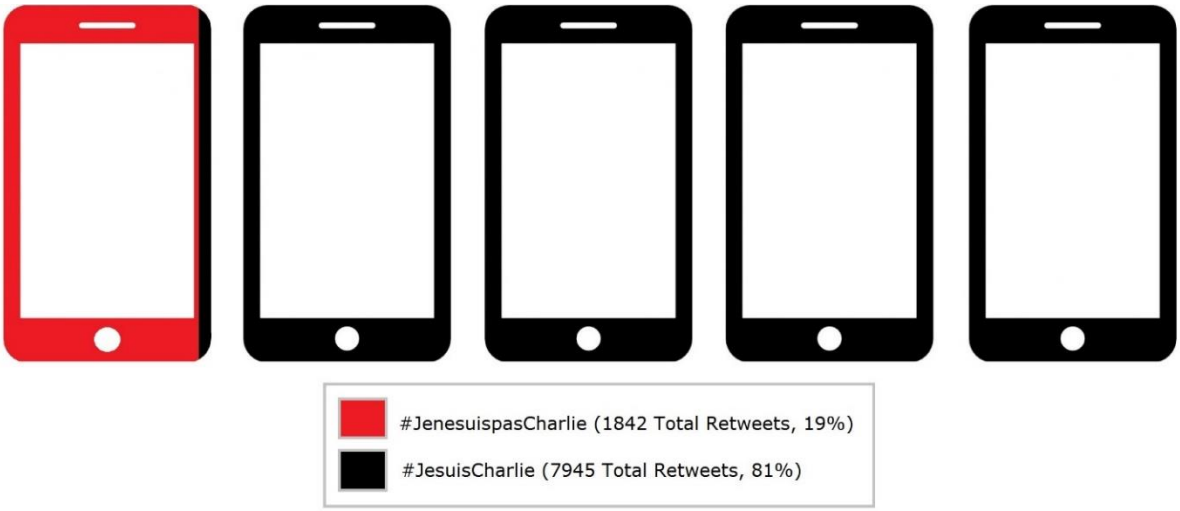

Figure 3.7: #JeNeSuisPasCharlie was included in 19% of the total retweets, and #JeSuisCharlie was included in 81% of them.

Although the pie charts look nearly identical in figures 3.5 and 3.6, the proportions vary in scope, which meant the blue slice of the #JesuisCharlie pie had the possibility of greater visibility and reaching trending status. #JenesuispasCharlie was retweeted a total of 1,842 times. Therefore, #JesuisCharlie's spreadability potential was over four times that of #JenesuispasCharlie. Further, retweeting data suggest only two of the #JenesuispasCharlie posts were retweeted more than once. These two posts proved extraordinarily resilient, with a total of 67 retweets between them. However, all other retweets only occurred once. So, beyond these two posts, the spreadability of the #JenesuispasCharlie was very limited. As figure 3.7 indicates, the spread of

#JesuisCharlie dwarfed that of #JenesuispasCharlie by a margin of four to one. Hence, the original #JesuisCharlie, maintained the dominant voice throughout the social media battle.

Now that the retweet power of both #JesuisCharlie and #JenesuispasCharlie have been examined, the chart in figure 3.8 (on the following page) represents the average distribution of those figures in 2015. #JesuisCharlie messages exponentially increased in retweeting power as the year progressed. By December 2015, #JenesuispasCharlie flatlined, while #JesuisCharlie reached a peak of over 500 retweets on average. This number may be deceiving in isolation, because many original tweets were not retweeted and others were only retweeted once. However, they do demonstrate the evolving impact of #JesuisCharlie on the ideological discussion and the rise and fall of #JenesuispasCharlie within the same context. This data indicates that the two ideological frames never gained a symbolic balance in the collective response of social media audiences. #JenesuispasCharlie challenged #JesuisCharlie briefly but was never able to gain sufficient social media traction to displace or even seriously challenge #JesuisCharlie in social media content. At its peak during September of 2015, #JenesuispasCharlie still only accounted for a fraction of the retweeting #JesuisCharlie sustained.

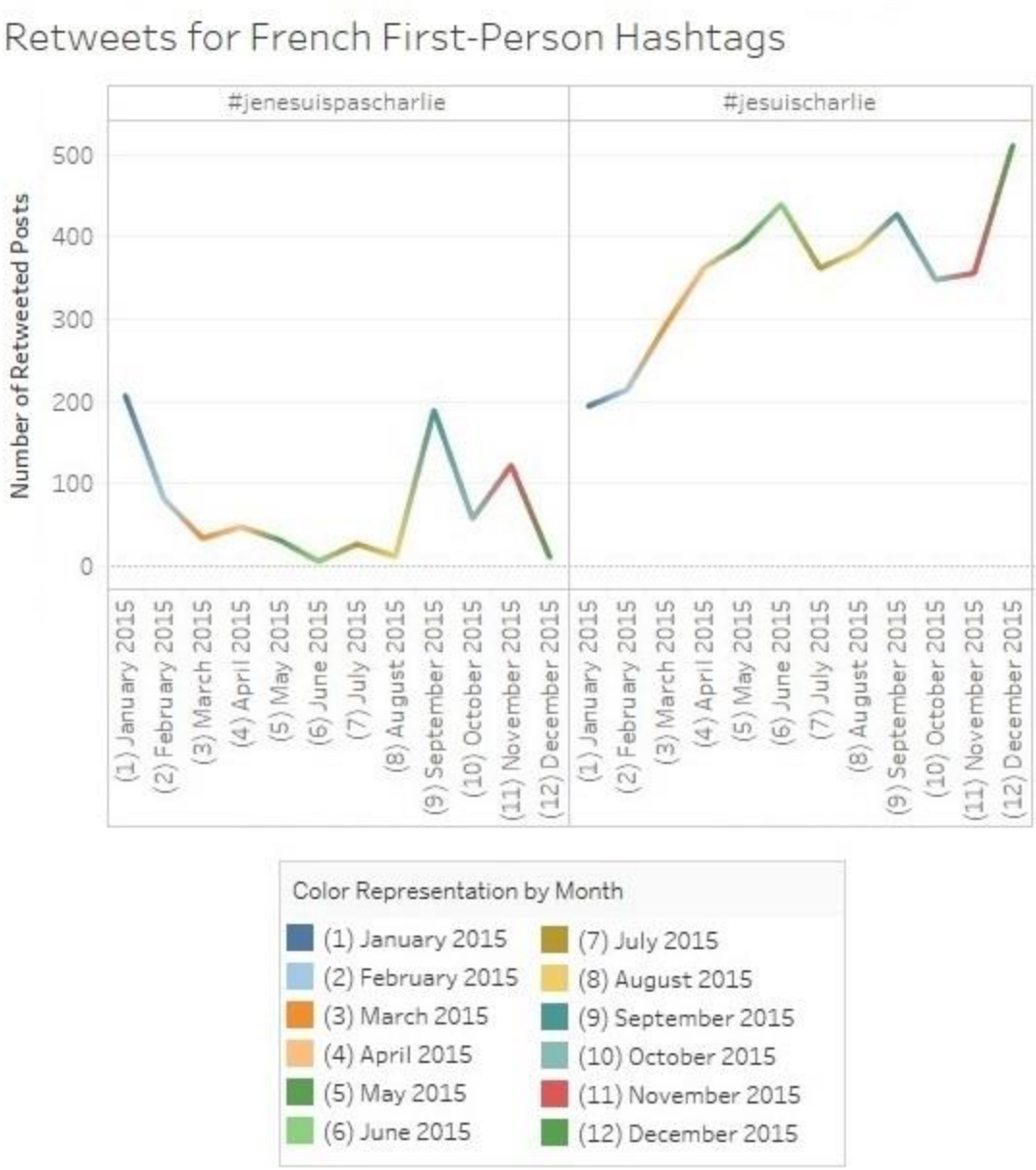

Figure 3.8: Retweets of #JeNeSuisPasCharlie and #JeSuisCharlie by month.

Meanwhile, only a select few tweets exceeded 100 retweets. To put the average retweet visualization into perspective, we should note one of the outliers that shift the averages accordingly:

Figure 3.9: Coelho speaking to his preexisting audience of fans.

Some users had more social capital than others when it came to circulating their message, and the frequency with which their tweets were retweeted and liked increased considerably with the presence of a preexisting audience. Paulo Coelho is an award-winning author, perhaps best known for his work, *The Alchemist*. His Twitter following was rather large given his popularity as a writer and, like many famous and celebrity Twitter users, Coelho's posts were read more frequently than most. When Coelho commented on #JesuisCharlie, as he did in the tweet (figure 3.9), the number of retweets dramatically skew retweeting averages. Aside from his fame, Coelho's message also broadened circulation by drawing a connection between *Charlie Hebdo* and another attack that unfolded not long after. #IAmMuath recognized the sacrifice of Jordanian Air Force pilot Muath Safi Yousef al-Kasasbeh. In February 2015, al-Kasasbeh was captured, held hostage, and then burned alive by ISIS ("French Police Question 8-year-old Boy," 2015). Coelho's tweet asked about selective grief and solidarity. Though, ironically, it may well have been retweeted by many who continued to seek identification and solidarity with *Charlie Hebdo* and Coelho as a writer and who may well have little knowledge of or interest in the

Muath case. While celebrity may significantly strengthen the spreadability of tweets and hashtags, it does not promise a stronger grasp of issues or ideological engagement among followers. Coelho's own case demonstrates the potency of celebrity to drive social media spreadability without any necessary impact on the acceptance or spreadability of other tweets expressing similar sentiment.

For every Coelho tweet, hundreds more by other users gained little to no retweet capital. However, #JesuisCharlie had the greatest circulation power and future potential of all *Charlie Hebdo* related hashtags. The reasons for #JesuisCharlie's circulation power may be debated. However, the data show how Twitter reproduced existing communication hierarchies. The celebrity only became more famous—that is, demonstrated its own celebrity, its own well known-ness for being well-known, not for content (Boorstin, 1987, p. 47). High responses on Twitter required existing notoriety. The likelihood of one becoming internet famous without a preexisting persona was very low (Stein, 2013). And, as noted, the retweeting of a celebrity's post may well show assent to the celebrity's celebrity rather than to the ideological point (Boorstin, 1987). The quality of content is simply not enough to guarantee spreadability (or to outweigh the spreadability of celebrity).

Even the most retweeted messages had little relevant shelf life. As Coelho pointed out in his tweet, #JesuisCharlie did not encompass the cause for which it purported to advocate if it did not bring its circulation power or strong spreadability potential to related causes. As we will see later, the #Jesuis collection of hashtags continued to grow as more terror attacks occurred, and Coelho's question is one that we will continue to pursue in this work. Specifically, the continued reuse of #Jesuis may lead the hashtags to lose all contextual meaning and simply stand in as an ideological totem to reflect a flat rejection of terrorism or the ideologies that sustain it.

Representation Matters: Selections from the Charlie Dataset

As noted, those who opposed the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoonists identified their opposition using #JenesuispasCharlie, or "I am *not* Charlie." The English translation of these hashtags were part of this analysis. After searching for parallel statements in Mandarin, Spanish, German, and other widely spoken languages, it became clear that most users used French and English hashtag designations. This was the case even if they switched back to their native language after using the French and/or English marker. The example in figure 3.10 showed this shift from one language to the next. "All are Charlie," user Latina-Online (@LatinaOnlineHoy) tweeted in French, and then in Spanish, "Extremists will never silence independent voices." Using French or English markers while using one's native tongue for content would indicate that these respondents see the ideological battle as one between French and English-speaking populations and terrorists. This ideological simplification may allow respondents to affirm their own ideological beliefs and expressions (being "independent voices") while distancing themselves from the conflict being engaged. They get to express their "rights" and "independence" without directly engaging any of the complexities of the ideological battle.

Figure 3.10: Latina-Online's statement about extremism.

Tweets opposing Charlie used two primary means through which users qualified their assertions. First, some users advocated for a complete rejection of *Charlie Hebdo*'s published content and its Islamophobic messages. A user named saint tweeted this anti-Charlie message:

Figure 3.11: saint's perspective on racism and disrespect.

This tweet equated Charlie and *Charlie Hebdo* with xenophobia, and the user, saint, personified this ideology as a "white racist man." Saint also disassociated from the pro-Charlie following by assuming that supporters were guilty of racism. Similarly, Redpop The Dreamer tweeted:

Figure 3.12: Redpop The Dreamer's analogy between the Kouachi brothers and *Charlie Hebdo* contributors.

In the chronology of tweets, equating the Kouachi brothers with *Charlie Hebdo* contributors had not been introduced until Redpop The Dreamer tweeted the message in figure 3.12. The tweet presented a less nuanced gaze into the meaning behind what each group represented. Moreover, these tweets, like the native language tweets, allow the communicators to essentially damn both sides of the ideological frame and place themselves above all those involved in the conflict—distanced "objective" observers with the right to judge and condemn all those who actually engage in public discourse.

The posts by saint and Redpop The Dreamer were two of the earliest to express a position against *Charlie Hebdo*. Later tweets with similar messages had higher measures of both retweets and likes. However, the tweets of neither saint nor Redpop The Dreamer became viral. Those that did become viral, like Coelho's tweet, drew on a preexisting following. Coelho's message was retweeted 577 times and liked 4,775 times. In November 2018, Coelho had 15.3K followers. As of March 2020, Coelho had 15.4K followers. Latina-Online's message had two likes and two retweets, and the Twitter handle had 383 followers as of November 2018. In March 2020, Latina-Online's followers decreased to 368. Redpop The Dreamer, now known as RDA, had 193 followers in November 2018. Like Latina-Online, RDA's followers also decreased to 184 in March 2020. At the time of this writing, saint deactivated their Twitter

account. Put simply, the viral success of these respective tweets was strongly correlated with preexisting followership.

Twitter users used many approaches to move out of obscurity. Some attempted to offer more inclusive messages in the early moments after the *Charlie Hebdo* attack. A user identified simply as Vanessa tweeted:

Figure 3.13: Vanessa's commentary on potential victims of violence.

Figure 3.14: le F's affiliation with #JenesuispasCharlie

The “but” in Vanessa’s sentence asserts that two sides were considered in the user’s interpretation of #JenesuispasCharlie. Two comments in response to Vanessa echoed the sentiment expressed in the tweet. Roughly translated, le F wrote, “Despite this barbaric act, #JeNeSuisPasCharlie.” As evident in figure 3.14, the tweet was also accompanied by a linked image that showed potentially offensive images of the Prophet Mohammed. These *Charlie Hebdo* drawings indicated the purpose behind the Kouachis’ retaliation.

On the other hand, “The danger is immediate,” wrote Twitter user Devenir meilleur(e) (@027_SCB_IC). The fear was punctuated by a depiction of a Muslim man climbing out of a large chasm in the middle of Western Europe.

Figure 3.15: Devenir meilleur(e)’s connection between Islam and violence.

The man in the above image was scowling as he climbed out of the dark hole in the center, and on his back was a weapon that appeared to be an AR-17. He looked resentful and somewhat disgusted, much like Devenir meilleur(e) appeared to be when writing this tweet on January 30, 2015.

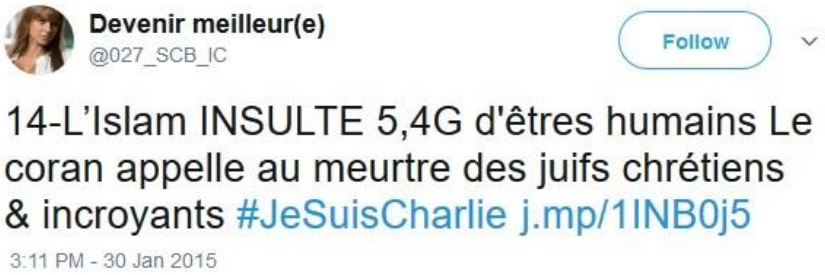

Figure 3.16: Devenir meilleur(e) connecting the teachings of the Quran and death.

The tweets continued with anti-Islam rhetoric. Devenir meilleur(e) asserted in the above tweet (figure 3.16) that the Quran calls for the deaths of nonbelievers, including Jews and Christians. Devenir meilleur(e) used the trending hashtags of the moment to expand the tweet's reach. This is a distinct example of the hashjacking phenomenon. Like Mikelodeon's content from figure 1.1, Devenir meilleur(e) used twitter to expand the reach of a series of attacks on all Muslims. Despite this, there was no measurable response from the Twitterverse. This chain of messages had no likes, comments, or retweets. Devenir meilleur(e) expressed fear of Muslims in these tweets, and the lack of support via likes, retweets, comments, etc. demonstrated their lack of impact. Despite the use of trending hashtags, Devenir meilleur(e) tweeted into a self-directed message silo.

The structure of Twitter makes this possible under the guise of "free expression" ("Twitter Values," 2018). However, Twitter's environment presents more opportunities for trolling (creating posts simply to upset or offend other users) and other perhaps even more problematic forms of eWOM:

> "[T]he question of definitions is far from merely semantic; what people call things often dictates what people are willing (or feel compelled) to do about them. Post enough stories condemning a poorly defined behavioral category that manages to subsume every

> asshole on the Internet, and eventually you'll start seeing legislation with the same kinds of equivocations" (Phillips, 2015, p. 154).

The patterns of word usage in the #Jesuis corpus provide a wider scope of the performative poses within this ideological space. Moving beyond hashtags into word counting suggests the kind of impact eWOM abusers and trolls have.

Word(s) Up: Frequency in Usage

The frequency with which words were used in the #Jesuis dialogue revealed a lot about what issues were relevant to those participating. The fragmented nature of Twitter resulted in people not always aware of what was being said or what had been said, or perhaps this information was not sought out. However, one reliable constant was that an uptick in word usage indicated a general interest on Twitter, or an area of thematic relevance. Like Devenir meilleur(e), many users included religious terms as part of their message or critique on Twitter. Each user referred to the terms in a slightly different manner. However, one thing the messages all advanced was a connection between religion and the *Charlie Hebdo* attack.

Not surprisingly, Islam was used the most of all religious terms in the corpus; in fact, it was used 737 times. Meanwhile, the French word for Jewish, or *Juifs*, was used 253 times, and *Chrétiens*, or Christians, was used 252 times.

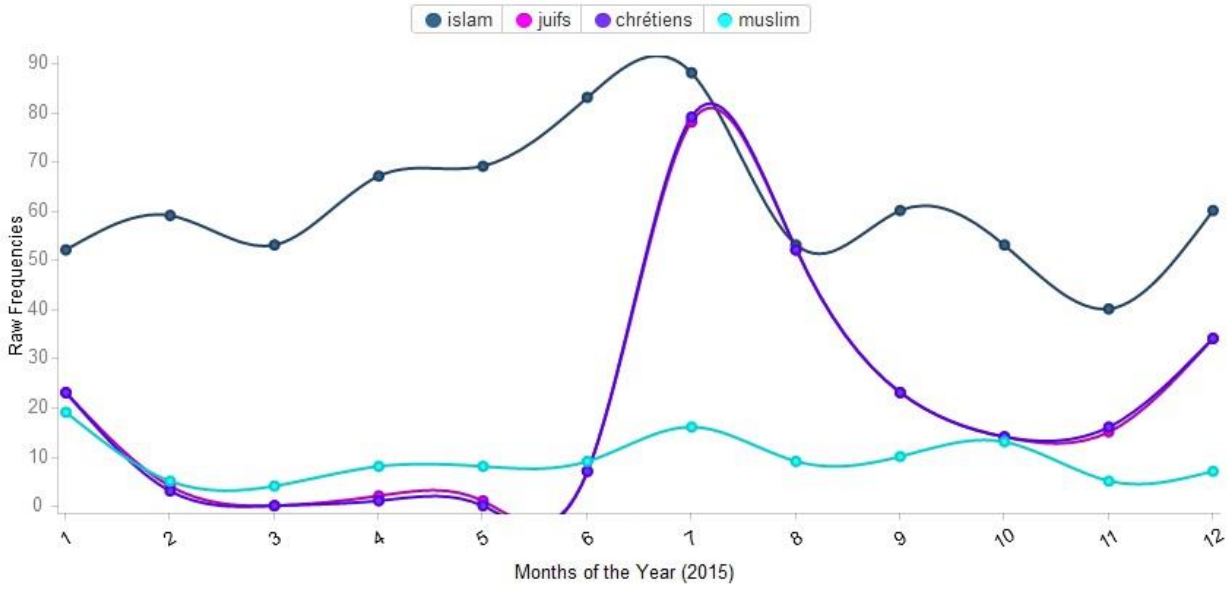

Figure 3.17: The frequency of the terms Islam, *Juifs*, *Chrétiens*, and Muslim.

Interestingly, Muslim was not used nearly as much as the prior three; Muslim was used only 113 times in the corpus. This might well be related to the context. In common use, political leaders speak of "Islamic terrorists," almost never of "Muslim terrorists." Given the ideological context of these tweets, the almost exclusive use of "Islam" might indicate an already existent prejudice regarding the nature of the attacks and their meaning. The spike in usage for *Juifs* and *Chrétiens* occurred in the summer months for the Northern Hemisphere, and prior to that period, these terms nearly disappeared from the chart. Islam remained consistently at the top of religious term usage, and it also peaked during this same period.

Based on the visualization above and a review of the corpus content, it would seem a greater sense of reflection occurred in the months of June, July, and August. Rather than focusing on a new terror attack, many of the posts used #JesuisCharlie and its variants to understand what the *Charlie Hebdo* attack symbolized within a greater conversation about Islam. As illustrated by figure 3.18, such a connection was made in the 201 tweets that use Islamophobia as a driving term for the conversation, and other variants. The French term for

Islamophobia, or *Islamophobie*, was only used 18 times. For the first time in this analysis, there is a greater emphasis on the English version of a term over its French counterpart.

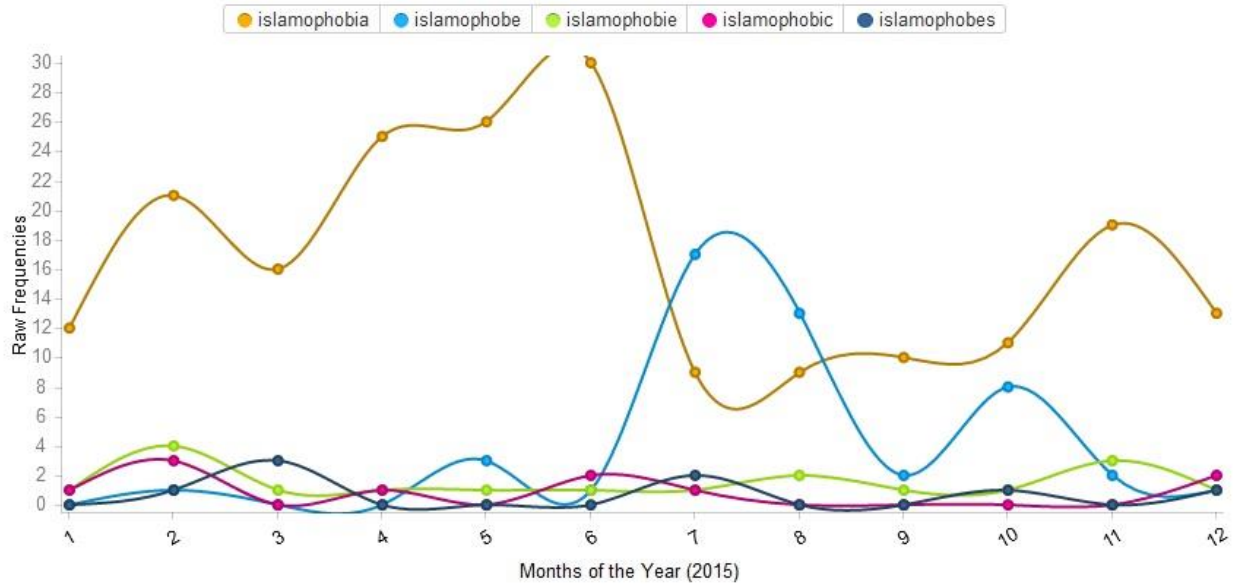

Figure 3.18: The frequency of the terms islamophobia, islamophobe, islamophobia, islamophobic, islamophobes.

Figure 3.19: Overall frequency of terms in the corpus.

The results depicted in figure 3.18 suggest that an English-speaking population of users, or those who choose to speak this language regarding Islamophobia, contributed more often to

the conversation as the year 2015 progressed. Again, this might well indicate an implicit assumption that the ideological battle was between English-speaking Islamophobes (likely assumed to be from the United States) and terrorists. The Cirrus Cloud visualization in figure 3.19 also demonstrated the high frequency with which English terms were paired with #Jesuis hashtags. It suggests only a fragment of the communicative noise through which users navigated. *France* and *status* stand out among the rest, but the terms that surround them show just how digression can lead to related performative poses. The cacophony of contributions made sense-making a challenging process, especially for the casual Twitter user. The degree to which a user can reasonably contend with such a girth of material is limited. A great deal of content should be discriminately eliminated for it to be approachable at all. Yet, of course, this elimination runs counter to the entire logic of Twitter and other social media platforms.

In fact, even approachability no longer matters when the Twitter conversation transforms too quickly for a user to keep up. As the prior visualizations and figures indicated, June, July, and August generated a density of material by the Twitter community. As the preceding analysis repeatedly indicates, this density of material involved more an expression of self-directed ideology than an engaged dialogue. Volume (in size and density and, hence, in ideological "noise") dampened all dialogue, suppressing interaction until participants were left hearing little but their own voices. With the passage of time, the reflection in the northern summer months eventually gave way to another stage of evolution for the #Jesuis marker.

Paris on Fire: #JesuisParisienne and #PrayforParis

"Who'll love the devil?

Who'll sing his song?

Who will love the devil and his song?

I'll love the devil!" (Eagles of Death Metal, 2004)

On Friday, November 13, 2015, the Eagles of Death Metal began playing their song, "Kiss the Devil," at the Bataclan Theater in Paris, France. Three attackers wearing suicide belts arrived as the song started. They forced entry through the front of the theater and into the back portion of the seating area. As their belts began to activate, one concert patron heard an attacker shout, "God is good" (Madi, et al., 2015). Patrons began to scramble out of the concert hall in a frenzy to attempt an escape from the blast. Throughout the districts of Paris, similar attacks were carried out.

Moments before the attack on the Bataclan, a football match between France and Germany was played at the Stade de France stadium. "A man wearing a suicide belt was reportedly prevented from entering the stadium after a routine security check detected the explosives," reported Madi, et al. (2015), "the man backed away from security guards and detonated the explosives. The bomber and a passer-by were killed. The game, attended by President Francois Hollande, was being broadcast on TV. After a second man detonated his suicide vest outside a different stadium entrance at 21:30, the president was rushed to safety." As the news began to break, more attacks unfolded across Paris, including the detonations at the Bataclan, where 89 people lost their lives. "People dropped to the ground," exclaimed Ben Grant, a witness at another attack in Le Carillon bar, "We put a table over our heads to protect us" (Madi, et al., 2015). The coordinated attacks lasted three hours (Madi, et al., 2015).

Figure 3.20: Locations of the November 2015 attacks in Paris.

As news of the attacks spread, users on Twitter began to tweet #JesuisParisienne. The use of this first-person statement linked back to the early search for knowledge using #JesuisCharlie on January 7 (Rasmussen, 2015; Sanadjian, 2015). As Twitter users responded to the November tragedy, the #Jesuis prefix served as a linguistic first-person connector between two separate events: The attack on *Charlie Hebdo* contributors in January 2015 and the coordinated attack on several Parisian venues in November 2015.

Figure 3.21: Scott Watson paying respect to emergency responders.

Figure 3.22: Jenson Button sending a positive message to victims.

However, as user Jenson Button's post demonstrated in figure 3.22, a notable shift in focus transpired in the #Jesuis Twitter conversation. #JesuisCharlie tweets often employed an "us vs. them" dichotomy between those who considered themselves free speech supporters and those deemed terrorists (Austin, 1975). #JesuisCharlie also created an immediate opposition between those who supported *Charlie Hebdo* without clear reservation and those who did not support and

often condemned the magazine's content. Rather than identifying with a specific ideology, #JesuisParisienne, or "I am Parisian," showed a general affiliation with those affected by these November tragedies. It was not apolitical per se, and #JesuisParisienne did not create significant opposition. In fact, only 14 tweets employed #JenesuispasParisienne, or "I am not Parisian," for the entire year of 2015. #JesuisParisienne was used in 1,937 original tweets. Given the widespread damage that occurred because of these attacks, it is perhaps surprising that one group was not represented as victims, such as the journalists that worked for Charlie Hebdo. Instead, users represented this as an attack on a city, not simply individuals or employees of a politically directed magazine. #JesuisParisienne attempted to express sympathy to all Parisians, whether they were impacted directly or indirectly by this tragedy.

Similarly, another hashtag grew amid the Twitter response to the November attacks, which placed a more visible spotlight on religion than before. Along with #JesuisParisienne, #PrayforParis was trending almost immediately after news of the attack broke. Although #PrayforParis was not new to this conversation, figure 3.23 shows the employment of this hashtag increased three times in November 2015 when compared to its use over the prior nine months combined, February – October 2015.

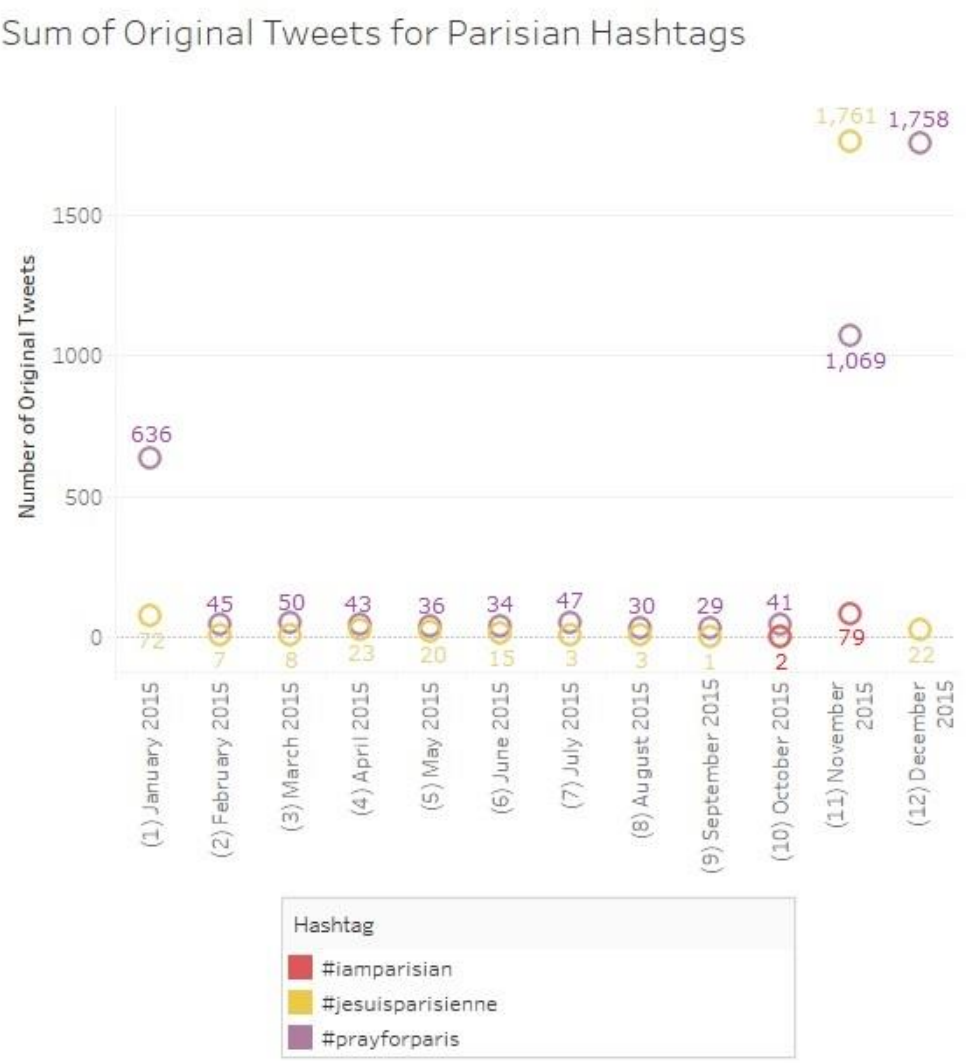

Figure 3.23: Original tweets using the Parisian markers.

Instead of a predominately religious symbol, the most widely circulated image associated with #PrayforParis tweets was a hand drawn peace sign incorporating the Eiffel Tower. Twitter user Dr. Seuss posted the image shown in figure 3.24 along with the message, “There is nothing to say.” Jean Jullien was credited with creating the image, and Jullien saw it as optimistic in tone (Feeney, 2015). “I express myself visually, so my first reaction was to draw a symbol of peace for Paris,” explains Jullien, “From there it seems to have gotten a bit out of my hands” (Feeney, 2015).

Figure 3.24: Eiffel Tower peace symbol.

Jullien was right when it came to creative control once an artifact makes its way onto the internet. Jullien's image quickly became associated with the November 2015 attacks and social media users' response to it.

Fill in the Blank: #Jesuis_____.

In February 2015, a shooter mortally wounded two people at a Copenhagen social club. The shooter's "target appeared to be the star guest, Lars Vilks, a Swedish artist who depicted the prophet Muhammad as a dog in a 2007 cartoon, and whose life has been under threat ever since" ("Copenhagen Shootings," 2015). Like the *Charlie Hebdo* attack, the Copenhagen shooting resonated with many, and Twitter continued to be the vehicle for expression regarding the attacks, as evident in figure 3.25 below.

Figure 3.25: Solidarity artwork and #JesuisDanois.

The Copenhagen attack was the first instance in which Twitter users made an active rhetorical move away from #JesuisCharlie toward another first-person statement, #JesuisCopenhagen. Likewise, #JesuisDanois, meaning "I am Danish," also appeared during the same time. The tweet composed by Nawak proclaiming solidarity in figure 3.25 demonstrated the common image associated with #JesuisDanois and #JesuisCopenhagen tweets. Like #JesuisCharlie before it, many of the tweets dealt specifically with free speech issues.

Significantly, the use of French language #Jesuis placed each of these hashtags within the context of the earlier attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* and on Paris. #Jesuis had now taken on a life of its own. The term no longer referred to a single incident (or a set of incidents). Rather, it had become an ideological signifier for identification with those who were victims of terrorist attacks. Like some latter day "Ich bin ein Berliner," the phrase now carried meaning never intended within its original posts.

Over 2015, more #Jesuis variants appeared on Twitter. Some reached trending status. #JesuisBruxelles, another adaptation of the hashtag, appeared after bombings that took place at the Brussels airport and metro system in March 2016. Likewise, #JesuisOrlando was used as a response to the nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida in June 2016. Like #JesuisParisienne in November, #JesuisOrlando was paired with #PrayforOrlando. This event was also one of the first in the series of #Jesuis statements to make an immediate connection between terrorism and the LGBTQIA+ community. Although the Orlando nightclub shooting was not the first of these attacks to impact LGBTQIA+ individuals, the victims in the Orlando shooting identified as part of this group. #Jesuis and #Prayfor markers were numerous, and as the visualizations have shown, the density of the material contained in each of them is mountainous. It is untenable for a user or lurker to make any meaningful connection with all of them. Hence, these hashtags now have become their own signifiers, signifying a social media expression of personal identification with various bodies of victimage. Twitter users now have their own internal language for creating expressions of self-victimhood. Twitter users can now "be" the victims of any expressions or actions they designate as hateful or terroristic. Twitter victimhood has now become its own simulacrum.

Points of Missed Connection

The potential and realized communicative goals of tweets were numerous, and the challenging use of eWOM was apparent in many of the earlier alternative viral tweets. On the other hand, original tweets using hashtags without trending status were not circulated as widely simply because the likelihood of a wide viewership was low. Although many users can be creative, crafty, and powerfully political, many of them fell into a deep chasm of obscurity.

Once a hashtag gained traction with enough users contributing to its success, the prior, obscure messages were often reintroduced by other users, and these later posts benefitted from social media capital in ways that the first iterations of these posts could not. When a hashtag was recognizable and its meaning was more immediately clear, newer messages were more likely to be recirculated, retweeted, liked, or receive more comments than their predecessors. Whether users who post the later messages were aware of the prior tweets or not remains to be seen. But, the fact remains that these later posts had an advantage in spreadability potential. The earlier posts that did not take hold in the quite the same way as their later counterparts may be termed *points of missed connection*.

In academic research, information that is stored on the shelf or in the vast expanse of the internet is simply in a holding pattern. Lack of use does not make the information less valuable. However, it cannot expand the minds of readers unless the content is read, considered, and engaged. The same may be said of these early tweets, and the #Jesuis case study illustrates this delayed phenomenon. Examples parallel to Charlie have occurred in the weeks, months, and years after the attack on *Charlie Hebdo*, and others which will occur well after the time of this writing may well follow a similar pattern. Yet, even these extensions of #Jesuis may well indicate that content in an internet holding pattern may not await being engaged. It may actually be awaiting co-optation, being reused within a new context that reconstructs the meaning of the original content in ways that express the ideological presumptions of the new users.

As discussed in chapter 1, #MeToo is one such successful example. Like many communication episodes, a warming up period occurs for which we should account. Points of missed connection occur in spoken, face-to-face communication as much as online communication. Yet, online communication is reviewable in a way that unrecorded spoken

communication is not. Recent posts on social media can be revisited through metadata and a simple search function. Advanced search functions via programs like Octoparse allow one to trace the earlier moments of a phenomenon, as the research conducted for #Jesuis and #Prayfor content illustrated. Unless these search functions are used, early posts with useful information sit on a virtual shelf collecting cyberspace dust. If such inactivity continues, points of missed connections will persist in online spaces.

One may ask, if content is tweeted again later, what is the harm? While some of the information is brought back in later posts, not all positions are reiterated or considered. Comments that reveal the ephemeral moment are integral to both an understanding of the event itself and the subsequent communication about it.

Figure 3.26: Jérôme Pasanau drawing a connection to similar events in Africa.

For instance, the message in figure 3.26 was not reposted for further communicative consideration, and it maintained minimal attention when it was submitted. “The shock wave also affects Africa,” wrote Jérôme Pasanau of the Burkina Faso response of solidarity, “the African streets are sad and undignified.” In the accompanying link after his message, Pasanau cited a news article describing the demonstration in Burkina Faso where protestors used #JesuisCharlie to advance their anti-terrorism position. Unfortunately, Pasanau’s tweet was not retweeted or liked with the same intensity as French and *Charlie Hebdo*-centric messages, which makes it a notable point of missed connection.

The missed connection is more apparent when one pairs Pasanau's tweet in January 2015 with those that followed in April 2015. Some of the tweets posted later demonstrate tweetjacking, because Pasanau's content was retweeted with a modified link. A familiar user, saint, posted the following:

Figure 3.27: saint commenting on connections to Africa.

Pasanau's tweet was on the threshold of getting eWOM amplification, but saint's second iteration of the message gained three comments in response. In other words, points of missed connection are alternative viral content that had the potential to become traditionally viral. Increasing exposure to these stories had the potential to reach social media users like Combi's (2015) interviewee Ryan, and others who also learn about world events from platforms like Twitter. However, this corpus and its lack of viral spread indicates that saint's commenters were the only users to gain anything out of it. Further, saint's co-opting of the original tweet, its change in context and meaning, mean that saint's followers not only missed contact with the earlier post but solely engaged saint's message. The users had no opportunity or apparent interest in the original. They posted the reconstructed simulation.

The Charlie-ization of the Garissa University Attack

On April 2, armed gunmen entered Garissa University in Kenya, and began shooting randomly. "What I managed to hear from them is 'We came to kill or finally be killed.' That's what they said," explained Eric Wekesa, who locked himself in his room at Garissa ("Kenya

Attack," 2015). Students, faculty, and staff hid in any space they could find to avoid the shooters. "It was horrible," another student, Augustine Alanga, described to BBC News ("Kenya Attack," 2015), "there was shooting everywhere." After four of the al-Shabab gunmen, an offshoot militant organization of Al-Qaeda, stopped shooting and detonated their suicide vests, 147 people were dead.

Many Twitter users responded to the Garissa attack using markers with the #Jesuis prefix. At first, these tweets shared news about what happened, much like the *Charlie Hebdo* attack only three months earlier. The tweets also expressed support for those involved. However, the Twitter response did not harken back to the sentiment expressed by Pasanau in January, and eventually saint. Such a connection would have bridged the semantic gap when using #JesuisCharlie alongside markers like #JesuisKenyan.

Summary of Findings

In the #Jesuis case study, the vast majority of posts were rarely engaged by other users. Therefore, most tweets in the #Jesuis corpus were alternative viral content and points of missed connection. These tweets remain as untapped communicative potential. In theory, twitter might start meaningful dialogue because of its open communication channels. However, the data contained in the #Jesuis case study demonstrated that potential as mostly unrealized, and the tweets that did gain traction are demonstrable outliers. A few of the outliers could have become viral like Coelho (figure 3.9). Vanessa (figure 3.13) and le F (figure 3.14) received some activity in response to their messages, primarily in the form of sentimental likes and retweets. However, it was neither sufficient to promote spreadability and eWOM amplification, nor could it transform monologue into dialogue.

Significantly, new tweets persistently modified the meaning of terms, from #JenesuispasCharlie reframing the original frame to the numerous #Jesuis markers taking the key term out of its own context and establishing a Twitter based signification that had little directly to do with the original attack on *Charlie Hebdo*. These new significations reinforce the comments in chapter one on the performatively posed nature of social media discourse. Original meaning consistently gives way to new significations for terms, significations that embrace the ideological perspective of the user and that do not, in any valuable or even noticeable way, engage the first user's message. Social media give users the tools to create their own expressions of sentiment based in signifiers that have lost the bulk of their original meaning and whose meaning void can be filled with the new user's ideas.

In terms of spreadability, contributions to Twitter face a losing battle if their content does not align with the previous activity and likes of other users. The primacy effect has a significant impact on a majority of these cases. Even if a user's content does align with these interests, their tweets might not be seen by another person at all. Not all popular ideas become viral, and the oversaturation of content makes it challenging to find valuable content like Pasanau in figure 3.26. Devenir meilleur(e) in figures 3.15 and 3.16 contributed to the oversaturation and did not achieve measurable sentimental engagement with the Twitter community. Based on the content, it is likely that Devenir meilleur(e) was "focusing on content sharing, while disregarding other behavioral responses" (Alhabash & McAlister, 2015, p. 1318). Figures 3.15 and 3.16 only represent a sample of a longer chain of tweets, all of which were equally unengaged by the Twitterverse. The amplification by electronic word of mouth (eWOM) seems to simply make the cacophony louder.

The evidence from the #Jesuis case study also supported Atton's (2002) claim connecting first-person references with ideological predispositions. By tweeting, #JesuisCharlie or #IamCharlie, and their inverse forms, users identify with the ideological tenets of their respective side. They adopted these terms to support their expression, as advocated by "Twitter's Values" (2018). Users' employment of particular hashtags supported their effort toward shareability and possible meaningful dialogue. Hashtags and other structures afforded by Twitter supported the illusion of potential meaningful interactions. However, the data show that most of these efforts were doomed to failure. In fact, most, in the end, became low impact expressions of self-referential sentiment.

Users intervened using the written word for this case study, but similar approaches can be enacted in photographic form as well. The next case study is concerned with photographic versions of these cyclical communication patterns. The visual form of "I am," occurs with the selfie, which marks the subject as the primary point of reference. This same signification is applied in settings where taking an image like this would be inappropriate, specifically at a memorial. In the *Yolocaust* collection, social media users were forced to see these transgressions for what they were, including the subjects of these photos. Prior to discussing the #Yolocaust data set, we will explore the process of planning and constructing the site of the problematic selfies at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe.

Chapter 4

Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe and the *Yolocaust* Collection

"A Japanese tourist, claims Eisenman, 'would perhaps feel what it is like to go into a gas chamber.' The architect later nuanced this inappropriate remark by describing the monument as a place in which visitors would not be urged to learn about historical facts or collective historical processes, but be forced to contemplate their individual understanding of the past by working backwards from traces of memories in the present."

-Peter Carrier, 2005, p. 130

"The visitors should ask themselves: What is it here? What does this mean? Where am I actually? Eisenman: 'I want to originate exactly this feeling of being lost and lack of orientation; this search, in vain, for a clear sense. The cognitive experience abdicates the affective one.'"

-Irit Dekel, 2013, p. 50

For #Yolocaust, the echo chamber was so loud that no one overtly disagreed. With the Holocaust as a frame, trauma and pathos appeals so visually demonized contrary positions, they made communication exchange nearly impossible. In fact, those targeted by #Yolocaust found themselves in such an untenable position on social media that they by and large quickly apologized for their actions and accepted the ideological frame of #Yolocaust as normative. On the one side, this demonstrated a moment when a single echo chamber broke through the walls of a second echo chamber. Unlike #JesuisCharlie and #JenesuispasCharlie, hashtags that, on the surface, opposed each other but, in practice, created self-enclosed and self-sustaining echo chambers, the actions of those targeted by #Yolocaust were cast into such a negative frame that they quickly acceded to the ideology of their antagonists and were silenced. This kind of silencing is rooted in history.

The subject of #Yolocaust was the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, Germany. The memorial carries immense historical, social, and political weight. As a visual frame, it carries its own ideological frame, one informed by history and the laws of Berlin.

"'In Germany it is forbidden to take photographs,'" a male patron told Simone Mangos (2007), a researcher documenting the scenes around the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin. "I advised him, in that case, to call the police," Mangos (2007) replied, as the man tried to grab her camera:

> "I nervously continue with my observations, determined to maintain my presence, whilst he and his wife now step up the offensive, making loud remarks about my physical appearance. Closing in, he walks adroitly behind me hurling insults. They both demand to know why I'm taking photographs. In his mounting anger, he grabs at my arm, whilst his wife almost tripped over herself in a flurry to hail down a passing police car" (Mangos, 2007, p. 12-13).

As Mangos' (2007) story of documenting scenes within and parallel to the memorial illustrated, she was harassed and told to stop by a man and woman patronizing the businesses nearby. Their aggression demonstrated a sense of abrupt silencing that Mangos sought to break down through her work. This silencing continued in different forms by various patrons in the nearby food stands and visitors to the memorial. Casting a side eye in Mangos' direction was the common response of patrons, while others in smaller numbers behaved like the *Flakhelfers*.[30]

"[T]he Nazi period has come to be viewed in most Western countries—whether on the winning or losing side of World War II—from a moralistic perspective," wrote Rosenfeld

[30] Also known as *Fliegerabwehrkanone* or Anti-Aircraft-Artillery Helper. According to Mangos (2007), they "were youths called up after 1943 to assist the Luftwaffe in the war effort. Germans born between 1926 and 1929 are often referred to as the 'Flakhelfer-Generation'" (p. 13). The couple acting aggressively toward Mangos fits this description.

(2015), “The essence of this perspective has long been defined by the phrase, ‘never again.’ These two words convey the simple moral message that posterity should heed the ‘lessons’ of the Nazi dictatorship and make sure its disasters are never repeated” (p. 14). Memorials and monuments were intended to represent these “lessons.” They ask us to confront the grotesque, the tragic, and the *nearly* unimaginable. Questions of normality remain in flux when considering such a complex history.

Normality and abnormality have a unique relationship in Nazi history. A recurring flip between the two challenges conventional nation-state narratives, and this paradox has often resulted in repeated references to Nazi Germany in the common vernacular. When one was described as having a Hitler-esque persona or being a Grammar Nazi (a term used to describe a person offering grammatical correction), the terms used tended to trivialize the horrors of National Socialism. Rosenfeld (2015) posited oversaturation of these terms led to an emptiness of meaning, particularly when it came to Nazi history. “The inflated use of the Nazi Legacy for tendentious purposes threatens to drain it of much of its historical distinctiveness and turn it into an empty signifier” (Rosenfeld, 2015, p. 341). Paradoxically, the lack of meaning allowed for the possibility of the now ideologically vacant spaces to be filled by non-sequiturs, false narratives, and contemporary temporal values. Attributions such as these led to a sense of tolerance for Nazi extremism, or passive acceptance of such ideologies at its worst. The normalization of Nazism in common discourse, such as the Grammar Nazi, was a complication by which “normal” can sometimes simultaneously or subsequently be “abnormal.” “Patterns of remembrance always change in the face of new events. Today’s definition of normality may not be tomorrow’s” (Rosenfeld, 2015, p. 348). As Rosenfeld (2015) suggested, the issue of multiple

meanings, and meanings that have not yet emerged, create significant complication for the memorialization project.

Memorial-building processes suggest some degree of intervention in the current consciousness. That is why memorials exist in the first place. They ask their viewers to expand, reconsider, and/or completely abandon their existing knowledge base. Memorials may be built by the state,[31] organizations seeking remembrance in a specific fashion, or some combination thereof. The memorialization process can be a challenge when reconstructing and deconstructing Germany's Nazi history. The vestiges of the Holocaust are being hurriedly documented before they disappear, and what was preserved remains the point of contention for those involved in memory construction.

> "There is the 'communicative memory' of historical events, meaning the oral preservation and transmission of eyewitness recollections of the past. And there is the 'cultural memory' of historical events, referring to their subsequent representation in different cultural forms, whether film, literature, theatre, art, or architecture" (Rosenfeld, 2015, p. 9).

In the case of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, an effort was made to combine these two memory forms. The construction of the site indicated why this was the case.

Memorial Site

"The Second World War, and specifically the Holocaust, shifted commemorative practices," wrote Niven & Paver (2010), "The focus on victims moved from soldiers to civilians, and memorial design turned to increased abstraction" (p. 244). Remembrance is, of course, a very subjective concept, and memorials should offer a reasonable level of abstraction to account

[31] State-sponsored memorials are uncommon in Germany. The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe is the first of its kind, according to Niven & Paver (2010, p. 243).

for such subjectivities. For example, Wiedmer (1999) described the memorialization process in Israel as a means for national unification, where Holocaust victims were celebrated as heroes (p. 142). The memorial project in Germany was charged with recognizing the geographic and personal difference in constructing a space of remembrance in Berlin. Whether or not that was fully realized remains a point of discussion.

"I demand of this country of perpetrators a memorial," declared Lea Rosh (1995), "Something like this should exist in the country of the perpetrators, a memorial, a site of remembrance, something that recalls this deed" (p. 3). Rosh led the call for the memorial to be built, and despite the conviction in her charge, she received little public support. Rosh founded a group called Perspective Berlin and sought support for the memorial she envisioned (Wiedmer, 1999, p. 143). She moved forward with collective support. She appealed for a memorial in a public advertisement:

> "A half a century has passed since the Nazis came to power and since the murder of the Jews of Europe. But on German soil, in the country of the perpetrator, there is still no Central site of remembrance to recall the singular genocide, and no Memorial that remembers the victims.
>
> This is shameful.
>
> Therefore[,] we demand that [a] clearly visible memorial for the millions of murdered Jews be erected in Berlin. Furthermore, we call for the erection of this Memorial on the former GESTAPO site, the seat of the SS headquarters, the murder center of the capital. The erection of this Memorial is an obligation for all Germans in east and west" (Rosh, 1995, p. 14).

Despite the memorial being *for* the murdered Jews, Rosh directed her rhetoric, "specifically at Germany's non-Jewish population" (Wiedmer, 1999, p. 143). Rather than getting the victims and their descendants' input about such a memorial, the ad placed responsibility for the memorial on those whose recent ancestors were responsible for the violence. The commemoration was to be focused on the Jewish victims of the Nazi regime from the perspective of the non-Jew, and the memorial had an added cultural layer:

> The memorial's "creation would proceed from the German sense of shame and duty (which is why the ad was directed only to non-Jewish citizens); it was to be built on the former Gestapo premises because it was there that the genocide had been decreed (and to a minor extent also carried out); and it was to be highly visible because, as Rosh states, it was also impossible for the crimes of the Nazis to be overlooked" (Wiedmer, 1999, p. 144).

The leader of the Central Council of the Sinti and Roma, Romani Rose, took issue with this framed version of Holocaust victimhood. Rose asserted that the project advanced by Perspective Berlin created a "differentiat[ion] between first- and second-class genocide victims" (Wiedmer, 1999, p. 144). Created for the "Murdered Jews," Rose claimed that Nazi victims were not recognized by the memorial. They were dismissed from historical memory. Rose described this unnecessary narrowing of the memorial's definition of victimhood as not only problematic but demonstrating a hierarchy of victims. In this limited perspective of history, violence continued to be enacted on unrecognized victims decades after the fall of Nazism.

The spokesperson for Perspective Berlin, Eberhardt Jäckel, responded to Rose by saying the inclusion of Gypsies in the memorial would result in a memorial that is meaningless, because all other affected groups would want to be included (Wiedmer, 1999, p. 144). Perspective

Berlin's justification for singling out the Jews was to target the political aim of Hitler presenting anti-Semitism as the core of his political ideology. According to Wiedmer (1999), Perspective Berlin combined two incompatible and far-reaching conclusions about the Holocaust: "The scientific-analytical question of Hitler's worldview, in which anti-Semitism undeniably played a central role, and the emotional business of mourning the tormented and murdered victims of Hitler's fascism" (p. 145). Many of those who sought inclusion of all victims were a part of a group called the Active Museum. Debates between Active Museum and Perspective Berlin continued throughout the late 1980s. Each group stood in opposition to the other. The impasse required the intervention of a third party, the Berlin Senate. The Senate "organized two public hearings, and on October 23, 1989, it was decreed that it would not be appropriate for a memorial to only one victim group to be built on the former Gestapo site" (Wiedmer, 1999, p. 145). Lea Rosh had failed to accomplish her goal.

Two weeks later, Rosh created a new group called The Sponsor Circle for the Erection of a Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe or *Förderkreis zur Errichtung eines Mahnmals für die Ermordeten Juden Europas* (Wiedmer, 1999, p. 145). The group was called *Förderkreis* for short. Their slightly altered mission removed all connections to the Holocaust, which was the point of contention that led to the Berlin Senate's decree in 1989. Instead, the *Förderkreis* planned a memorialization project focused on Jewish victims without a historical demarcation. Their separation of Jewish victims from the Holocaust made their argument sufficiently generalized for reconsideration. This distinction provided the argument needed to gain government support and move forward with Rosh's plans. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, large tracts of land became available, which opened new possibilities for the vision of the *Förderkreis*. The center of Cultural Affairs approved the request made by *Förderkreis* for a new site at the

former ministerial gardens. "[T]his new site was in fact neither the place where Hitler's chancellery had once stood, nor where his bunker has been located (both of which led to the south of the proposed area, on land already slated for the federal states' offices)" (Wiedmer, 1999, p. 146). With the space designated, a Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe could move forward. The decision-makers concluded that the Senti and Roma victims would be addressed in another memorial, one which has yet to be realized (Carrier, 2005, p. 104).

In 1994, a competition was launched for submissions to design a memorial for European Jewish victims, and "the organizers of the competition were the Federal Republic of Germany, the *Förderkreis*, and the state of Berlin" (Mangos, 2007, p. 20). In addition to the open competition, twelve artists were invited to contribute their proposals, and they were offered 50,000 Deutschmarks for submitting designs (Mangos, 2007, p. 20). Overall, 528 designs were sent to the competition's governing bodies. These included a wide variety of what both Schlör (2005) and Mangos (2007) call "kitschy" designs, which include:

> A "giant star of David comprised of yellow flowers, a single continuously burning crematorium oven, a huge concrete swastika, a ferris wheel composed of rotating suspended cattle train compartments, architectonic variations of monoliths and distorted stars of David, ramps, and a giant 40 metre high empty vat for the blood of the murdered" (Mangos, 2007, p. 21).

Two committees were appointed to decide which memorial design would be erected. Christine Jacob-Marks led one of the teams and the other was led by Simon Ungers. After a drawn-out process, the committees decided on a design by the Jacob-Marks' collaboration, which consisted of a cemetery-esque design with an elevated and skewed gravestone. Chancellor Helmut Kohl strongly disagreed with the decision. Only three days after the announcement of the winner,

Kohl removed governmental support (Mangos, 2007, p. 21-22). For a period, the movement on the memorial was stalled yet again. The project echoed controversial sentiments from the late 1980s.

"The controversy itself became the 'site' in which all attitudes to the treatment of the Nazi past and the politics of remembrance were publicly discussed" (Schlör, 2005, p. 34). In 1997, a new commission was formed, which included "Christoph Stolzl, Director of the German Historical Museum, Dieter Ronte, Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Bonn, Art Historian Werner Hoffman, Architect Josef Paul Kleihues, and Professor of English and Judaic studies at the University of Massachusetts James E. Young" (Mangos, 2007, p. 23). Young was the only person on the commission who was Jewish and not from Germany. Young (2000) wondered about his own presence on the committee, including the possibility that he was "a mere decoration, this American Jew, a sop to authority and so-called expertise" (p. 196). He questioned why he was there, whether it may have to do with his "academic authority on memorials or as a token American and foreigner . . . [Are they] looking for a Jewish blessing on whatever design is finally chosen?" (p. 196) Although the intention behind the appointments on the committee was not publicly released, Young's astute observation held water. His outsider perspective was needed to offer alternatives to the relatively homogeneous decision-making body.

For the commission's consideration, 28 models were submitted in the 1997 competition, which was an invitation-only contest (Carrier, 2005, p. 106). Peter Eisenman and Richard Serra's design was eventually selected, and their design is the realized memorial that stands on the site today. After the proposal's acceptance, it was not free of contention like many of the events in the past, which Schlör (2005) described as a "seismograph of memorial culture in

Europe" (p. 34). As the project began to move forward, Eisenman and Serra were asked to lower the height of some of the concrete structures, or stelae. At this point, in March 1998, Serra withdrew from the project (Niven & Paver, 2010, p. 245). Like Young, Eisenman was an American Jew, and the pressure to complete the visual narrative fell on his shoulders. Instead of managing the weight of this responsibility, Eisenman relinquished much of the control of the narrative itself by pushing forward an empty memorial, where the emptiness is more an endless abyss rather than an appropriate space to be filled by temporal meaning. "Real understanding, says Peter Eisenman, is not possible. We see the past only 'in its manifestation in the present'" (Schlör, 2005, p. 54). Eisenman's claim to the memorial's emptiness can be seen in a simple description of the memorial's design:

> "The total area of the site is 19,073 m^2/4¾ acres. On it are distributed 2,711 stelae made of high-quality concrete which are 95 cm/37" wide and 2.98 m/9'9" long. The height varies between 0.5 and 4.7 m/15'5". Thus 469 of the stelae are 1-1.5m/3'-5' high, 232 are 2.5-3m/5½'-6½' high, and 83 stelae are around 4.5 m/15' high. They are arranged in 54 axes from north to south and 87 axes from east to west. The paths are paved, and 180 lighting units are sunk into the ground. There is wheelchair access, and 41 trees on the western side of the site lead visitors over from the Tiergarten. The Place of Information in the south-east corner of the installation has an exhibition area of 778 m^2/8,375 sq. ft., plus rooms for lectures, a bookshop, and offices. Total construction costs were 27.6 m[illion] euros" (Schlör, 2005, p. 45).

Such a dry description of the concrete design was not far detached from the dry, somewhat removed sense of the memorial. "The monument is integrated into its urban surroundings as an extension of the public space of the Tiergarten park to the west, and as an extension of the urban

grid structure of apartment and office blocks, embassies and governmental buildings to the east" (Carrier, 2005, p. 102). The memorial is a continuous representation of the surrounding structures, with minimal signage to indicate what is there and what is supposed to be represented.

"The design by American architect Peter Eisenman does not shy away from being monumental," writes Niven & Paver (2010), "but does not attempt to individualize each death" (p. 243). This anonymity necessitated the inclusion of an information center. The center was not initially supported by Eisenman, because his emphasis remained in the present, immediate experience of visitors. According to Barthes (1977), the information center served as a caption of sorts, which would offer a set of connotations and tend to "amplify" our interpretation of the denotative message. The caption appeared to reproduce what we saw in the image, but instead it supplemented the meaning of the image (Barthes, 1977, p. 26). In the information center, the Holocaust becomes visible, and the faces of victims can be connected to the atrocities of the Nazi regime. The shift in this space resonated with the 1980s dialogues about focusing on the Jewish victim in the Holocaust, rather than the victims of an anachronistic violent massacre, completely devoid of history and context. "In an unexpected reversal, the information center is a site of Holocaust remembrance, while the field of stelae expresses the ephemeral and fragile nature of memory as it is experienced in the present" (Niven & Paver, 2010, p. 247). The exterior memorial was an empty or fresh slate for the non-Jewish German people, with the specific narratives secluded in the information center. However, the memorial's creators and its supporters neglected a fact that arose during the construction process.

Although Hitler's bunker was known to be located to the south of the ministerial gardens, a new Nazi stronghold was located through the excavation for the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. The day before the memorial was set to open in 2005, Simone Mangos attended

a press conference with the leadership responsible for the memorial. When called upon, Mangos (2007) asked Peter Eisenman to "indicate when he had become aware of the bunkers that have been located on the site—and, if he had considered integrating the 'Goebbels Bunker' into the underground museum" (p. 94). Mangos' microphone was immediately silenced when the intention behind her question was apparent, but she continued to ask the question. "Eisenman states that he knew about the bunkers, and had lots of ideas for the integration of a Goebbels Bunker in the memorial," explained Mangos (2007, p. 94). Eisenman continued, "'The people down at the Reichstag told me what they could mean or symbolize, and they know better than I do, so that was that" (Mangos, 2007, p. 94). Eisenman relinquished responsibility, which was dangerous when paired with the dominant narrative in the space: The memorial became simultaneously a self-criticism paired with a sense of pride and grandiosity which Lübbe notably called *Sündenstolz*, or the "pride in the sin" (Broder, 1997, p. 23).

Eisenman considered the memorial as neither a representative of the Holocaust nor as a vehicle for memory preservation. The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe possessed "no nostalgia, no memory of the past, only the living memory of the individual experience. Here we can only know the past through its manifestation in the present" (Niven & Paver, 2010, p. 247). Instead of being a place of remembrance, the memorial asked its visitors to consider the memory making process. Every time we recall a memory of our own, it becomes transformed in the moment and altered when we recall it in the future. Rather than the memorial serving as a marker for memory, it asks us to consider the present as a frame for the past.

James Young (1993) distinguished between monuments in the public eye and artistic forms. Art was often produced for critique, display, and recognition. However, Holocaust memorials were not usually on the artistic cutting edge. For Young (1993), these differences

were important to note (p. 12). Such a distinction was not obvious with the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. In a lot of ways, the memorial embodied both public monument and artistic expression, with the latter revealing itself in the memorial's emptiness and its open-endedness to the point of oblivion. The spatial makeup of the memorial demonstrated where the signification falls short:

> "Seen from a distance, the gray alternating forms, when completely unpopulated, are sublime. Their beauty commands the respect of something not to be touched or entered—but observed only. This is *powerful*. Anything else has the effect of a violation. As soon as one enters it—it [be]comes flat. As if this has been foreseen, the promotional photographs of the memorial invariably *placed the viewer outside and elevated from a birds-eye view*. *All photographs were also unpopulated*" (Mangos, 2007, p. 156-157, emphasis added).

One's perspective of the memorial offered insight into how it should be used. Because of its representational emptiness, the memorial "depicts nothing and explains nothing" (Schlör, 2005, p. 54). The responsibility for meaning making fell on the shoulders of those visiting the site. Ideally, the memorial evoked an individual self-reflexive process. At its worst, it was a self-aggrandizing experience paired with a denial, or at the very least, a sublimation of history.

A Lack of Remembrance

"Seen from a distance, the field of stelae seems to be swallowing and spitting out people, as they penetrate and sink into the memorial, falling out of sight; they disappear into the unknown, only to reappear unexpectedly in a different corner, incomprehensibly" (Niven & Paver, 2010, p. 245). The incomprehensible nature of the memorial complicated the process of

interpretation. Once a meaning seemed pinned down, the memorial absorbed it into its empty frame. The memorial demanded experiential interpretation rather than mere documentation:

> "And because the scale of this installation would be almost irreproducible on film shot from the ground, it also demands that visitors actually enter and experience the memorial space and not try to know it vicariously through their snapshots. If the designers have their way, what will be remembered here are not photographic images but the visitors' actual experiences *in situ*" (Young, 2008, p. 201).

Of course, these observations are optimistic. As Mangos' (2007) story at the beginning of this chapter suggests, the opportunity for unfiltered access to the memorial is a luxury not commonly afforded to its patrons.

In practice, the memorial had often served as a transgressive space. It had rarely been a site for reflection. Instead, people visited the memorial to have a picnic, sunbathe, play, and take problematic photos. Mangos (2007) described this strange display as an open invitation for nearly anything:

> "While *Ordnungsamt* (Department of order) officers patrol the streets and parks of Berlin, prosecuting offenders who dare to cross the road one second before the lights turn green, or allow their dog to run off the lead—the freedom available at the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe comes as a real treat. So much is obvious. Doused in a massive amount of urine following its opening, the memorial also serves as a convenient toilet right in the center of Berlin" (p. 150).

What gave the memorial tremendous psychological impact was its ability to conceal people. But, this function made their activities within the stelae somewhat concealed as well. As we will see

later in this chapter, Shahak Shapira did not let this concealment remain for long, especially when photographs of debauchery at the memorial site were posted online.

Yet, this discussion of the public history of the memorial points out the vague and shifting signification in the project. Presumed to express the guilt of a nation over the mass genocide of an entire race, the intentionally vague signification, giving preference to perspectives of the present over the past, drained the site of much of his historical meaning and opened it to signifying practically any ideological expression any public took up. Rather than an expression of guilt, the meaning of the memorial could be filled with significations of the power of Germany of the present, of a free park area for Berlin's citizens, of a monolith swallowing people whole when seen from a distance. Significations of the mass slaughter of Jews were no longer necessary and many of those who visited the area no longer saw them as meaningful. It is not surprising, then, that visitors would fill the empty space with meanings that would be wildly offensive to those who recognized the memorial as signifying the guilt of the German nation in the deaths of millions of human beings. Yet, the preference of present eye over past memorial was reinforced by the German press.

In the years following the memorial's opening, the German news media did not look kindly on criticisms of how the memorial was used. Many suggested that law and order were followed strictly elsewhere. If this *haven* of personal expression was removed, Germans would have one less freedom to enjoy.

> "This in some ways isn't surprising, when commentators, such as the *Westfaelische Nachrichten*, describe the memorial as proof 'that [. . .] we have emancipated ourselves.' Emancipation from what, one wonders. Guilt? Responsibility? History? The Jews?" (Mangos, 2007, p. 153).

Mangos' (2007) assessment of the situation illustrated the conundrum. Eisenman's design created a sense of isolation and, by design, permitted multiple interpretations. Shapira's *Yolocaust* would disallow some interpretations. But, the mass of visitors was, on some level, invited to supply their own interpretations and their own ideological perspectives. The memorial could be used to signify nearly any meaning from nearly any point of view. As we shall see, this open-ended signification led to the ideological conflict this chapter examines.

The Memorial Looking Back

The dual feeling of isolation and congratulatory performance demonstrated in Eisenman's design was realized to the point of absurdity. Eisenman (2004) recognized the psychic deprivation and loneliness one felt within the memorial's confines, but he showed no concern for the harmful communicative performances that have been rendered in the world he created (p. 510). This loneliness was perhaps better centered on the victims the memorial should honor and *remember*. However, the remembrance that occurred at the memorial had little to do with the purported subject. The past had been subsumed in significations of the present and the memorial itself became a self-reflection, a mirror that simultaneously looked back at the memorial visitors in the Lacanian sense. Lacan spent time away from his Ph.D. program at a fishery in Brittany, France. During his relatively brief expedition, Lacan noticed a sardine can floating along with the muck in the water. The "gaze becomes something that the subject encounters in the object; it becomes an objective, rather than a subjective, gaze," McGowan (2003) said of Lacan's encounter with the sardine can. "The gaze is not the look of the subject at the object, but the point at which the object looks back" (p. 28-29). Although the sardine can experience happened earlier in his life, it made such an impact that Lacan's later theoretical work was influenced by it (McGowan, 2003). The emptiness of the concrete at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of

Europe allowed a projection similar to Lacan's sardine can, only the concrete walls served as the dull reflective surface.

The sardine can implied another kind of cultural reflection that can be found around the memorial's perimeter. Across the street, where the *Flakhelfers* were found before they interrogated Mangos, rows of casual cafés and small shops can be found. The eateries and shops opened in 2006 on the newly named Cora-Berliner-Straße (Mangos, 2007, p. 160). The carnivalesque nature of the food establishments alongside a memorial to murdered human beings is a strange planning choice. However, it should not come as a surprise that such relaxed and uncritical behavior made its way into the stelae of the memorial space. The self-reflective signification created by the work almost invited such a clash of meaning, or perhaps a pedestrian and mundane filling of the gap where meaning should reside in a memorial. However, the lack of meaning was simply a repetition of historical events where powerful regimes make horrific decisions and others who are on the sidelines turn away and pretend the atrocities in their peripheral vision do not exist. The memorial's design was a recreation of this dynamic: Visitors behaved badly, others justified it as one of the few places where the *Ordnungsamt*[32] rarely intervened, and those, like Shahak Shapira, were ashamed of the entire display. The last group saw the memorial as a sacred place, much like a burial ground. "Some critics have likened this design to a Jewish cemetery, although its designers, the American architect Peter Eisenman and artist Richard Serra . . . deny any symbolic content, interpreting their work instead in purely abstract terms as a 'zone of instability'" (Carrier, 2005, p. 102). The "instability," according to Carrier (2005), may be interpreted in many ways. Disruption within a Jewish cemetery might be labeled as an act of hate and anti-Semitism. Others might write it off. However, "instability"

[32] Department of Order

may offer more introspection into the mind of the architect of the memorial than one might typically expect.

The drawn-out competition for the prize of constructing the memorial meant that dozens of unrealized memorial projects were left on the table. As the selected plan was constructed and after Serra left the project, new details emerged. "The artist Jochen Gerz and architect Daniel Libeskind accused Eisenman of plagiarism, because the revised model contained an information center similar to the building proposed in Gerz's proposal shortlisted in the competition of 1997, and a field of stelae similar to those in the grounds of Libeskind's Jewish Museum" (Carrier, 2005, p. 108). The accusations did not impact the project, because the decision-makers dismissed the notion of any wrongdoing. Regardless, Naumann, the *Bundeskulturbeauftragter*,[33] approved a revised version of the project called Eisenman III, which incorporated the inclusion of an information center. The project continued forward despite outcry from various sectors of the community. The reflection of decisions made by an autocratic body demonstrated a more problematic objective view; the Lacanian sardine can perceived a more sinister and cyclical view of humanity. As noted, critics complained that these changes, made by empowered German leadership, emptied the memorial of its representation of murdered Jews and replaced it with a demonstration of German hegemonic power. In an attempt to memorialize the Murdered Jews of Europe, they were slaughtered once again in the name of "progress."

The memorial itself represented a haunting history that cannot be ignored, no matter the original intention behind its construction. What reflected back from the stelae had more relevance to the memorial's visitor than anything else; our eyes served as our own lens for

[33] Federal Cultural Officer

interpretation and meaning making. Such a task opened the door for problematic readings and a perversion of the Lacanian sardine can (McGowan, 2003).

Betwixt and Between Memory

"Once storage media can accommodate optical and acoustic data," wrote Kittler (1986), "human memory capacity is bound to dwindle. Its 'liberation' is its end" (p. 10). Now that this assertion had been realized in today's technological landscape,[34] the hallucination of imagery through the mode of reading had been coopted by the visual and aural. Reproductions of these prior hallucinations no longer had the glow of the original aura, in the Benjaminian (1969) sense. In other words, the movie was not always as compelling as the book. The light was still there within the mechanical forms of reproduction when compared to the supposed "originals." But it was dispersed over wider expanses of copies. It was more of a sacrament rather than malefice, as Baudrillard (1983) would describe it.

The reproduction of material that was once in the realm of the mind instead operated in an external manner. Our memory was further fragmented by technological compartmentalization. This did not mean that we forgot and stumbled in our recalling of historical and cultural significance; rather, we pieced together these memories from outsourced technological sources and mediation.

Photographs offered a unique feature of this fragmentation as always and already dead, with the photograph as the point of convergence between the actual subject and memory preservation (Barthes, 1980). The viewers of the photograph saw something that had ended as soon as the image was captured. For Barthes (1980), the result of photography was an ephemeral moment postmortem (p. 10-11). For Balzac, his fear of death and the empty eyes of those who

[34] Dery (1993) corroborated Kittler's (1986) claim by referring to human memory as alliterate and divorced from a previous era.

have passed had been exacerbated by the visual extension of writing, because haunting hallucinations were realized and less susceptible to one's subjective hallucinations when the same material was read (Landow, 1992). The visual representation of a subject was introspective, but introspective after the moment of capture had passed. We pieced together memory in hindsight. The pieces of the historical puzzle fit within the present context. That context created the photograph's meaning.

As photographs and images were used for artful manipulation using today's technology, the benefit of hindsight and our contextual understandings were clearer than before. The #Jesuis case was primarily centered around word usage, because most tweets offered textual content, with the exception of figures 3.10, 3.14, 3.15, 3.24, and 3.25. For #Yolocaust, the visual was at the center, because the conversation started with shocking images. These images created a present contextual meaning for the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. That meaning was first created by those who would subvert the memorial's presumed (though, as we have seen, largely unexpressed) meaning (or master narrative) to the self-referential values of the photographs' subjects. However, the potential for imagery may be realized in its ability to reflect back subversive ideologies operating in the background. And, though the memorial may have been created with an ambiguous signification, interested rhetoricians challenged the meanings put forward by those who subverted the presumed master narrative behind the memorial. While master narratives were rarely held accountable for the outcomes they produced, an apparently neutral online space may effectively call on them in condemning a particularly lurid misuse of public symbols.

The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe and the Internet

The memorial looked back at its visitors just as much as their camera lens took in light to photograph them. Although the mechanism for the stelae and the camera lens were different, their functions operated in meaningful and parallel patterns. They served as artifacts for the texture of memory, and the distortion of those memories were similar in the conscious and subconscious mind:

> "The past incessantly resurfaces into consciousness in both direct and oblique ways with all the urgency of an obsession that disrupts chronology and casts a shadow over all subsequent experience. Despite their quite radical difference in styles, techniques, and even purposes, the texture of memory is shown as elliptical, often fragmentary, tantalizingly elusive, inscribed on the body, and favoring nonverbal signals in the recording of sensations, such as sight, touch, smell, sound" (Zeitlin, 2003, p. 178-179).

Our experience of the past was transformed by the internet and mobile technology. The stickiness and spreadability of images and other media content were made possible through the portable technologies that support them (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013). The ways that media were replicated and modified in a Baudrillardian (1983) fashion suggested new ways for the past to "incessantly resurface" (Zeitlin, 2003, p. 178). In 2015, approximately "61,000 Hitler-related images macros are currently listed on Meme Generator and thousands more exist on competing meme-generating sites" (Rosenfeld, 2015, p. 3). That number has continued to rise with the current political climate in Germany, the United States, and around the world. However, this was not new; revitalized and aestheticized stories of the Nazi Germany epoch were told for decades. The internet only increased the speed of dissemination of these anecdotes to their end user within shared ideological bubbles. (Rosenfeld, 2015, p. 24).

The internet reproduced many of the preexisting narratives; however, virtual spaces offered an open-ended space for expression that invited extremism:

> "The ways in which [internet texts] represent Nazism have been profoundly affected by the unique features of the internet as a medium. By providing a venue for the expression of all ideas, no matter what their quality, and by fostering new habits of reading, thinking, and remembering, the internet has granted unprecedented attention to the sensational and the trivial" (Rosenfeld, 2015, p. 293)

Extremist rhetoric also inhabited these relatively unmoderated virtual spaces. In 2017, "Unite the Right" planned an alt-right rally to protest the removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee in Charlottesville, Virginia, and the ironic wielding of tiki torches to illuminated angry faces shouting Nazi propaganda was captured using traditional and mobile cameras (Katz, 2017). The clash with counter-protesters was hostile and the violence resulted in counter-protester Heather Heyer's death (Silverman, 2018). Word of the event spread rapidly due in part to the internet and social media technologies. "People have always thought to express their idiosyncratic ideas in public, but only since the rise of the internet have they had a platform to present them to a larger audience. Their ideas may be odd or offensive, but they are destined to secure attention" (Rosenfeld, 2015, p. 306). They certainly have our academic attention, but whether they have secured and maintained broader attention online is disputable.

In such an environment, how can the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe possibly compete for attention when it was constructed to be rhetorically empty?

> "Studies have shown that the flow of information on the web is so large and rapid that we cannot easily transfer what we read from our working memories to our long-term memories. The only result is that we have begun to outsource remembrance to the

> internet itself, thereby turning it into 'an external storage system'" (Rosenfeld, 2015, p. 295).

The outsourcing of memory was problematic, because it lowered the value of one's own thoughts and ability to recall. The use of "Google" as a verb was a residual of the information distancing that can be experienced via technology. However, if computer servers promoted a replacement or extension of our memory, they also made these data points available for others to observe. Ideas once held privately in the mind were displayed across the internet. The same thing went for the mechanical eye of the ubiquitous cell phone. It operated mostly unobstructed across everyday experience. Whether these photographic memories were published on social media platforms or simply on the cloud, they almost immediately found a place online.

The cell phone's capacity to take images brought new challenges. These challenges were confronted in the intervention of *Yolocaust*. Taking photographs may have been erroneously considered illegal by the *Flakhelfers* shortly after the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe was built (Mangos, 2007, p. 12). However, this practice flourished at the site and these photographs were usually taken from an uncritical eye.

> Content warning: The images in the next section may be disturbing for some readers. This section shows images of Holocaust victims and other acts of violence.

Yolocaust and Visual Disruption

"People will neither hold the same interpretations of history nor will they share the same combinations of meaning for war memorials," wrote Mayo (1988), "Personal bias comes into play regarding what actual history is and what should be remembered and commemorated" (p. 9). *Yolocaust* was a backward-looking collection that questioned the faux-private nature of

social media content. Cultural appropriation often occurred at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. "Multiple messages in war memorials are unavoidable for they serve a variety of audiences who interpret history differently," explained Mayo (1988), "Such pluralism may seem democratic, but it can create serious conflicts in remembrance, particularly for sacred memorials" (p. 9). The *Yolocaust* collection demonstrated the problematic rhetoric that comes from an abuse of open-ended interpretations of memorial space.

In figure 4.1, a man knelt on concrete tiles wearing a screen-printed t-shirt, patterned pants, and an open vest. His eyes were trained upward toward the five pink balls he was juggling. A sixth ball rested in his left hand. The pink stood out in the scene of towering gray concrete slabs on either side of his body. The ground behind him sloped downward, and then back up again. It offered a small glimpse into the vastness of this space.

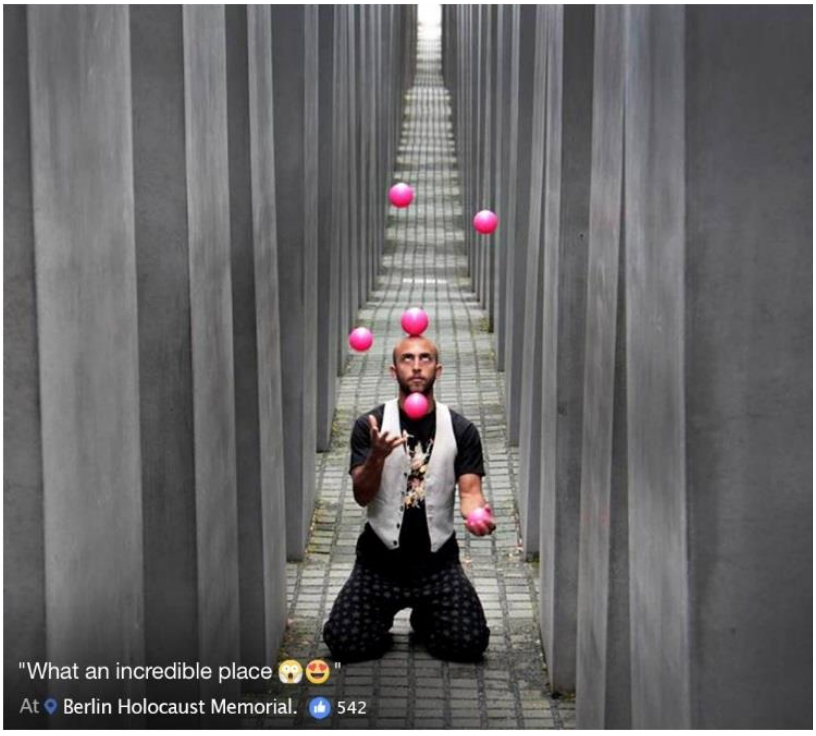

Figure 4.1: A man was seen juggling several pink balls among the stelae.

The gray slabs were stacked close together along the concrete tile path and overlapping shadows in the furthest end of the frame were ominous. The photo was captioned, “What an incredible place.” Emojis, or icons connoting facial expressions, followed to express shock and love.

The photo was also captioned with the popular name for the memorial, indicating the juggler was performing at the Berlin Holocaust Memorial. This renaming further distanced the memorial from the murdered Jews who were supposedly its subject. The vast majority of responses to the image were positive. The image and responses reread the memorial as a public space for fun and entertainment. As a memorial to the “Holocaust,” it opened space for German performers to promote their skills. As such, the Holocaust was recast from German eyes as a German park, a German memorial.

Figure 4.2: The juggling image is transformed into a burial site.

In an altered image, the background was transformed. The man in the foreground was still present; the balls he was juggling remain in mid-air just as they had before. His eyes were still looking above with the precision it took to keep the balls suspended. The only thing

different about him was the lack of color; the juggling balls were no longer pink, but a dark gray. Just a short distance behind him, where the concrete tile once was, a mass grave appeared. Bodies were twisted this way and that. They were frail from malnutrition. One victim's head was twisted upward, facing the same direction as the juggling man. They both appeared to be entranced by the same phenomenon. Two men in the shot looked away from the juggling man, while more men appeared in the upper edges of the frame. A man in the upper right-hand corner of the frame wielded a shovel. He prepared to pile dirt onto the lifeless forms below. The place where the concrete slabs stood before were transitioned into the dirt walls of the grave, which were covered in dirt shortly after the photo was taken, a darkness far more desolate than any of the shadows depicted in the first iteration of this scene.

The juggler's photograph had been transformed. It was an image of a juggler entertaining himself while sitting among the murdered Jews of Europe as they were being lowered into their graves. Recast in black-and-white, the juggler was moved in time as well as space. He sat in a grave of Jews just as they were being buried. The juggler's space, the German memorial built for German and tourist performers, had been jarringly replaced with the presumed space originally intended for the memorial, a space for murdered Jews.

In another picture of the memorial, two women smiled for the camera. One was in the foreground wearing a brimmed hat and carrying a blue backpack. The other was in the background with her arms open wide. Her body was tilted toward the left-side of the frame. In her left hand appeared to be a brochure. The women stood on two separate concrete slabs diagonal from one another. An endless sea of concrete tops appeared on the edges of the frame. Their full density was too large to be included in the visual field from this angle.

Figure 4.3: Two women balanced on the memorial stelae.

Once again using the preferred and popular name for the memorial, the Berlin Holocaust Memorial, the photo recast the space as a public park, a place for selfies, laughter, fun. Standing atop obelisks as if they were playground equipment, the subjects smiled and posed, taking center stage as the point of interest of the photo. The women and their entertainment were the meaning of the photo. The photo expressed their fun, their hilarity, their joy.

In a graphic reconstruction, the women were still in the same positions as before, but they were in a dirt field. The rows of slabs were replaced with a larger chasm of dead bodies in an indistinguishable mass, tangled together in a morbid mosaic. Like before, the bodies were naked, and they appeared to have been discarded like garbage. A couple of men were seen walking among the dead, not far from the woman's outstretched arms. It was as though they were wading through a genocidal river. Four more men circled the pit, three of whom appeared

to be running. The women were still smiling at the camera, unaware of the tragedy superimposed behind them.

Figure 4.4: The balancing women were among deceased bodies.

As with the juggler's photo, the women in this image had been removed in time and space. They were no longer standing on obelisks at a German park, they stood among the murdered Jews of Europe. They no longer stood in the sunshine of 21st century Germany. They stood in the grainy gray darkness of Nazi Germany. They no longer performed as fun-loving tourists. They were an obscenity, desecrating the mass grave of murdered Jews. The reconstructed image, again, enforced the original meaning of the memorial onto the reframed "new" meaning created by the photographers.

The disturbing nature of these images continued in a third example. Two men were seen jumping from slab to slab, both suspended in mid-air as the image was captured. They wore neutral clothing and combat boots. Both men had playful looks on their faces as they hovered above the concrete tiled walkway. Their arms were spread out to create a sense of flight. At this

angle, the varied heights of the concrete slabs were most evident, and most of the image was gray apart from one blue jacket worn by the man furthest from the lens. The caption accompanying the original image on Facebook says, “Jumping on dead Jews @ Holocaust Memorial.”

Perhaps the most challenging of these images, this photo celebrated the emptiness of the memorial. Still naming the site the more neutral “Holocaust Memorial,” the photograph made the idea of jumping on Jewish graves a satiric joke. Intentionally or unintentionally, the original caption treated the memorial as an actual graveyard. The performers jumped “on dead Jews” as if the slabs they leapt across were real tombstones in a real cemetery. The site had been transformed into a space open to mocking the very Jews who were slaughtered in the millions within Germany.

Figure 4.5: Two men jumped from one concrete slab to the next.

The transformed image reverted to the black and white tone as the previous images did, diluting the blue of the man’s jacket. Their expressions remained intact, their legs still suspended in an

ephemeral lived moment. Such suspension was no longer momentary, however. With the opening and closing of a lens, their display—like those discussed before it—will always be there.

Figure 4.6: The jumping men were no longer landing on concrete slabs in this altered image.

So too is the altered version of this image. Behind the men, where the concrete slabs once were, was another mountainous collection of dead bodies in an otherwise empty clearing. This time, the faces of some of the dead were more distinct. Below the left leg of the jumping man at the fore, a deceased person looked away from their glee toward the empty sky.

As with the other reconstructed images, this reframing removed the jumpers in time and space. The Holocaust Memorial which, for them was a place to mock "dead Jews," was replaced by the very "dead Jews" they would mock. The black and white reframing of the jumpers put them back into the time and place of the death camp, jumping on murdered Jews, gleefully leaping over (and landing on) the devastated naked remains of those starved, beaten, and humiliated in death.

The images above came from a collection known as *Yolocaust*, a collection by Shahak Shapira. Connecting both YOLO[35] and Holocaust, the title *Yolocaust* was a portmanteau. Shapira, an Israeli living in Berlin, was frustrated with the lack of respect that was paid to the Berlin Holocaust Memorial, specifically in the recreational uses that had been attached to it in the years after its construction. "[L]ast week I launched a project called YOLOCAUST that explored our commemorative culture by combining selfies from the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin with footage from Nazi extermination camps," wrote Shapira (2017), "The selfies were found on Facebook, Instagram, Tinder and Grindr. Comments, hashtags and 'Likes' that were posted with the selfies are also included." The images, including those described earlier, offered visual commentary on the use of memorial spaces, particularly the unorthodox and potentially offensive transgressions that often occurred at the Berlin site.

The broader impact of these images was immediately clear when one examined the traffic to Shapira's website, social media sharing, and the comments that followed. According to Shapira (2017), his website had over 2.5 million hits since the release of the Yolocaust images. As users viewed and shared these images, the twelve people featured in the collection became aware of their complicity in reframing the memorial. The Frequently Asked Questions portion of the Yolocaust website gave those featured in the collection an option to have their image removed, a process Shapira (2017) called, "undouche me." However, they were encouraged to email Shapira at a special email address: undouche.me@yolocaust.de. "Almost all of them understood the message, apologized and decided to remove their selfies from their personal Facebook and Instagram profiles," wrote Shapira (2017). After receiving emails from all twelve,

[35] An acronym for "You only live once." This is a common hashtag for social media images of tourists and travelers, particularly when taking part in extreme activities.

Shapira removed the entire collection from the *Yolocaust* website. The email from the man prominently displayed in the jumping image has been made publicly available:

> I am the guy that inspired you to make Yolocaust, so I've read at least. I am the "jumping on de..." I cant (sic) even write it, kind of sick of looking at it. I didn't mean to offend anyone. Now I just keep seeing my words in the headlines. I have seen what kind of impact those words have and it's crazy and it's not what I wanted. The photo was meant for my friends as a joke. I am known to make out of line jokes, stupid jokes, sarcastic jokes. And they get it. If you knew me[,] you would too. But when it gets shared, and comes to strangers who have no idea who I am, they just see someone disrespecting something important to someone else or them.
>
> That was not my intention. And I am sorry. I truly am.
>
> With that in mind, I would like to be undouched.
>
> P.S. Oh, and if you could explain to BBC, Haaretz and aaaaallll the other blogs, news stations etc. etc. that I fucked up, that'd be great. 😅 (Shapira, 2017).

Although Shapira removed the images from the official *Yolocaust* website, they were still actively sticky and spreadable. The collection was accessible on social media and via search engines. The process of "undouching" did not erase their presence from the internet after all. Everything posted online will always be there, even if the user "deleted" the content.[36] Once content was brought online, it was archived in a virtual bookshelf where it remained suspended until someone picks it up in the future, such as the #MeToo movement picking up Tarana Burke's content ten years after its inception and the use of "stan" as a verb nearly twenty years

[36] Snapchat claims that content is deleted after all users have viewed it and left the chat (When does Snapchat delete Snaps and Chats? 2019). However, archives of these interactions exist on Snapchat's server despite the "deleted" designation (Murray, 2014).

after the eponymous Eminem song was released. The content was and is always there waiting for someone else to find it and build upon it.

Even after the conflict between the original photographers and the #Yolocaust reconstructions may seem to have been resolved, the original images and the various responses to those images remained on the internet bookshelf, locked in a never-ending ideological conflict. As a review of responses to both images indicated, the original tweets created self-affirming echo chambers in which the memorial site was conceived as a German space for play (even if that play might, at times, seem offensive). The reconstruction of those images into #Yolocaust images created a competing echo that reframed the memorial as a space to remember the murdered Jews of Europe. The power of the #Yolocaust images seemed to have broken through the echo chamber walls and made most of the original photographers regret and delete their original images. However, the permanent nature of all online content means that these echo chambers, even when one may have been abandoned, will remain on the internet in perpetuity, expressing ideological frames for the memorial and inviting viewers to take up and embrace those frames.

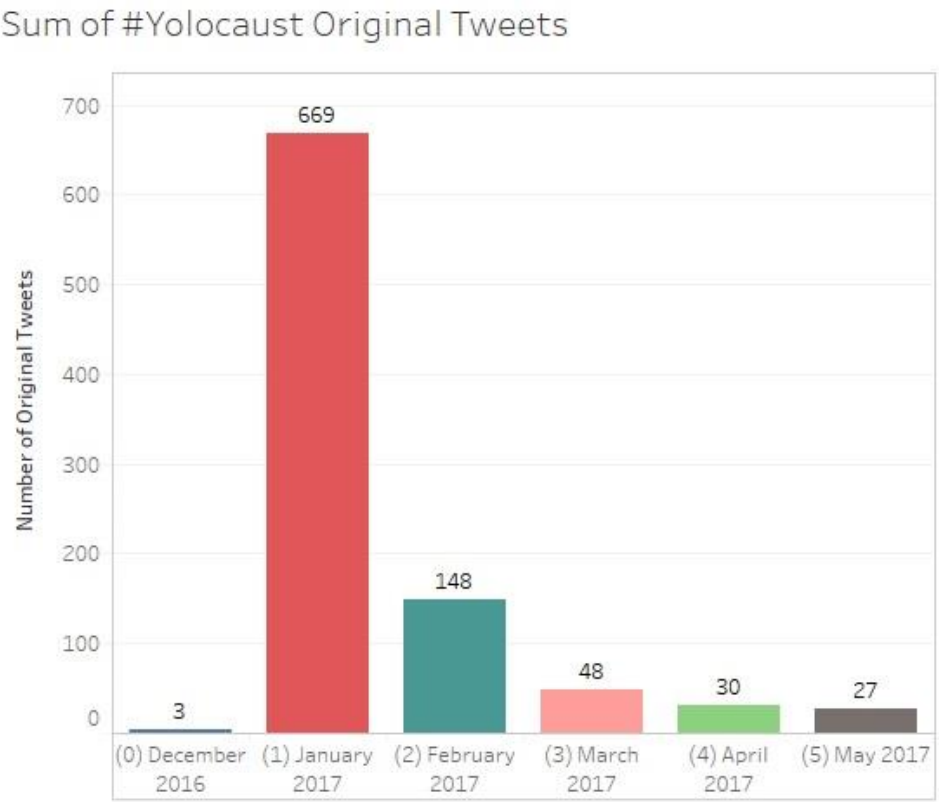

Figure 4.7: Original tweets that were created using the #Yolocaust marker.

Yolocaust and the Twitter Response: Original Tweets and Retweets

The *Yolocaust* images circulated on social media almost immediately after their release, and despite the "undouching" process on the Yolocaust website, the content remained accessible elsewhere. Twitter users responded immediately to the release of the *Yolocaust* collection, and it was likely the most robust conversation of all the social networks on the topic. As with *Charlie Hebdo*, this was because of one's ability to access tweets from users outside of one's immediate friendship circle. No pre-established social media relationship was needed to participate in the interaction. Viewers only needed to use the marker, #Yolocaust. Between December 2016 and May 2017, 926 original tweets used the #Yolocaust marker, not including retweets. 669 of the 926 original tweets were posted in January, which accounted for 72% of the dialogue. During this period, when the collection was released, and shortly thereafter, the twelve individuals came forward via their "undouche me" email responses.

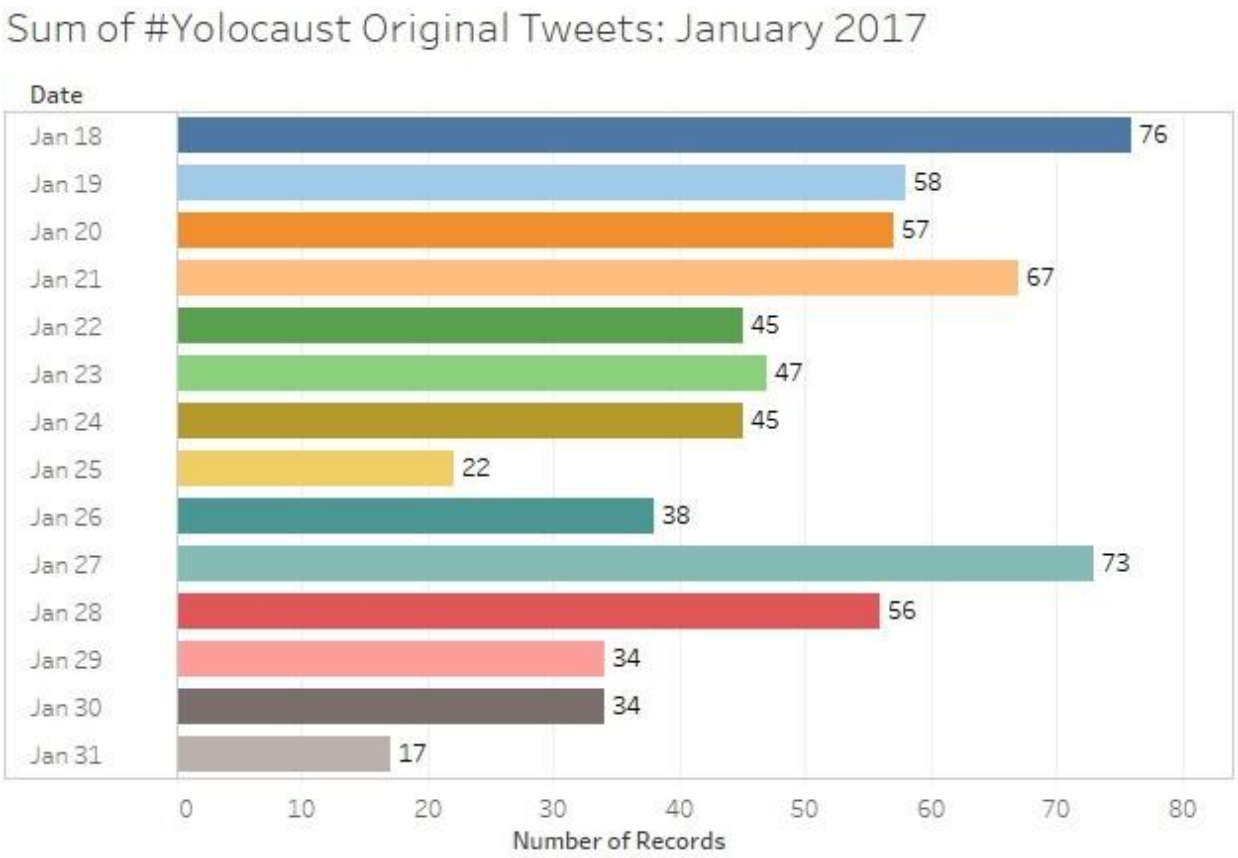

Figure 4.8: Original #Yolocaust tweets by date in January 2017.

Like the #Jesuis case study, the initial #Yolocaust posts were primarily used for spreading news about the existence of *Yolocaust*, and the tweets that focused on responding to the phenomenon appeared not long after. To gain a clearer picture of the volume of content in January, the tweets were distributed by date in figure 4.8.

The *Yolocaust* collection was released on January 18, 2017, and the highest number of tweets using the #Yolocaust marker also appeared that day. As word continued to spread, the conversation remained consistent, but a noticeable decrease was found on January 25, with only 22 tweets using the #Yolocaust marker that day. Shapira tweeted a message offering to answer questions about the collection on January 26. This Twitter forum contributed to a significant spike in #Yolocaust usage on January 27, which came closest of all the subsequent days to match the usage total on January 18.

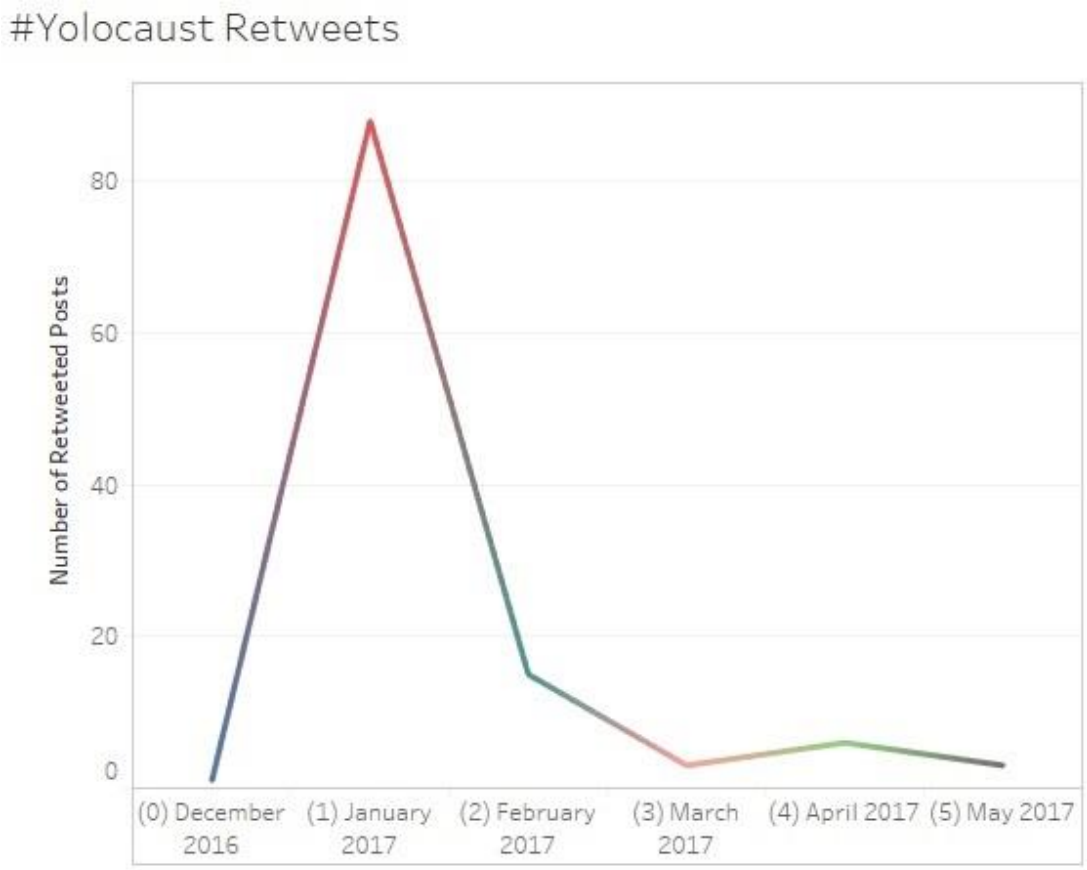

Figure 4.9: #Yolocaust retweets between December 2016 and May 2017.

As the original tweets circulated, retweets in figure 4.9 began to increase in a form that followed the summation pattern in figure 4.7 closely. As new content and commentary appeared on Twitter, successive recirculation process followed suit, almost in real-time. The recirculation peak in January showed the timeliness of online responses. As soon as the images were released, the conversation commenced, and retweeting matched these patterns. Unlike the #Jesuis retweets, some #Yolocaust retweets were more concerned with offering a wordless "ditto" rather than adding more to the conversation. Some of these wordless "dittos" hashjacked the conversation in socially problematic ways. They appropriated a trending topic via hashtag use and changed the subject (Chandler & Munday, 2016). However, retweeting, in this case, served more as a reinforcement rather than an additional contribution. The hashjacking drew on the symbol to reinforce already expressed sentiment.

Language in Response to Photographic Self-Centering

As more communicative content paired with #Yolocaust was submitted, the patterns established by the original tweets and subsequent retweets suggested the degree to which this collection of provocative images struck the viewer. The responses to these altered images, with their original forms alongside, demonstrated how invasive selfies can be, especially in a setting designed to memorialize the Murdered Jews of Europe.

This centralization of oneself in an incongruent frame was placed at the intersection of two competing ideologies. The first expressed ideology was one of self-pleasure, a perverse form at the expense of others. Shapira (2017) called out those who expressed this pose, which represented a distinct capture of this ideological fishbowl. Another ideology was concerned with maintaining the historical significance of the memorial's meaning. In their acknowledgement of their transgressions, this perspective was evident in the apologies of those seeking to be "undouched."

Yolocaust offered one example of how many have taken selfies beyond socially accepted limits. The succeeding conversation on Twitter offered thoughtful musings on the issue along with a side of trolling. Original tweet contributions using the #Yolocaust marker revolved around many themes about:

(1) Self-expression on the internet

(2) Appropriateness and respect both online and offline

(3) The importance of memorialization.

Self-expression on the internet took a different form, but the visual was still a maintained property in online social currency. Taking a selfie created a distancing. A user could not control what happened to an image after it left their hands. When it came to capturing images like those

included in the *Yolocaust* collection, intention was not always evident: "[I]n the celebrity-focused fabric of social media, they are involved in an arguably irrational quest for a notoriety of their own (paradoxically coupled with anonymity, real or perceived)" (Donnachie, 2015, p. 65). As the Yolocaust images became viral, viewers were not aware of the misguided thought process of the jumping man, for example. They simply saw the reconstructed image, an image that created its own signification. The unexpressed intentionality of the original photographers was likely the reason Shapira (2017) posted the jumping man's "undouche me" message: "That was not my intention. And I am sorry. I truly am." Yet, the caption, "Jumping on dead Jews @ Holocaust Memorial," was published by the jumping man when he posted the original image to social media. The fact that the original unaltered image was liked by 87 people demonstrated that others responded positively to the jumping man's "joke." Those likes expressed ideological sentiment, an emotional identification with mockery of murdered Jews.

With this in mind, the frequency of words used to justify self-expression in #Yolocaust tweets expressed what was important at the time. In early January 2017, the word *media* was used more often than *selfie*. In further examination of these tweets, media-focused messages were concerned with getting information out regarding the *Yolocaust* collection; whereas, selfie-focused messages served more as assessment and critique. *Foto* and photo, and their variants, were not used as often, and they did show a decline in broad term use. Rather than focusing on the act of photography in general, #Yolocaust tweets critiqued the centering of the subject in such scenes. Images of the memorial alone would not have the same resonance in online spaces, and they would likely go unnoticed on most, if not all, social media platforms. The inclusion of an authoring subject with the memorial as peripheral was at the center of this corpus, which explained the spike in the use of *selfie* in figure 4.10.

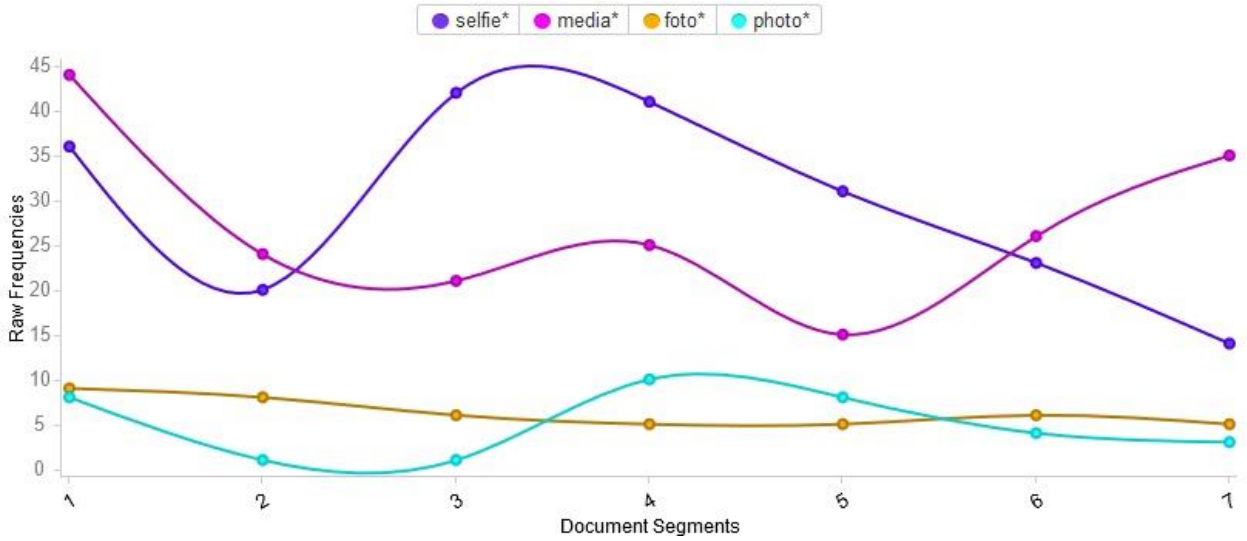

Figure 4.10: The frequency of specific terms in the #Yolocaust corpus, particularly *selfie*, *media*, *foto,* and *photo.*

Memorials have been categorized by the sense of respect that they yield (Mayo, 1988). As the #Yolocaust conversation progressed, the word *respect* was used in several languages, primarily in English, German, and Spanish. Although a great deal of conversation occurred in German, the English *respect* was used more than the German *respekt*. In fact, the Spanish *respeto* and its close variants were used two times more often than the German *respekt*.

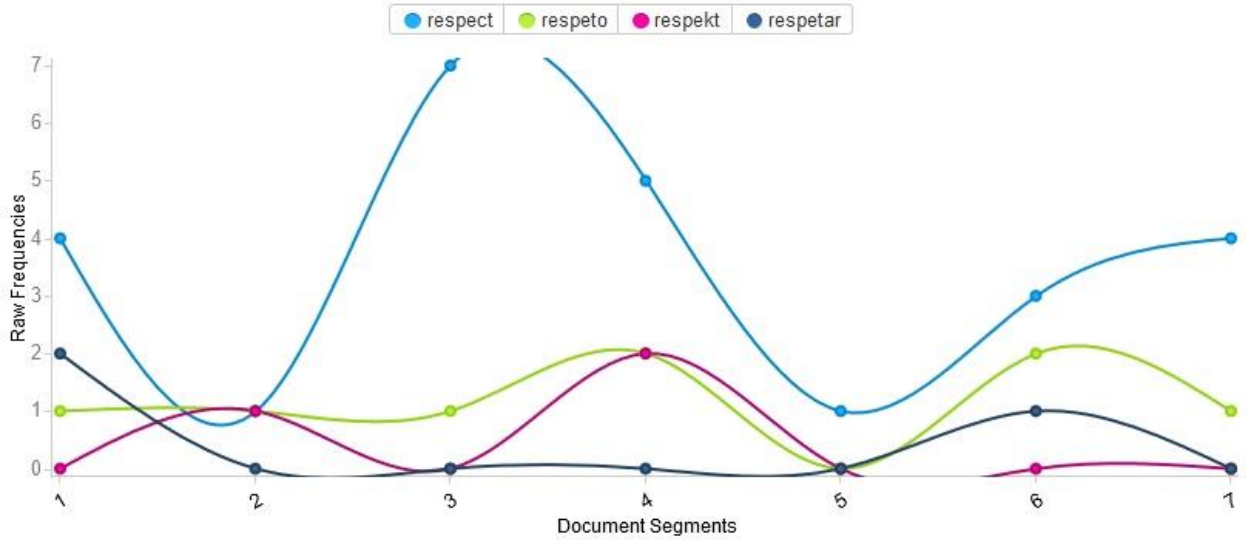

Figure 4.11: The frequency of specific terms in the #Yolocaust corpus, specifically *respect*, *respeto*, *respect*, and *respetar*.

Equally as notable, the terms *disrespect* and *disrespectful* and their English variants took a noticeable turn in use, and it was not until late-February and early March that *disrespectful* became a mapped term in the content. However, the most interesting aspect of this finding was that *disrespectful* was not used as frequently as its *respect* counterparts. With a raw frequency only reaching five at its peak, *disrespectful*'s minimal use signaled that other terms were used to suggest this connotation or one that is adjacent in meaning.

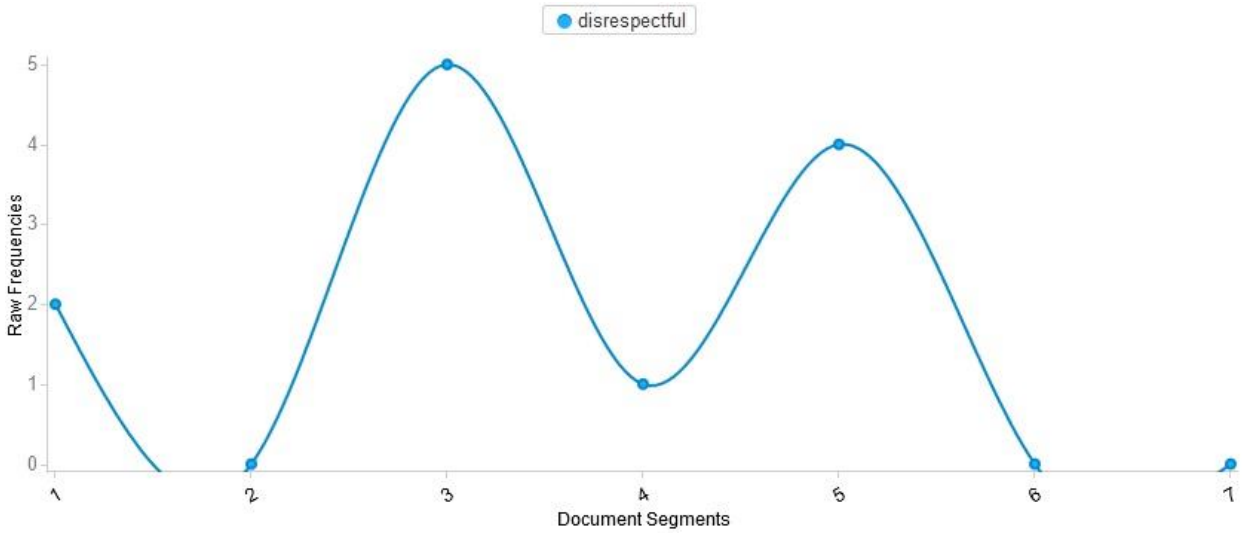

Figure 4.12: The frequency of the term *disrespectful* in the #Yolocaust corpus.

Revisiting the Memorial

Interpretations of what *Yolocaust* meant for the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin were notable. The context of these messages was important as well. In a multi-lingual conversation like #Yolocaust, the languages themselves shape interpretation. Of all the related terms, *memorial*, *erinnerungskultur*, and *mahnmal* were the most used descriptors. *Erinnerungskultur* is a German word that connotes the idea of remembrance culture, specifically in reference to World War II and acts of atonement by the German people. *Mahnmal* is the German word for memorial, and many tweets used this term alongside *erinnerungskultur*.

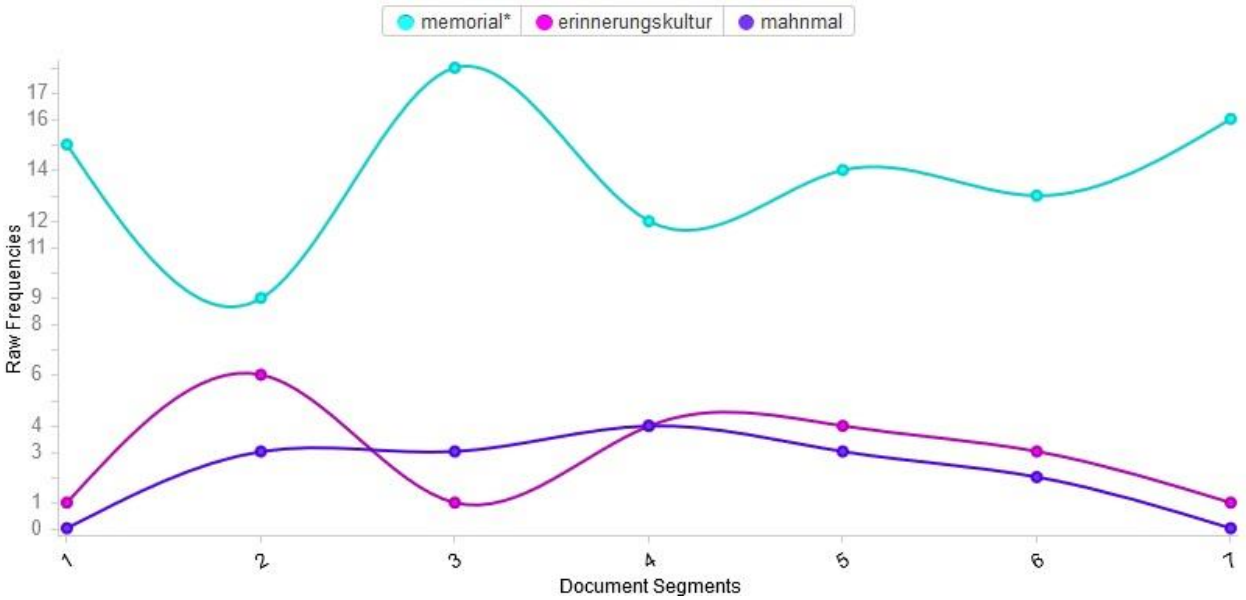

Figure 4.13: The frequency of specific terms in the #Yolocaust corpus, including *memorial, erinnerungskultur,* and *mahnmal.*

With a few minor peaks and valleys, *erinnerungskultur* and *mahnmal* had a use relationship, as evident in figure 4.13.

Although the #Yolocaust Twitter content originated in German via Shapira's post on January 18, the most common contributors to the discussion of memorialization spoke English. In fact, toward the end of May 2017, *erinnerungskultur* was tweeted once, and *mahnmal* lost favorability entirely. Instead, *memorial* continued to be a persistent point of conversation, with its only charted valley in January, when *erinnerungskultur* experienced its peak. In addition, *memorial*'s raw frequency low of nine still exceeded *erinnerungskultur*'s high of six.

These statistics offered some insight into the evolving ideological battle. While the original #Yolocaust frame was created in German, the primary contention over the term "memorial" and its meaning evolved in English. This may well have to do with the original posts being in English, indicating that the users who posted the pictures might well have been tourists from outside of Germany. As such, their reconstruction of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe as a public park in Berlin would have carried a further layer of

signification—the reconstruction of the memorial as a tourist park. As Boorstin (1987) and Baudrillard (1983) asserted, in many ways, reinforced tourism itself and reconstructed place as the tourist's domain. The tourist destination was recreated as a simulation of the original culture (Baudrillard, 1983). It was reconstructed into a fictionalized image of that culture, typically heightened with caricatures of the culture with the intention of selling that caricature as an experience for the tourist (Mangos, 2007). But, the experience remained the tourist's, owned by the tourist who has paid for the fictionalized culture. Natives become the marginalized other before they disappear into the simulation created in the image approved by the tourist.

The original tweets and images expressed the ideology of the tourist. The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe was deconstructed as a place of remembrance and reconstructed as a tourist experience. As a tourist experience, the memorial became a site for the (often English speaking) "native" (that is, tourist in a tourist site). It's relationship to its culture, history, or meaning disappeared into the tourist experience.

The forms in which we memorialize, and for whom, remained issues with which scholars have continued to grapple. However, those who participated also possessed a level of privilege, whether it was the privilege of time and/or internet access. That privileged experience created a struggle between competing ideologies. The #Yolocaust conversation illustrated this struggle. In this echo chamber, #Yolocaust largely won the struggle.

Monologic Data Spikes

Given the kind of rhetorical strategies evident in this dataset, a sense of communicative deviance emerged. The *Yolocaust* collection arose only two days before Donald Trump was sworn into office as the President of the United States. In far greater numbers than *disrespectful*, the terms *Trump* and *white genocide* appeared later in the Twitter messages. As the information

sharing continued, a wider audience became evident in the responses, and the term *Trump* increased to a high of 22 in raw frequency in late-May 2017. *White genocide* was a phrase not as common as *Trump*, but the popularity in terms of use appears to follow the same trajectory, albeit without the same plateau.

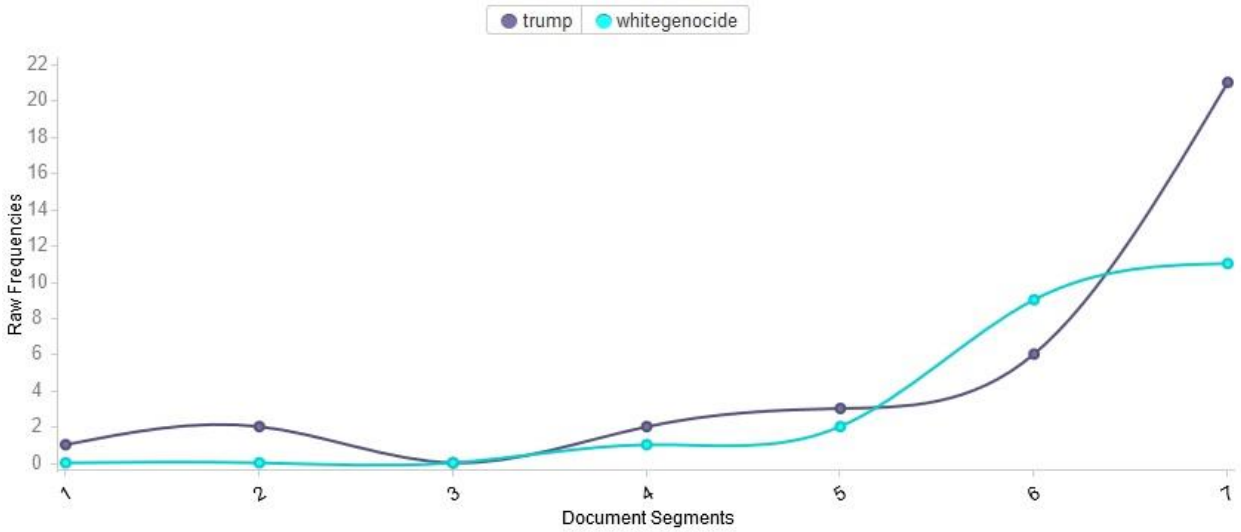

Figure 4.14: The frequency of the terms *Trump* and *white genocide* in the #Yolocaust corpus.

Even more provocative was the frequency of authorship. Although *Trump* as a term was dispersed among a group of users, only one contributed to the spike in *white genocide*. User Tom Tree jumped on the #Yolocaust conversation toward the beginning. The racist terminology used in messages only increased from there. Tom Tree described Africans and African Americans in a distasteful manner, and cited their mere existence as white genocide. Although this project has examined many problematic forms of communication, displaying these tweets would likely be too offensive to justify rewriting. Further, while they indicate the manner in which a conversation can be hijacked by subversive tweets, they move us off of our original analysis and focus us on a trend with a very limited life and audience. That said, Tom Tree showed how one can increase the visibility of bigoted language when the most highly trending hashtags were attached to them. Yet, despite the lack of interaction with Tom Tree's messages,

these messages, like the rest of those in this corpus, were permanent. Tom Tree's racist rants will be on the internet forever. Tom Tree's rants have become "missed connections" waiting on the social media shelves to be rediscovered by those who share the user's perverse values.

The longevity of a tweet will not change the fact that it was not redemptive. Tree's tweets indicate that speaking hate was the author's primary motivation. Speaking for speaking's sake, as Alhabash & McAlister (2015) would suggest, almost never leads to a committed audience. Tom Tree's racist ideology was apparent in the content of the tweets, but the author made no visible effort to start a dialogue. This monologue represented another point of missed connection, because other users were not invited to intervene and engage these claims. To distinctly examine this monologic approach, specific tweets were explored to provide complementary details for the raw data discussed above.

That said, the sudden spike in references to *Trump* are another indication that the #Yolocaust struggle continued to slide into a series of monologic trends among English speaking and, likely American users. The 2016 election created a new context for extending monologues on issues of race, freedom of speech and offensiveness. As #Yolocaust evolved within these broader cultural struggles, its language offered 2016 users a context in which to opine on the American presidential election and issues specific to the United States. These trends further separated #Yolocaust from its context, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. In fact, the memorial began to disappear in the redefined context of American politics.

You Only Live Once: Selections from the #Yolocaust Dialogue

On January 18, 2017, the main catalyst for the #Yolocaust conversation emerged in a simple tweet by Shahak Shapira:

Figure 4.15: Shahak Shapira introduced *Yolocaust*

"I have combined selfies from the Holocaust memorial with images from extermination camps," Shapira tweeted on January 18, followed by a link to his website. The message was retweeted over 2,500 times. Of those that remained public, many asked about the status of the "undouching" process. As the translated conversation in figure 4.16 illustrated, the "undouching" process happened in a matter of days. The first comment by Shapira was in response to a tweet that suggested the usefulness of the images and laments their disappearance from the *Yolocaust* website. The comments represented many tweets that circulated at the time, and they suggested the care that was needed in such a conversation, as user (((EricGuillaumin))) described in figure 4.16. Although Twitter had significant space limitations for response,[37] the users involved used what was available to them. In many cases, Twitter was merely a launching point.

[37] The 140-character limit at the time prevented much depth in tweets. Although the new 280-character limit helps, the length restriction makes it challenging to really make a social impact.

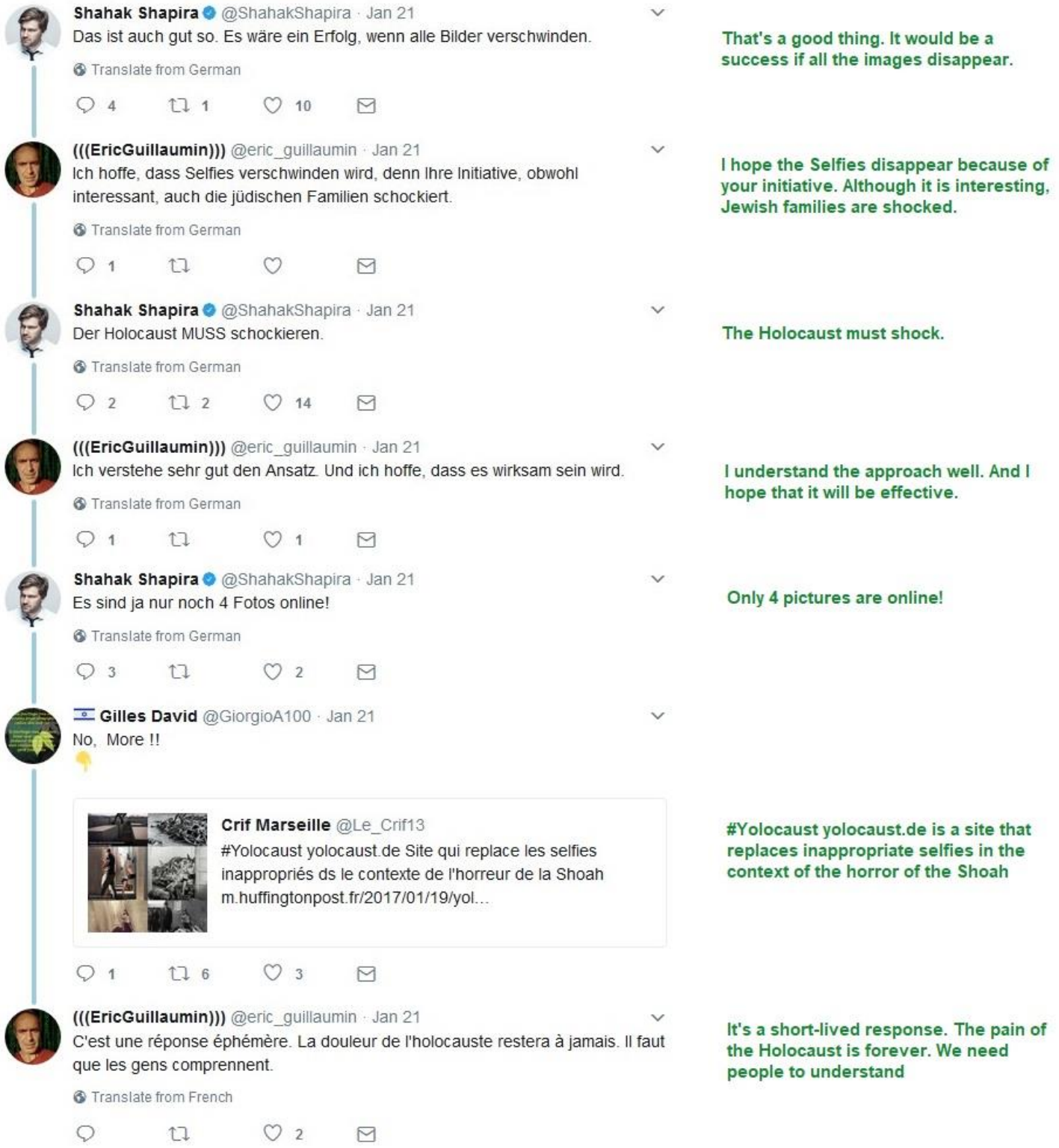

Figure 4.16: Comments on Shapira's image collection and responses to their disturbing nature. This is one of the few instances of semi-social content.

Figure 4.17: A tweet featuring an article about Shapira's work.

"What do selfies and photos of concentration camp prisoners have in common?" the tweet in figure 4.17 read, "@ShahakShapira joins them in #Yolocaust." The text in the attached image is a direct quote from Shapira, "You should go, look at it. The sun can also shine, you can have fun, but you should imagine what this monument stands for, and why it is there. Because it is not a 'happy place.'" Many #Yolocaust tweets followed the same ideological perspective, and like the #Jesuis dialogue, redirection was often necessary to gain greater comprehension and

meaning. Often, this was a challenge while Twitter maintained the limitation of 140 characters per tweet.

In contrast with #Jesuis, Yolocaust content was verbose and difficult to contain in the character limit imposed by Twitter. In most cases, users could not parallel the brevity of #IAmCharlie or #JesuisCharlie. Chain tweets worked around the length limitation. They were numbered to encourage viewers to read them in order.[38] When users responded to #Yolocaust with content beyond agreeing with Shapira's tweets, the full meaning of their messages was clearer than #Jesuis. More users felt compelled to explain rather than assume everyone agreed. Such an approach made these tweets more likely to be dialogic than monologic. But, very few tweets broke from the monologic status quo of Twitter. Shapira's tweets were the most engaged, because he was the equivalent of Boorstin's (1987) conception of celebrity in this case study. Shapira was the #Yolocaust equivalent of Coelho in #Jesuis. Rather than simply concluding with one tweet that announced the *Yolocaust* collection of images he released (See figure 4.15), Shapira continued to engage the Twitter community with additional dialogue (See figure 4.16 and 4.19). Other users used these tactics and attempted to create conversations of their own. However, no attempt at breaking free of monologue was nearly as fruitful as those which included Shapira.

[38] User Devenir meilleur(e) illustrated chain tweeting in figures 3.15 and 3.16

Figure 4.18: Farhi connected the *Yolocaust* collection with art.

"Excessively disturbing," suggested user Gabriel Farhi in figure 4.18, "but is this not also the function of Art?" The disturbing component was seen plainly in the altered image, but we could take Farhi's comment a step further. The context of the woman standing gleefully on the representative concrete slabs may be construed as equally disturbing as the dead bodies, even if their corporeal existence was not in the same visual plane that Shapira created. The meaning of the slabs was internment and death, and the *Yolocaust* collection created a visual connection with such meanings. Benjamin (1969) suggested a similar interpretation:

> "The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is

> jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object" (p. 221).

In other words, as visual communication was passed along to a large audience for an unrestricted time, like those in the *Yolocaust* collection, meaning and analysis could change. The immediate moment and internal noise could guide one toward a specific reading; whereas, other contexts might operate differently. This may be the reason that *intra*personal communication exists, but a duration of time is necessary for it to transpire.[39] When a writer is reunited with their own work years or decades later, it is "reactivated," according to Benjamin (1969), in a new setting. This creates potential for an internal re-reading of the message and the moment in which it was constructed.

As the *Yolocaust* collection gained popularity, Shapira offered a unique opportunity for Twitter users to engage with him:

Figure 4.19: Shahak Shapira offered to respond to questions from the Twitter community.

"Who would ask me questions about #Yolocaust and life itself?" asked Shapira, "At 21:30, they will be answered." A string of responses appeared, and Shapira answered many of them. The

[39] For example, if a writer were to read their own journal entry composed twenty years ago, it could be similar to reading someone else's work. Enough time has passed that the author may not remember writing the entry, they are far enough removed from the context that specific details are not readily available. In some cases, it can be both.

questions focused on Shapira's intention behind creating the collection. More often than questions, however, were comments like those in figure 4.20:

Figure 4.20: flrtvl's response to Shapira's open call for questions.

"No questions," responded user flrtvl, "Self-evident. Good thing." Beyond the tendency for tweets to take on the qualities of a news headline, what was most compelling about the content of the entire #Yolocaust corpus was the assumption of interpretation. Many tweets, like flrtvl's tweet (figure 4.20), took for granted the authoring user's interpretation. This was a unique example of monologue being disguised as dialogue. Even in 140 characters, it was clear that many agreed that Holocaust remembrance spaces and their original "intended" meaning should be upheld. Interpreted meanings that diverged from that intention were viewed as obscene. Yet, these interpretations were evident through photographic documentation (e.g., the transgressive selfies), which was what Shapira used as his starting canvas for the collection. Such absolutes could be accompanied with genuine questioning. For instance, should memorials for the Holocaust always serve as somber spaces? While this sort of question remained far beyond the reach of Twitter's monologic engagement, traces of such questions do appear. This line of inquiry may be best answered in a Twitter dialogue that occurred just one month before the *Yolocaust* collection's release.

Potential Inspirations for the *Yolocaust* Collection and Intended Meaning

Before a trend gained online notoriety, precursory messages contributed to its growth as a communicative phenomenon. Over a month prior to the release of the *Yolocaust* collection, three posts appeared using the #Yolocaust marker. It was unclear what influence, if any, this may have had on Shapira's formulation of the collection, but it did show #Yolocaust was not a new posting hashtag on Twitter.

"Is it normal that @SafiaVendome is posing, laughing, with her shoes on the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe?" asked user chiante in figure 4.21 below, "(Reminder: the Shoah = 6M[illion] dead)". The tweet by chiante gained some comments, but the conversation was difficult to follow without a hashtag in the original tweet.

Figure 4.21: chiante questioned the appropriateness of Safia Vendome posing in the stelae.

Many tweets that do not follow the metadata features can easily get lost in the virtual void. They make the inverse error of hashjacking and tweetjacking (Chandler & Munday, 2016). On Twitter, one must know where to look in order to follow a dialogue, and user Noctis Caelum offered this response to other users calling for a hashtag to mark relevant messages.

Figure 4.22: Noctis Caelum agreed with the use of #Yolocaust as a marker.

"Yes," responded Noctis Caelum, "I agree that it lacks a hashtag. #Yolocaust makes the whole thing credible." Others agreed, and they simultaneously suggested that visitors to sacred spaces such as the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe should follow a specific decorum. However, a smaller minority offered a different perspective, not one that was widely represented in the #Yolocaust dialogue that transpired a month later.

Figure 4.23: x_in_progress suggested an alternative perspective.
Another outlier of semi-social content.

"So much better if this place also generates laughs and games," wrote user x_in_progress, "A little life." This response was one that needed more consideration by the Twitter community and

should not have been disengaged in the #Yolocaust discussion in January 2017 and the months that followed.[40]

Summary of Findings

All the #Yolocaust tweets that experienced some degree of eWOM engagement from the Twitter community agreed with each other. In figure 4.20, user flrtvl made this point by suggesting the *Yolocaust* collection's purpose was self-evident. The vast majority of the tweets that gained comments and likes were those of *Yolocaust* creator, Shahak Shapira. Consensus made the ideological frame more apparent, because no alternative interpretation was publicly accepted in the Twitter conversation.

The space generated through Twitter consensus spoke to a unique form of situationism, which "maintains that people react to situations based on context rather than fixed psychological traits. Situations, and thus social order, are collectively produced by participants" (Marwick & boyd, 2010, p. 116). Although they were communicating with each other on the surface in this case study, the data presented evidence that this echo chamber broadened its scope. With only a few exceptions, a large portion of the tweets in the #Yolocaust corpus agreed with Shahak Shapira's photoshopped work and his framing of the selfies. It is likely that the echo chamber of this particular Twitter conversation continued to recycle itself. As more identical tweets recirculated, Yolocaust lacked the transactional process involved with communication (Marston, 2012). There were circumstances, however, where disagreement existed.

[40] It was not unlike the stories families in Western culture tell themselves after losing a loved one: They would not want us to be sad. They want us to be happy and laugh when remembering the good times. For Kittler (2006), "It is not the meaning of media to transmit meaning; rather, they are to pass on to the senses of others what would otherwise fade away in the present" (p. 57). Although Western cultural rituals surrounding the death of a person do not follow these recommendations often, this rhetorical device might offer an alternative to the "intended" interpretation of the Yolocaust collection and others like it.

User Tom Tree created a notable spike in the data through repeated use of the term *white genocide*, as illustrated in figure 4.13. The hyperbolic and racist language in the collection of tweets demonstrated how noisy the echo chamber can be. Whoever Tom Tree's intended audience was, they did not respond. Or, they might not exist in the first place. It is also possible that Tom Tree recognized the echo chamber for what it was and decided to tweet something offensive as a means to scream into the virtual void. It might be easy to dismiss Tom Tree as a troll, but the fact that one user can create a spike in data showed how powerful the number and numeral connection can be (Kittler, 2006).

Many other tweets in the #Yolocaust corpus were not significantly engaged in the Twittersphere, or at all. An overwhelming majority of these tweets did not resort to the tactics employed by Tom Tree. Instead, they served as similar points of missed connection as those discussed in the #Jesuis case study. The #Yolocaust content offered reasonable starting points for debate and discussion, but this potential was not realized.

Much can be gained from the disruption created by the *Yolocaust* collection and the reminder it offered in our political moment. "If current patterns hold, every effort to normalize the Nazi past will elicit defenses of its exceptionality," explained Rosenfeld (2015), "Debates will continue to erupt between the proponents of normality and morality. Nothing will be resolved. Dynamic deadlock may become the normal condition of memory" (p. 347). Because of the virtual guerilla tactics employed by Shapira, the Holocaust was brought to the forefront of Twitter content for a time, and it was prevalent enough to be a trending hashtag during peak #Yolocaust use in January 2017 (See figure 4.7). Shapira's disruptive use of real selfies taken at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe created space for political and historical conversation on Twitter, which did address Rosenfeld's (2015) concern with "dynamic

deadlock" (p. 347). However, #Yolocaust was only productive when most people shared the same ideological perspective reflecting the continued prevalence of ideological echo chambers. The content of tweets demonstrated this to be the case. #Yolocaust mirrored #Jesuis in this way. This "regulated improvisation" within ideological orientations, according to Bourdieu (1990), proposed an opportunity to break out of the feedback loop. However, that break most often led to posts and likes that reified standing ideological perspective. Even when users might have sought to break out of ideological echo chambers, the chambers remained powerfully resilient.

In answer to our larger query, Shapira's #Yolocaust posts did challenge a flow of images and tweets that expressed what we might call an ideology of the tourist. Those posts had created an ideological echo chamber in which the Memorial to the Murdered Jews in Europe was transformed into a tourist site for sport, fun, and self-promotion. Posts reflected a tourist's narcissism, recreating the tourist site as a space owned by the tourists who paid (through travel) to visit it. Few challenges had been offered to this ideology and, as the discussion of pre-#Yolocaust posts indicated, some users promoted this as a proper ideological frame for the site. Further, this reframing was not contradicted by the original artist's "vision." The vague core of the memorial, never clearly specifying intent or meaning, allowed users to recreate the site in their own ideological image.

Shapira's #Yolocaust successfully challenged this frame. Many of the original users targeted by his posts eliminated their original posts (seeking to erase the memory of their indiscretions) and asked a form of social media forgiveness ("undouching"). Yet, having been "undouched," they accepted the ideological frame Shapira placed on the images and reinforced those as normative. Once one ideological echo chamber had been challenged, those who

abandoned it leapt immediately to the opposing chamber, echoing its ideology even to the point of investing its rituals ("undouching") with concrete meaning.

To understand this phenomenon further, the third case study will explore geolocational manipulation as another means to show online solidarity. We have discussed written and photographic embodiments of ideology: #Jesuis discussed written forms of *I am,* and #Yolocaust visually demonstrated *I am*. However, rhetorical play with geographic online check-ins offered a spatial form of ideological projection worth exploring. In the third case study, #NoDAPL suggested alternatives for *I am here*.

Chapter 5

Standing Rock, #NoDAPL, and Geolocational Solidarity

"The valorization of individualism, domination, and linear progress within Western ontological orientations to the environment has reconfigured the contours of our soundscapes and problematized the meaning of 'environment,' as well as what it means to preserve it."
– Rachael Presley & Jason Crane, 2018, p. 308

"[T]he outcome of the 2016 US presidential election marked a critical passage for the NO DAPL movement. On 24 January 2017, the newly elected President Donald Trump signed an executive order that abruptly interrupted the dialogue
initiated by the Obama administration with the Water Protectors."
– Michele Martini, 2018, p. 4036

(Un)social media created challenges for geolocational markers. Ironically, the global positioning system (GPS) inherent in internet access tools (in particular, smartphones) would seem to offer social media a robust means to create and promote geolocational markers for ideological ends. However, the Dakota Access Pipeline controversy indicated some of the difficulties set ideological frames create for protesting governmental repurposing of locations that hold cultural significance.

When using the check-in function on social media and in related content, users employing #NoDAPL, or No Dakota Access Pipeline, manipulated geolocational markers to advance support for a preexisting ideological position. #NoDAPL was another echo chamber like #Yolocaust in the online space where it began. It reified existing sentiment but could not break through ideological barriers. The social potential of this phenomenon was only realized offline. However, the echoed content on Twitter grew as the news about the Dakota Access Pipeline began to spread.

Dakota Access Protests

On the back of a white horse, a man was riding in mid-stride on the grass emblematic of the Great Plains in the United States. A tattoo was visible on his back, and the design possessed a curvature mirroring the grace with which the horse walked. A darker hued horse bayed on the right, and its mouth was open perhaps in a sign of resistance to something outside of the frame. Still more horses circled the vicinity, but none of them were calm. "I believe it is the beginning of a civil rights movement in America," said Larry Towell, the photographer of the described image, "Only it involves a different ethnic minority" (Wehelie, 2016). Towell was referring to the protest against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, which impeded on Sioux reservation land. The men described earlier on horseback were showing their support for the cause. In a show of solidarity, Native Americans and supporters from all over the United States converged on the Oceti Sakowin Camp on reservation land. According to Martini (2018), the protesters called themselves protectors. This name carried a positive connotation. They were not fighting oil companies or the United States, they were protecting Native American culture. The protestors demanded protection for the surrounding Native American community:

> "Their demand was motivated by the fact that, according to their claims, the construction of the oil-pipeline would both pose a grave danger to the water supply in the area (Missouri River) and defile terrains held sacred by Native Americans. The number of protesters grew exponentially during summer 2016, leading to the creation of two additional camps. As a whole, the No DAPL movement represented the largest gathering of Native American tribes in more than 100 years" (Martini, 2018, p. 4036).

Sioux activists were troubled by the construction of a controversial oil pipeline, which they said would interrupt their way of life. "The Dakota Access Pipeline is a 1,172-mile underground

conduit that would transport some 470,000 barrels of crude oil a day—stretching across North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, and Illinois," wrote Wehelie (2016), "It's a $3.78 billion investment by Dakota Access, a subsidiary of Energy Transfer Partners." As part of the construction plans approved by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the land adjacent to the reservation was to be used as an operation center. The construction project involved installing the pipeline under the Missouri River, which was the primary source of drinking water for Standing Rock Sioux. Reservation leaders asserted that they were not consulted properly during the planning process, and both their sacred tribal grounds and access to natural resources were threatened (Wehelie, 2016).

As their plight began to make headlines, social media quickly responded. Facebook implemented a work-around on the locational status updates available to users, so people could indicate that they were "at Standing Rock" even when they were not physically present there. Over one million people made this online move, according to Kennedy (2016). They "checked in" from Standing Rock even though they were not there. Users identified two purposes for taking this virtual step:

(1) To throw off police officers, who were believed to be monitoring social media, so they would think more people were physically present at the protest than were actually there.

(2) To show solidarity with the protesters' cause.

However, despite the sheer quantitative data available publicly on Facebook, little deviation from these two stated purposes was offered by users. The earliest check-ins on Facebook demonstrated an adherence to the first purpose of manipulating the check-in process. Further, they indicated a strong belief that users were foiling the plans of law enforcement due to

conflicting information coming out of the protest site (Worland, 2016). Shortly thereafter, the goal of posting shifted to enacting solidarity with Sioux activists. Confusing local police diminished as a goal. The majority of check-ins in the latter moments of online activism were concerned with this second articulated purpose.

Although many of the check-in posts originated on Facebook, the largest volume of content on the subject occurred on Twitter. Twitter had a greater potential for increasing the visibility of tweets due to its accessibility by users other than those in one's friendship circle and the platform's emphasis on "free expression" ("Twitter Values," 2018). Though confusing the police and straight-forward proclamations of agreement were points of advocacy on Twitter, its limitation of 140 characters[41] did not hinder further discussion beyond the purposes advocated on Facebook. In fact, this very public space became another arena for supposed debate, as it had in the previous two case studies.

To best categorize the available data, three major hashtags were used by Twitter users: #NoDAPL, #StandingRock, and #WaterisLife. Of these hashtags, #NoDAPL was used most frequently in original tweets, and it was the most recognizable hashtag due to its trending status. #NoDAPL, or No Dakota Access Pipeline, was tweeted 25,640 times over the span of a year between March 2016 to March 2017. During that same period, 12,681 original tweets included the #StandingRock marker, with the general focus being the geographic solidarity implicated in the second articulated purpose described above. #WaterisLife was originally tweeted 21,223 times, and on its own, this hashtag was most explicit about the dangers presumably faced by Standing Rock Sioux.

[41] This was the case at the time. As mentioned before, the limit is now 280 characters.

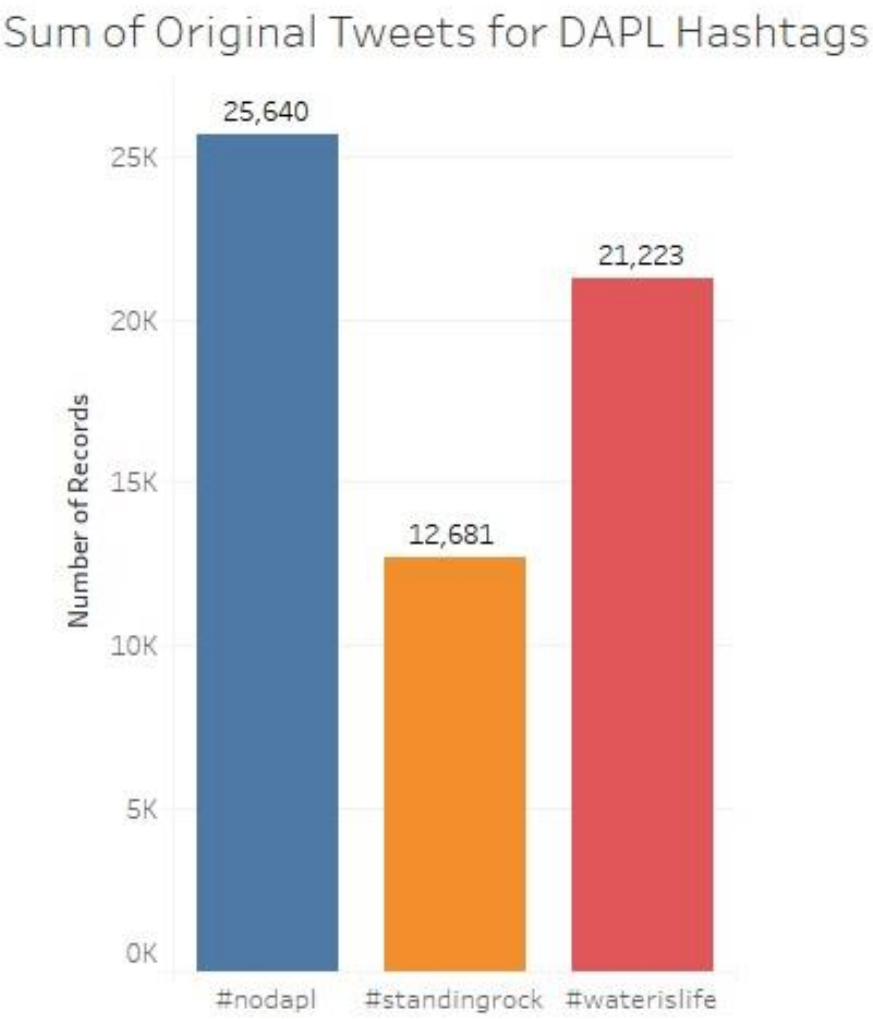

Figure 5.1: Original tweets for No DAPL related hashtags

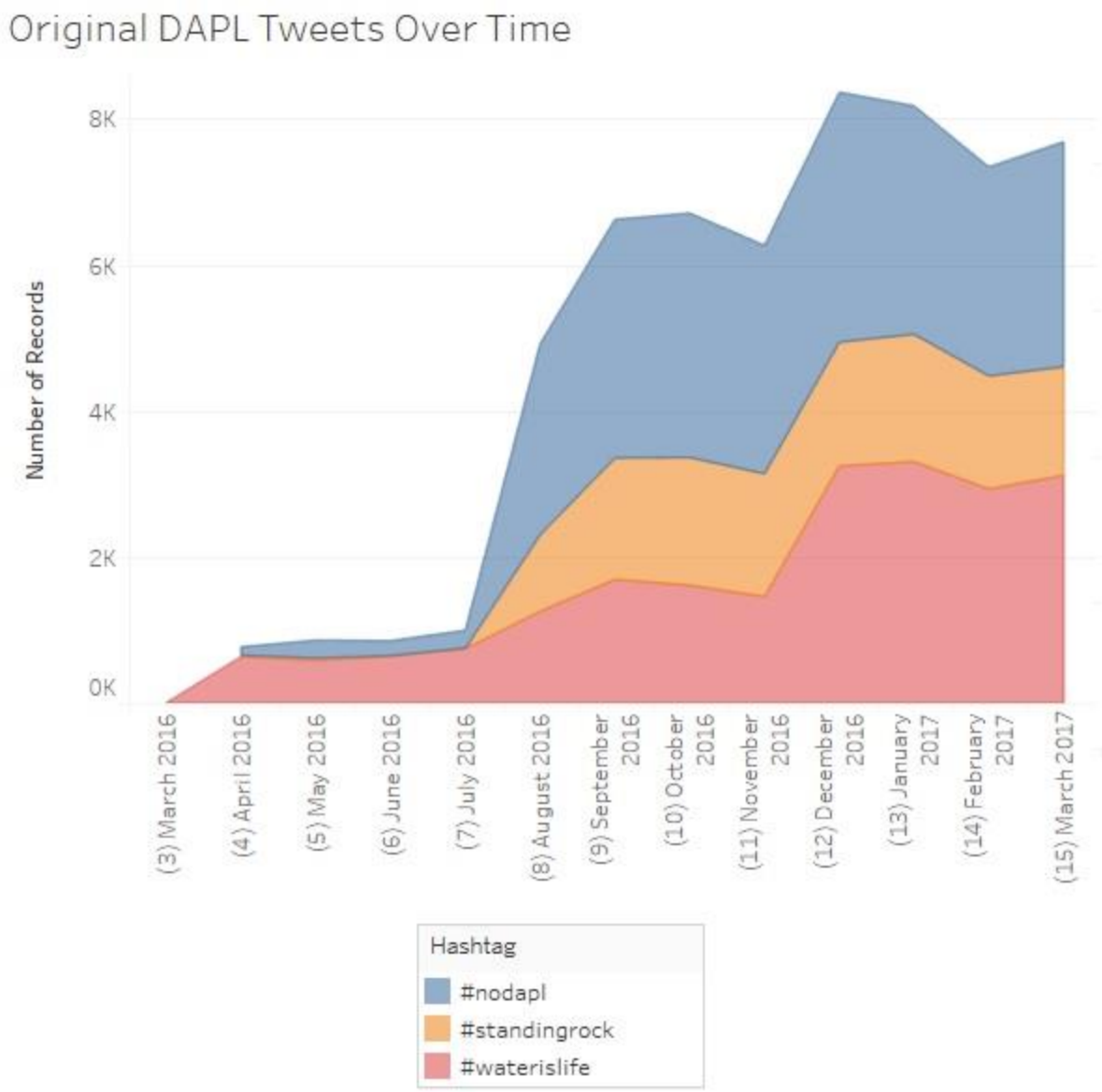

Figure 5.2: Tweets using the No DAPL related hashtags between March 2016 – March 2017.

Figure 5.2 represented a telling composition of the degree to which this topic trended over the year from March 2016 to March 2017.

Of the three major hashtags, #WaterisLife was used first. Earlier posts were not uniformly focused on the pipeline debate, but #WaterisLife served as a preexisting marker to start the debate about Standing Rock. #NoDAPL made its first appearance in April 2016, and it continued to grow alongside the momentum established by #WaterisLife. In fact, many posts

that include #WaterisLife from this period were often paired with #NoDAPL. In this instance, the prevailing popularity of one hashtag supported the growth of another, and in turn, #NoDAPL became the most recognizable phrase associated with Sioux activists' movement via the trending list on Twitter. In July 2016, #StandingRock emerged as a stand-alone hashtag, despite its use in non-hashtag forms in preceding months. As the Twitter conversation became more pointed and protests continued to mount, the raw numbers for original tweets using all three of these major hashtags reached a peak in December 2016. Although that high was not reached again in this dataset, it remained elevated through the early months of 2017. As indicated by Worland (2016), the escalating tensions between pro-pipeline representatives and Standing Rock protesters were evident in these respective jumps in frequency on Twitter.

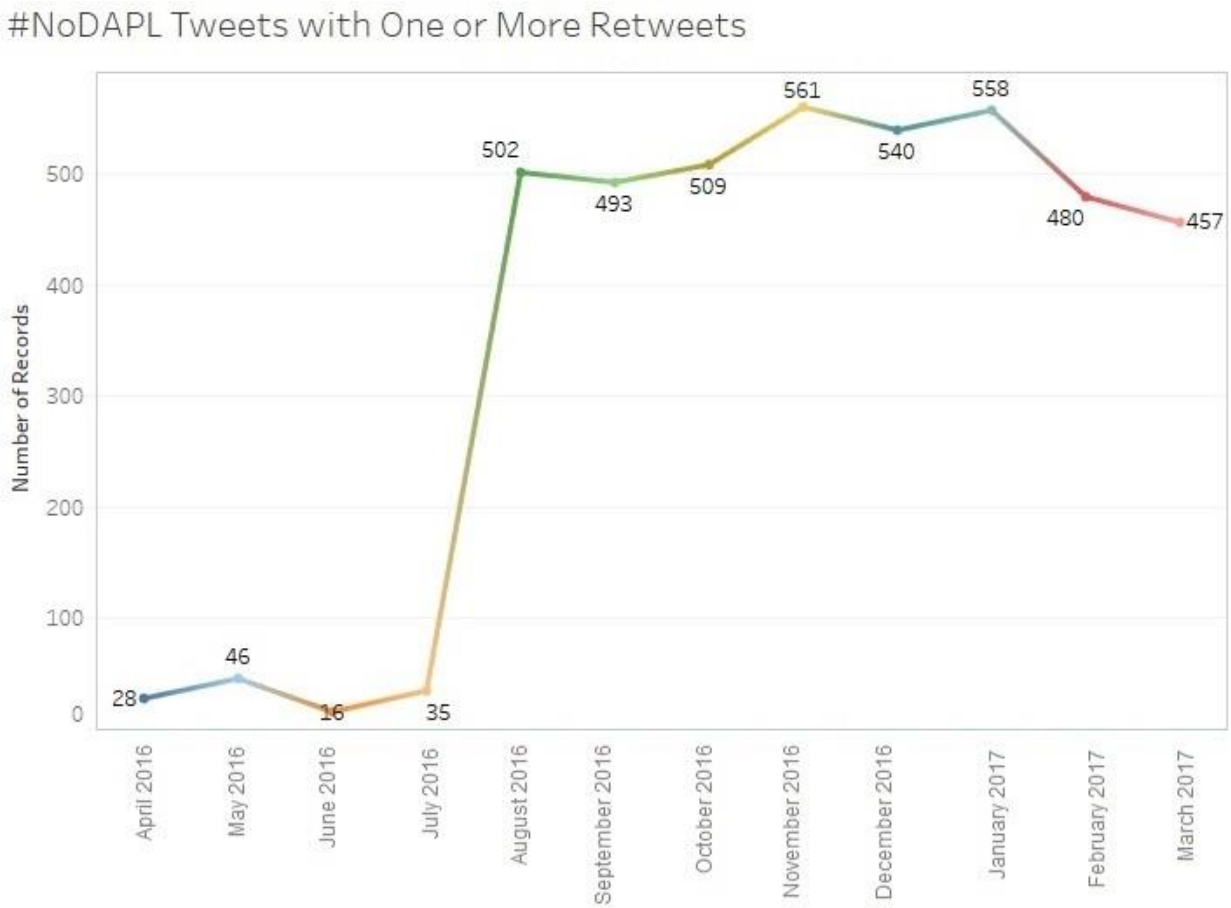

Figure 5.3: Retweets of #NoDAPL content.

In addition to original tweets, retweets had a significant quantitative impact on the Twitter content. Beginning with the hashtag that many associated most strongly with the movement, #NoDAPL, retweets made little contribution in the earlier months of the dialogue, which was not surprising given the trajectory this hashtag set with original tweets. The jump in #NoDAPL retweets was striking between July 2016 and August 2016, where the raw number of retweets increased over fourteen times. The retweeting power remained consistent between August 2016 and March 2017. It reached its highest peak in November 2016, with January 2017 coming in a close second. As evident in figure 5.3, the potential for retweets to impact the virtual conversation should not be underrated, even those that hashjack and/or tweetjack (Chandler & Munday, 2016).

Retweets of #WaterisLife in figure 5.3. followed a different pattern than original tweets in figure 5.2. Instead, the #WaterisLife retweets followed a semi-linear pattern representing a quantitative increasing function, with a slight drop off in March 2017. #WaterisLife retweets reached a summit in February 2017, which was the latest among all three of the major hashtags associated with this debate. These retweets also suggested why #NoDAPL achieved trending status over #WaterisLife. Although they differed in frequency with respect to original tweets, #NoDAPL was retweeted a total of 4,225 times over the year's span; whereas, #WaterisLife was retweeted 1,721 times. #NoDAPL's retweets were almost two and a half times that of #WaterisLife. #WaterisLife made an important contribution to the Dakota Access online content, but tweets with this hashtag were not recirculated quite as fully as its counterpart.

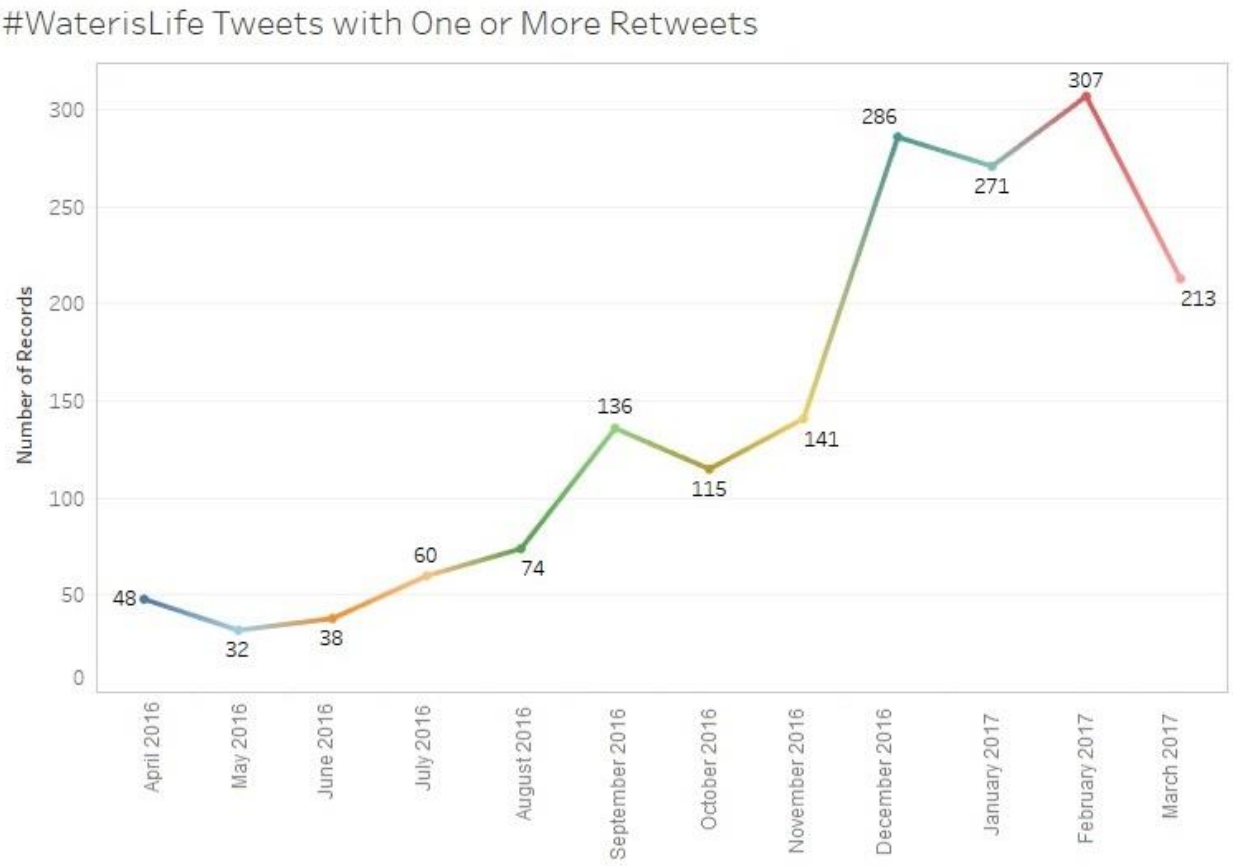

Figure 5.4: Retweets of #WaterisLife content.

The #StandingRock marker experienced less recirculation than #NoDAPL as well, and it was retweeted a total of 1,475 times over the year's span. As discussed earlier in figure 5.2, #StandingRock had a slower start to its contributions of original tweets, and this pattern was reflected in its subsequent retweets. One of the dramatic shifts in this hashtag's retweet visualization occurred between June 2016 and July 2016, where it moved from only a singular retweet to 118. This notable shift continued a near-linear path upward, and retweets for #StandingRock reached a peak in November 2016. These numbers showed the emerging and sustained interest in Sioux activists' debate, and the content of these tweets revealed interesting commentary across media platforms. The act of marking oneself at a different geographic

location on Facebook was not simply an act undertaken by hackers anymore, and Twitter offered space for public response to these virtual check-ins in ways that the former platform did not.

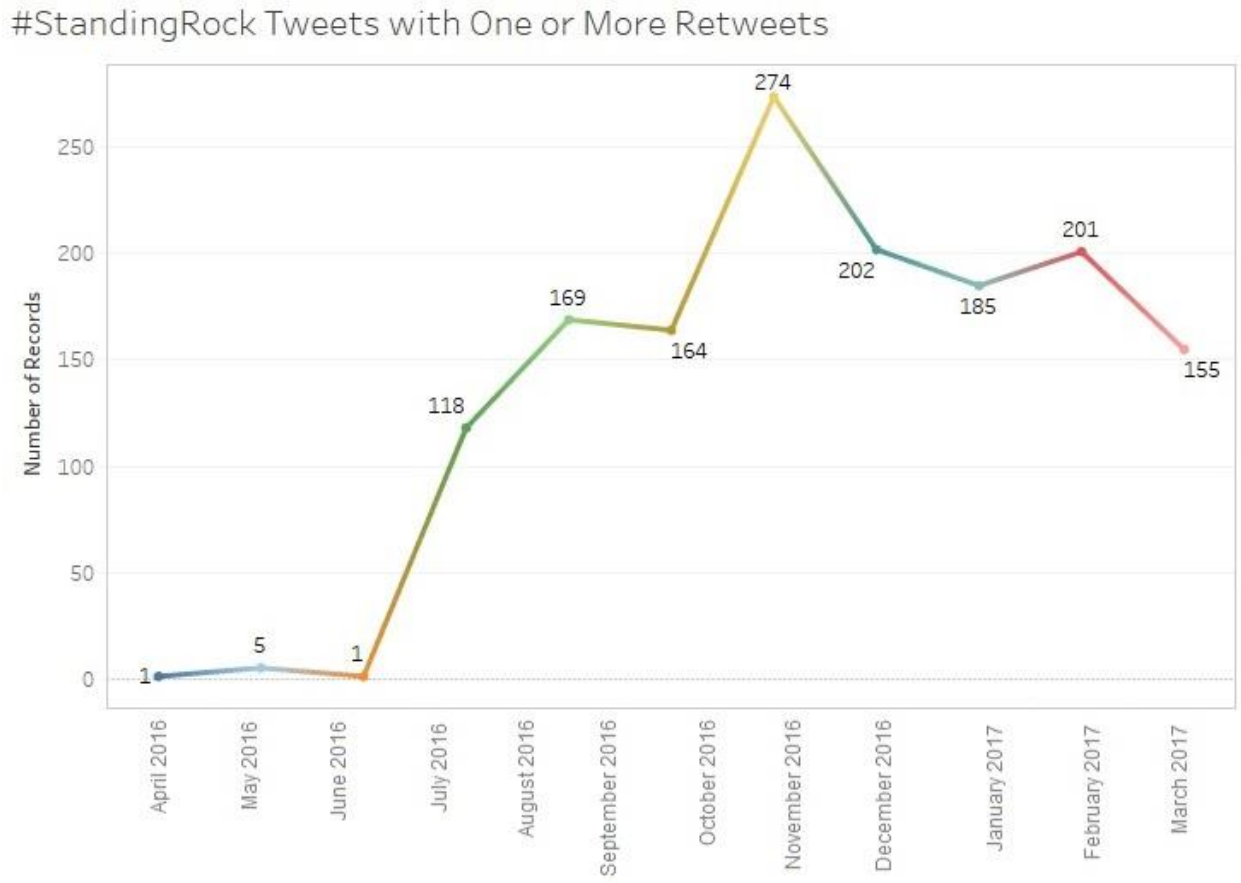

Figure 5.5: Retweets of #StandingRock content.

It may seem contradictory for a platform with character limits to communicate deeper messages than those with seemingly endless communicative space, because such limits would trim content and additional talking points that would otherwise be there. However, as the prior case studies established, the public nature of these tweets were indicative of the unrealized communicative potential of this medium. To illustrate quantitatively how this potential was realized in the Dakota Access Pipeline debate, the frequency of terms used will lend valuable insight about the areas of interest for users.

Figure 5.6: Frequency of word use in the No DAPL corpus.

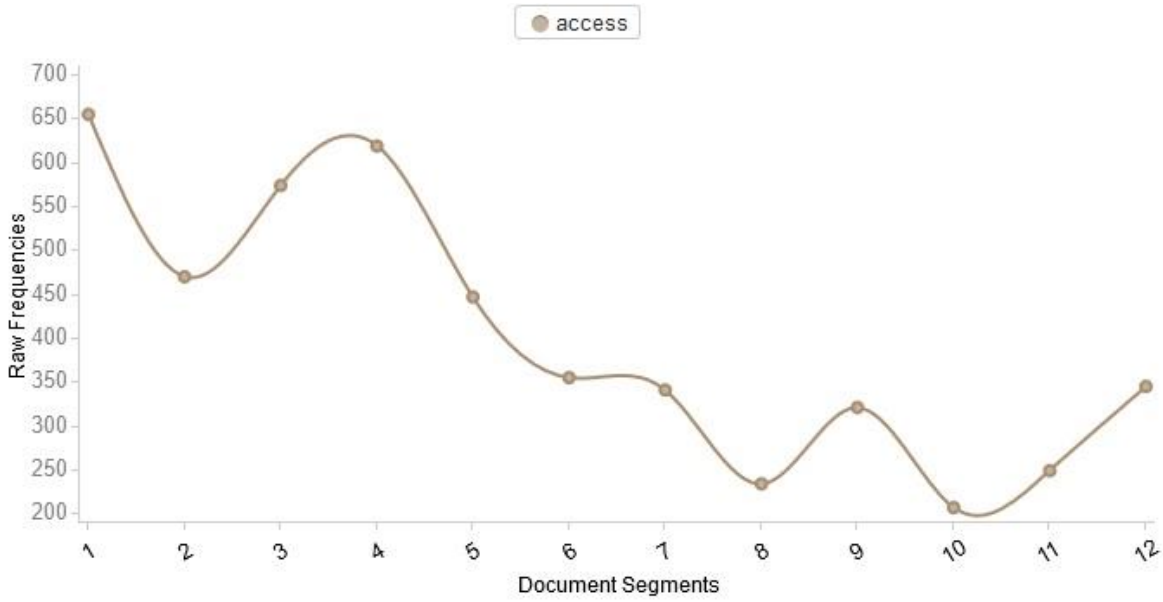

Figure 5.7: The frequency of the term access in the No DAPL corpus.

Standing with Standing Rock: The Content of Responses on Twitter

Of the 59,544 messages in the Dakota Access Pipeline corpus, certain sentiments gained traction, as evident in the retweets and replies they received. The terms in figure 5.6 show the frequency of word usage among the tweets that used one or some combination of #StandingRock, #NoDAPL, and #WaterisLife.

Access. Not surprisingly, the word *access* was used most often (See figure 5.7). Overall, *access* had a significant impact in terms of frequency with 4,805 individual uses. However, it experienced the greatest surge in the summer months of 2016, and it began to taper off in the latter part of 2016 and early 2017. This shift was notable. As we will see in an analysis of other major terms in the discussion, *access* remained part of the content. Instead, other words were used in its place, and this deliberate word choice clarifies specific priorities in *access* that users identified and discussed.

Some tweets used *access* as part of the Dakota Access moniker, while others used it for different purposes. Many tweets were concerned with *access* in terms of available drinking water for Standing Rock Sioux, *access* to sovereign tribal lands, and *access* to meaningful protest. In one such tweet, user Crick in the Holler discussed the importance of access to clean water (See figure 5.8). This message was among the many that criticized the building of the pipeline as destructive of the natural resources, which a small group of tweets initially denied. The image accompanying Crick in the Holler's tweet was on location at the protest, and the look on the woman's face captured the distress the tweet expressed.

Figure 5.8: Crick in the Holler's call for resources.

This tweet and the broader focus on *access* spoke to the theme of empathy expressed in the #Jesuis debate. The Nawak tweet in figure 3.25 (in chapter 3) expressing solidarity with the Danish impacted by a terror attack followed a pattern similar to that of Crick in the Holler in figure 5.8. Nawak focused on promoting empathy as a means to connect with others. The notion of an *access*ible Twitter resonated with the call to action posed by both users. *Access* should not be the private domain of corporate or political powers. It should, according to the trend, be available to all.

News. In addition to *access*, *news* was the second-most used term in the Dakota Access corpus, as demonstrated in the cirrus cloud in figure 5.6. *News* was mentioned 3,771 times in the

corpus, and it experienced the greatest spike toward the central point in the timeline during the 2016 United States Presidential Election. As could be expected (and as occurred in the #Yolocaust trend) politically charged content increased during this period. As tensions mounted at the protest site, sharing *news* became a central focus.

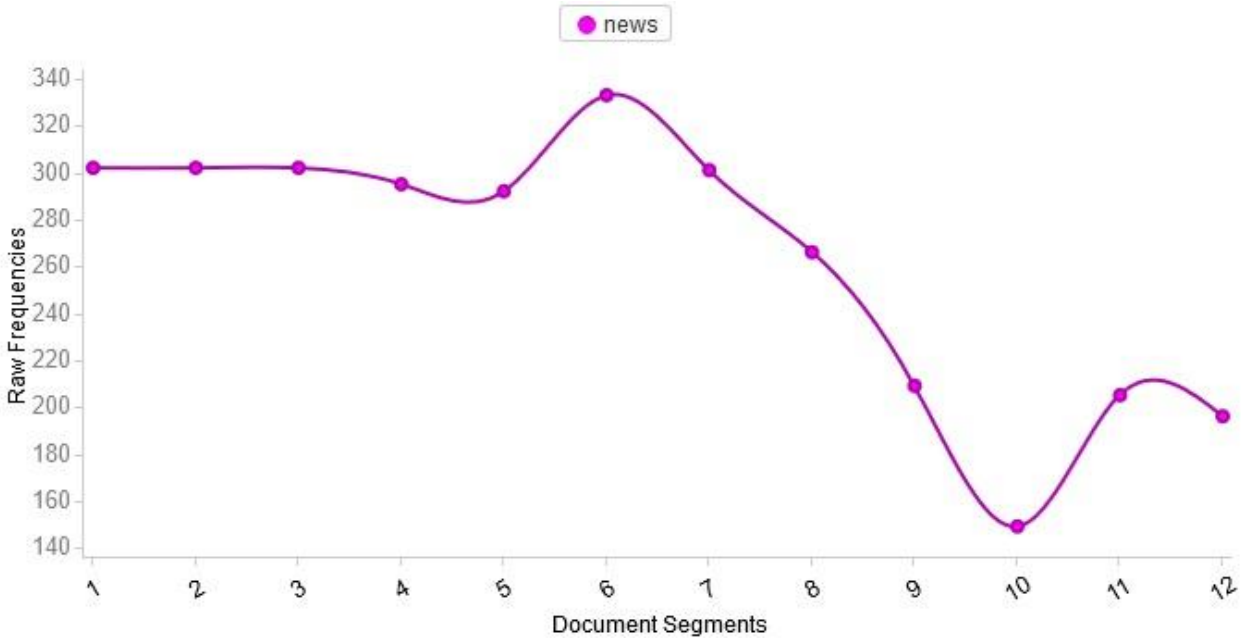

Figure 5.9: The frequency of news in the No DAPL corpus.

The drop-off of news sharing occurred shortly after the construction resumed on the site at Cannon Ball, North Dakota in December 2016 (Worland, 2017). With protestors being forced away from the construction site, limited news was available to be shared, and a great deal of mainstream media no longer focused on the debate. Twitter users did not end the conversation, but the content shifted dramatically.

At its peak, the term *news* was used in its literal sense, as many tweets were centered on spreading information about what was happening at the protest site and communication from officials and activist leaders. Like #Jesuis and #Yolocaust, users focused on spreading information and emerging details. Many tweets using this term were accompanied by links to

articles from news outlets like *Huffington Post, Washington Post, New York Times,* and *Los Angeles Times,* among others.

Figure 5.10: McCann's link to a *Huffington Post* article.

Although some tweets covered first-hand accounts, they were fewer in number than those found in the #Jesuis case study. Instead, signs of support for Sioux activists were represented through linked articles within tweets that supported their perspective. Kevin Patrick McGann's post in figure 5.10 was one of many that shared the story about the challenges experienced by Native Americans. In the article widely circulated for over a year after it was written, Giago (2015) wrote about the sentiment and problematic reporting of the different encounters involved:

> Firsthand [Ed Schultz of MSNBC] witnessed the absolute determination of the Indian nations to stop construction of the Pipeline. He witnessed their determination and reported on it. Except for Schultz the national media shows no interest and apparently

> has no knowledge of how the Indian people feel about the Pipeline nor do they comprehend that they will go to their deaths stopping it. What is wrong with the national media when it comes to Indians? As an example of the national media's apathy, the Lakota, Nakota and Dakota have turned their backs on the $1.5 billion dollars offered to them for settling the Black Hills Claim and although they are among the poorest of all Americans, the national media does not consider this news (Giago, 2015).

The lack of interest shown by journalists was most striking in Giago's (2015) piece. These claims persisted in much of the content on Twitter in the months following its release. In fact, McGann tweeted the article link almost two full years after its release.

Giago (2015) and many other opinion writers were sources of support for many Twitter users' arguments. So, a lot of the tweets with the word *news* carried links to articles by writers such as Giago (2015). Though, sometimes they did not have any citations at all. In those cases, the users seemed to assume the story and sentiment were sufficiently clear that readers did not need a full explanation. Such was the case with a tweet posted by user Mantas Ališauskas.

Figure 5.11: Ališauskas describing access to clean water.

As part of an activist message regarding water preservation, Ališauskas' tweet uses an unattributed statistic. As a straightforward assertion, the message is certainly alarming. However, readers must presuppose the accuracy of these statistics without citation or authoritative support. Although Twitter and other social media platforms are not known to be bastions of cited academic research, they do have their own standards for "reasonable" arguments. These are constituted of user-generated rules and culturally dictated norms.

Ališauskas' tweet in figure 5.11 used shocking statistics, which could be repeated in everyday conversation without attribution. Given Twitter's limit at the time of 140 characters per tweet, users had to be selective about what they included in their messages. Those limitations helped create a cultural norm in which unattributed statistics might well be taken at face value, users assuming the poster did not have the space to include a full reference. Had this occurred during the September 2017 pilot and subsequent implementation of the new 280-character limit, perhaps sourcing would have been more likely and expected (Collins, 2017). It is hard to know for certain, but future iterations of this research may generate further insight.

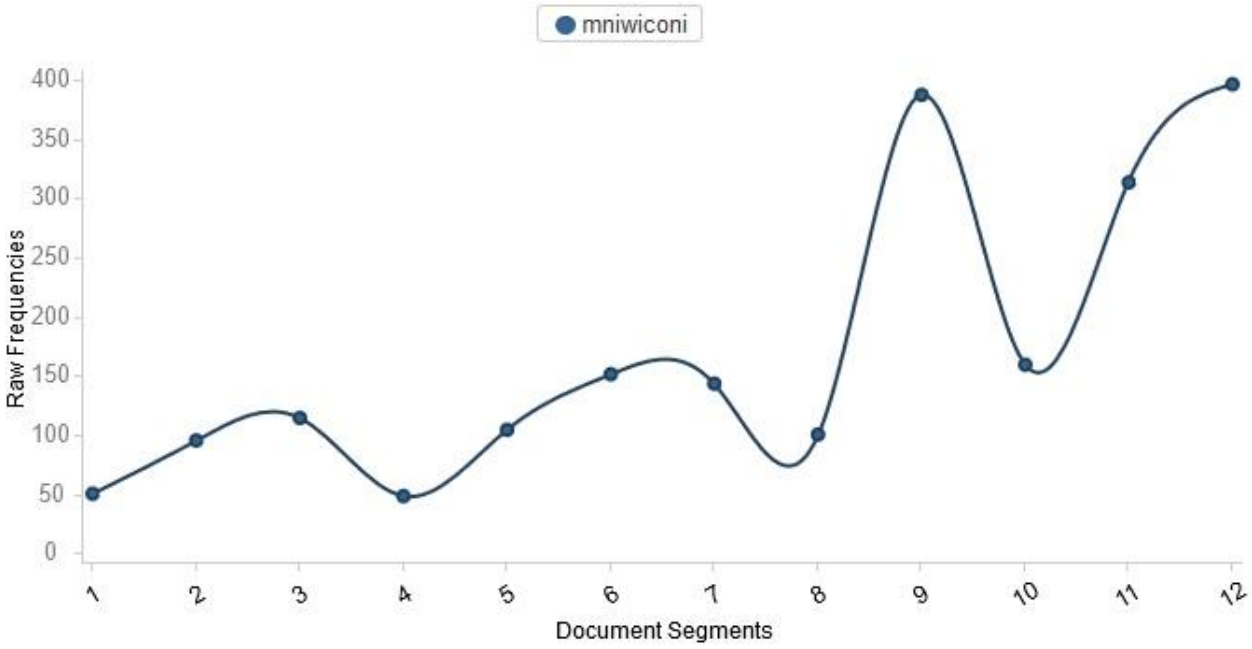

Figure 5.12: The frequency of Mni Wiconi in the No DAPL corpus.

Mni Wiconi. **"**Water is life," in Lakota is, "*Mni Wiconi*." The phrase was used 2,060 times in the corpus. It was often paired with its English counterpart #WaterisLife, and the frequency with which *Mni Wiconi* was used followed the same trajectory as #WaterisLife shown in figure 5.4. The most common use on Twitter omitted the space between the words, to accommodate hashtag form. The focus on water rights as a major issue was a point at which

access was replaced; *Mni Wiconi* narrowed the focus to a specific issue, among many possibilities expressed in the Twitter conversation.

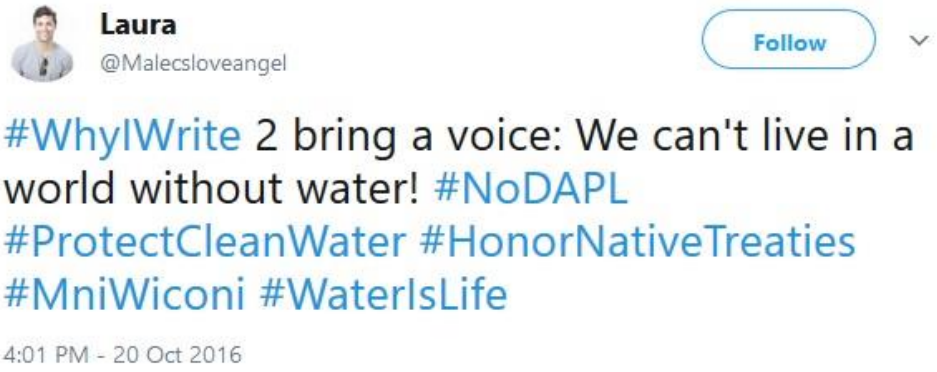

Figure 5.13: Laura's tweet about water access.

Access to clean water is critical to human life, and activism during the height of this protest was organized primarily around this issue. Strange (2011) described this centralizing process as indicative of success in online social movements. "Networks of advocacy groups that cross national borders have become recognized as bringing both new actors and interests to global politics," wrote Strange (2011), "It is through an interactive process that activists identify their campaign target/s and develop a common vocabulary by which the network actors may frame their collective action" (p. 1238). #WaterisLife and *Mni Wiconi* gained prominence in the dialogue when a collective vocabulary became evident. These practices were crucial to gaining traditional viral status. Once achieved, these hashtags appeared as part of the worldwide trending list on Twitter. Exposure on such a list promoted the existing conversation and increased the likelihood that further contributions from new actors would emerge, and additional content would follow. As we can see in the prior visualizations, that likelihood became a reality.

Figure 5.14: Goldenburg offered skills as a resource.

The Online Reality of First-Person Statements

The Twitter Dakota Access conversation rendered a great deal of insight beyond the *I am here* indicators of Facebook check-ins. However, the solidarity demonstrated on both Facebook and Twitter suggested an alternative to the physical meaning of arrival. In other words, when one said they were *here* online, they meant something different than proximity. In figure 5.14, user Goldenburg described how they might contribute to the cause, and how their *access* to graphic design skills gave them a sense of presence. In the message, "I am here to help," Goldenburg replicated the patterns of the #Jesuis movement. This position offered more insight into the ideology at play, and it was one that supported a particular view of online solidarity.

Goldenburg's statement was at odds with but also simultaneously similar to references to the presence of a person at the site. The person writing the tweet was still *there*, in the sense that

the content was created by him/her/them. A person was behind the screen and typing on the keyboard. But when the message was transmitted for public view, the person's physical intervention was lost. This resulted in "a strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance . . . of a distance, however near it may be" (Hansen, 2012, p. 106). When others read the content tweeted by the user, the person did not need to be physically available for the tweet to have meaning. After submission, presence in the physical sense was actually unnecessary and unwarranted. The content was readily accessible to anyone with an internet connection.

The entire process of "virtual presence" in the #NoDAPL postings bore a striking resemblance to the casting of place in the #Yolocaust posts. Where the original user content that became #Yolocaust posts reframed the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe as a sort of Disney-park for tourist play, #NoDAPL posts reframed the figures within the tweet frame. Users who placed themselves virtually at the site recreated themselves as present protesters in a virtual world. The actual site of dispute disappeared into a virtual site in which protesters could gather to "stand up" in a political pose. The users never had to travel or put themselves in danger of arrest or assault. The protest lived wholly within a virtual world. Like tourists who seek "adventure" that is safe and leaves them at a comfortable hotel, these virtual protesters sought to present themselves as making a "dangerous" political stance, placing themselves within the front lines of protest from within the comfort and safety of their own air-conditioned homes (Boorstin, 1987). In this manner, virtual protesters became tourist protesters, reframing the site of protest as a travel adventure at which they "played" protesters without the physical discomforts or dangers of actual protest activities. The original site of protest was first hidden by then disappeared behind the users' simulacrum of protest (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 6).

Figure 5.15: Sol Hog described the Protectors.

Another way to consider the aura in this sense was to contemplate the notion of first-person as an expanded category (Benjamin, 1969). In the Dakota Access corpus, there was evidence of self-reflexivity on a broader level. As a negotiated process, many of the tweets were concerned with how the protests were framed to the non-participating public, as demonstrated in figure 5.15. User Sol Hog's tweet established one specific instance for centralization and organization, and a conscious effort to acknowledge the aura that was projected in this debate. Hog addressed Global Goals, an environmental organization focused on similar priorities as the #NoDAPL Twitter contributors. In this respect, aura was also a gaze or a "form of perception" that has the "ability to look back at us" (Hansen, 2012, p. 106).[42] The presence of aura was complicated in online communication, but one might consider this form of communicative cultural action as a means to diffuse aura in as many corners of the platform as possible. When a hashtag reached trending status, its aura should have the capacity for mirror reflection. If new

[42] "In Lacan's later work, the gaze becomes something that the subject encounters in the object; it becomes an objective, rather than a subjective, gaze. . . . The gaze is not the look of the subject at the object, but the point at which the object looks back" (McGowan, 2003, p. 28-29). McGowan is indirectly recounting the story of the sardine can, as discussed in the Yolocaust case study.

users stumble upon the echo chamber in-progress, the degree to which they participate may be determined by how much they see themselves in the debate. Does this make them equally as upset and frustrated? If it does, they are more likely to consider the content of the tweet in front of them. The rhetoric of the tweet invites viewers to respond in the form of likes, a comment, and/or a retweet. More instances of this dynamic will make social media seem a social entity or one that is semi-social. Yet, the invitation remains one of sentimental assent and, hence, a symbolic repetition of the original tweet's ideology.

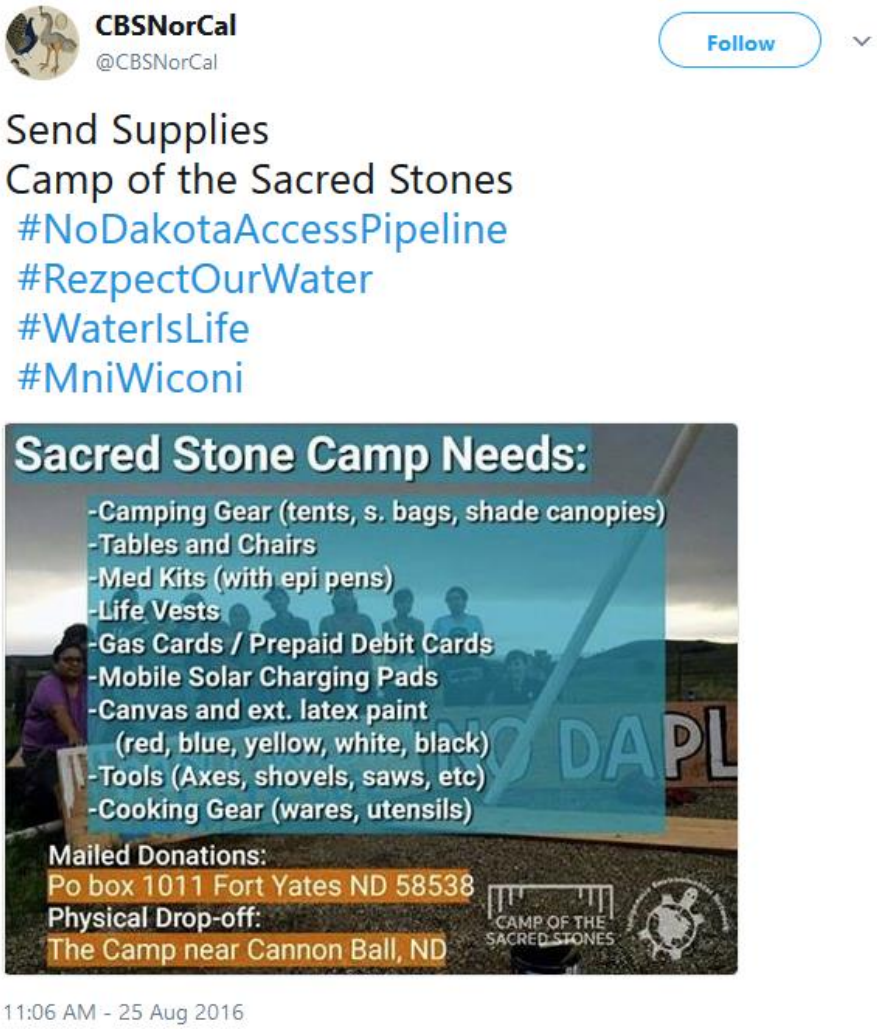

Figure 5.16: CBSNorCal's tweet about supplies.

To be truly social, social media should be representative of authentic engagement. Benjamin (1969) considered aura to have a complicated relationship with reality and authenticity. Hansen (2012) described this perspective of aura as a halo-like "substance" that "surrounds a person or object of perception, encapsulating its individuality and authenticity" (p. 106). This halo-like substance is evident in figure 5.16, because it brought the reality of the situation to the fore. The provided list brought real human needs to the Dakota Access debate, which may not always be obvious in tweets using similar hashtags. While it can be simple to succumb to the notion that armchair activism or hashtivism is ineffective, the potential to spread widely the needs of those physically protesting was one way this kind of dialogue extended beyond venting. Viewers of user CBSNorCal's[43] message learned what they could do to contribute beyond tweeting hashtags; this kind of message increased *access* as it was discussed earlier (See figure 5.7).

Summary of Findings

In this third case study, the centralized self remained at the core of content shared on Twitter. However, an online form of marking one's geolocation was used to tag oneself in a different space than they currently occupy. This was equivalent to saying, *I am here*. But, #NoDAPL did not go much beyond that. The marking was seen as the beginning and end of a user's contribution, and that contribution was not unique in any way.

The Dakota Access Pipeline debate was one that had challenges similar to the #Jesuis and #Yolocaust case studies. These include:

(1) With a few exceptions, #NoDAPL experienced a similar degree of ideological consensus as #Yolocaust, which was amplified through likes and retweets (eWOM).

[43] No apparent affiliation with the CBS corporation.

(2) #NoDAPL was concerned with real forms of support. For many users, the support began and ended with geolocational solidarity and tweets.

The latter issue was complicated when it came to tangible offline impact. Many of the tweets in this corpus appeared to focus on the needs of the protesters in North Dakota, but it was unclear how effective these messages were toward sending material contributions. Future research should consider connecting these pieces, if possible.

This case study presented a condition not obvious in the prior two case studies, and it was one that would not be possible without the internet. Dropping a pin at the North Dakota protest site on a virtual map allowed individuals to, in a virtual world, be in two places at once. It allowed ideology to be split and carried over into one's virtual presence or digital twin that operated separately. The check-in feature on Facebook allowed users to digitally teleport themselves into another reality. This created a sense of gamification akin to street view on Google maps. Checking in on Facebook and/or Twitter as being in North Dakota while using the #NoDAPL marker proclaimed this split reality to publicly document the travels of the digital twin.

However, the digital twin may be more independent than is thought. Kittler (1990) saw this split as a byproduct of the machine communicating rather than the user. With machine learning and processing playing a greater cultural role than ever before, it is no surprise that *access* was the most frequently used term in this case study's corpus[44] (See figure 5.6 and 5.7). Access to the modes of communicative operation was critical to be a contributor. This is the limitation that exists when internet access is not possible; those without it cannot make use of the

[44] Not counting *access* in the term No Dakota Access Pipeline (#NoDAPL).

machine's extensions. As internet access is becoming a growing reality for communities around the world, future studies along these lines will account for a greater number of contributors.

The digital twin traversing virtual spaces presented online users with the opportunity that our bodies cannot afford us. The #NoDAPL case is an exemplar of how one may extend themselves beyond the limitations of the physical. Despite the digital split, the centralized self still remained at the fore just as it did in #Jesuis and #Yolocaust. But #NoDAPL suggested new directions for the future of online communication and potential cultural praxis. The digital split in #NoDAPL showed how ideology diffused in different ways than previous case studies had shown. However, the diffusion of virtual "presence" is not social, because there is no exchange happening as the virtual pin is dropped. Rather, the virtual "presence" is a performance, a display. The virtual protester did not gather with other protesters in a public space to voice dissent. The virtual protester dropped a "digital twin," a virtual self, into the protest site to display their own ideological sentiment.

Hence, the digital twin was another form of monologic content, another embodiment of self that did not create social interaction but reinforced their self-referential frame as a protest hero. As with the other subjects in this study, the pose embodied a narcissistic self-promotion that took over images of space, reconstructing them as the province, the stage for self-aggrandizing images. In the Dakota posts, the self became the simulacrum, a complete simulation of self-righteous protester that, at first, stood in for real protesters at the site of contention (Baudrillard, 1983). But, in the end, the simulacrum of self made any reality of onsite protesters disappear into the self-involved simulacrum of protest.

The digital twinning of self represented the virtual segmentation of our individual ideologies. Though we seem to embody an ongoing conversation involving a variety of spaces

and perspectives, the representation results in an ideologue of one. The audience of monologic communication in #NoDAPL was the user themselves and their digital twin (again, themselves). Users attempted to one-up their own digital existence with every new tweet they posted or virtual pin they dropped.

At the time, the inundations of check-ins at Standing Rock led other users not "in the know" to become confused. "Are you really in North Dakota?" was a common response to these messages (Kennedy, 2016). The level of confusion made the #NoDAPL content a series of performative poses to generate a personal simulacrum. The check-in markers were amplified, but the meaning of these check-ins was not apparent to everyone. In fact, the only user to whom the check-in ultimately had meaning was the user who did the checking in. These self-centralized poses indicate how users create their own image of what it means to be an activist and contribute to a cause virtually. Even when users elaborated on the meaning of their check-ins in North Dakota, as the earlier figures indicated, nothing new was provided beyond the pose itself. Without exchange, this content remained performative and suspended in virtual spaces. Even within the internet "bookshelf" of missed connections, these tweets held a uniquely muddled space. They did not reach out to future users with an ideological point to make. They simply embodied a self-directed message of personal integrity, involvement, and heroism, a wholly fictional message created by the faux placement of self within a protest site. This message construction was not simply in the form of performative poses. Spaces of social protest were eroded into spaces of self-worship. If this trajectory continues, social media may not be communicatively salvaged.

Chapter 6

Conclusions and a Proposal for the Future

"It literally is at a point now where I think we have created tools that are ripping apart the social fabric of how society works. That is truly where we are. The short-term, dopamine-driven feedback loops that we have created are destroying how society works: no civil discourse, no cooperation, misinformation, mistruth. And it's not an American problem. This is not about Russian ads. This is a global problem."

-Chamath Palihapitiya, Former Facebook Vice President for User Growth
(qtd. in Wang, 2017)

This study began with the flat statement that social media are not social. From previous research we found that social media offer little if any potential for real interactive engagement. Social media platforms promote individual performance rather than dialogic engagement. Given the limitations in viral potential for content, that individual performance is first (and often only) self-directed. Users are prompted to post self-directed images (in words as well as pictures) that reinforce one's set ideology. Through likes and similar prompts, users are prompted to offer symbolic sentimental echoes to content that fits within their ideological frame. Hence, rather than dialogic engagement, social media content often quickly devolves into simplistic sentimental echoes of repeated concepts. These echoes create a kind of ideological echo chamber or simulacrum in which much social media content is projected.

These ideas led to a series of questions. In examining significant social media trends, do we find content tending to create ideological echo chambers? Does this occur even within complex social and global controversies? Can content break out of ideological chambers? If so,

can content break down the walls around an ideological chamber and modify the beliefs and behavior of a body of social media users?

We examined three significant controversies: The social media response to the *Charlie Hebdo* terror attacks, the #Yolocaust reframings of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, and the Dakota Access Pipeline controversy. In each case, we found that responses did, indeed, slip quickly into echoed sentiment. These echoed sentiments did little, very often nothing, to break outside of their respective simulacra. Moreover, they typically created no legitimate interactive conversation in which disagreeing parties engaged in reasoned dialogue. Impact was generally limited to the level of celebrity of the particular user and, at times, to the extremeness of the content. Even then, more extreme posts, such as those by Tom Tree in the #Yolocaust controversy, did not guarantee any greater impact and sometimes blunted the impact of posts.

We found that social media trends recast images and events into ideological frames that created the meanings of the posts. As Baudrillard (1983) warned, the original meaning or real events that prompted posts quickly disappeared as the online posts became the "reality," the meaning (pp. 11-15). Users reframed public spaces into fictionalized sites that fit their ideological intent or that housed virtual extensions of the users. Social media created a stage on which to perform identity and ideology. Once events (e.g., a terror attack, a pipeline) justified posts, the posts themselves became the "conversation." Retweets, likes, and other responses were made to the social media simulacrum, not to the original events (the ostensible reasons for the posts).

In the case of #Yolocaust, we did find that it was possible for posts from one ideological perspective to break through the walls of another echo chamber and impact those within. The

#Yolocaust site reframed tourist pictures in such an extreme and inflammatory way that response was almost necessary. The "undouching" process showed that original posters could be shamed into deleting their original posts and seeking to change their online identity (and ultimately, into a new echo chamber or simulacrum). Though, it is worth noting that the posters did not do so in response to the memorial site or the historical context of that site. They did so in response to an online social media post that fictionalized their original images by editing them into pictures from the 1930s and 1940s. Further, even when they sought to change their online identity, we noted that their original posts, even when deleted, could never fully be expunged from the online record. In the social media universe, they will forever remain, in one image, tourists enjoying a tourist site and in another, perverse ghouls dancing on the open graves of the dead. The remainder of this chapter will weed out several more specific ideas indicated in this study.

The Paradox of Social Media

(Un)social media have created a paradoxical space for communication and cultural exchange. These platforms project the image of interaction through the use of likes, retweets, and comments, but the interaction is only with oneself and one's ideology. There is no communication exchange happening in these virtual spaces, as Marston's (2012) definition of communication indicated. Instead, users are exposed to sentimental echoes with which they already agree.

It may seem that markers such as likes, retweets, and comments would reveal the social nature of social media. When these measures are traced, as the preceding case studies have done, users do not communicate with each other. Instead, users enter images—both visual and written—of their own values, beliefs, and ideology (Barthes, 1980). Where one might expect dialogic communication, one finds monologue and simulacrum instead.

Through the examination of three disparate cases, this dissertation had several major findings:

(1) Social media are not social.

(2) Viral content is the exception, not the norm.

(3) The study of social media is more a study of missed connections than of dialogic engagement.

Social media are made up of performed self-referential communication, which places importance on the communicator, their ideology, their prejudices, and their values.

Content in these virtual spaces is equivalent to anti-culture. What we acknowledge as a culture is lost, because there is no meaningful exchange between members (Hall, 2007). A culture necessitates a community, some form of agreement, which then leads to exchange. Social media promote neither communication exchange nor cultural development in any of the cases examined, because:

(1) Virtually *all* content on the internet does not "go viral."

(2) Content that does go viral typically does not do so because the content itself was effective.

(3) Content gets retweeted or liked because of a pre-existing audience that is already likely to respond to the user's tweets.

These self-centralized poses indicate how users create their own image to define what it means to be an activist and contribute to a cause virtually. There should be an appropriate degree of interaction in the offline world to have any significant following that users like Coelho had. However, Coelho's tweets are an exceptional case of social media content possessing amplified eWOM, or electronic word of mouth. However, eWOM and stickiness neither predict virality nor

do they indicate social content. Likes are used to express a sentimental echo in which a self-referential expression that says "I" like this tweet for one reason or another and others should as well. This is not because the tweet itself deserves it but because the user posting the tweet is the authorizing agent in this context saying it is worth liking.

The study of social media is more a study of missed connections than of dialogic engagement. The vast majority of tweets never gain an audience, so they act as missed connections. Missed connections are content sitting on the virtual shelves of the internet, like library books gathering dust, waiting for someone with the same ideological bent to pick them up and express them in a new and different context. This new context may be one that recasts the tweet into something the original author never meant.

The instance of fan culture using "stan" as a verb is one example of this (Gaillot, 2017). As discussed earlier in this dissertation, the fictitious fan in Eminem's (2000) song was violent and obsessive, and the new iteration of stan nearly twenty years later wipes away the violence from the context. The intent of the song *Stan* could have been a warning siren against hero worship, but the current use of stan as a verb is void of context. To "like" something in the social media sense is similar to "stanning" a celebrity. The content level of the two terms is relatively empty, and this emptiness contributes to the segmentation of online and offline spaces. Audiences of these sentimental echoes are growing smaller and smaller as a result.

There are many limits in social media platforms, and a structural change away from sentimental echoing toward dialogue will be essential for actual change. Reevaluating social media would require a conscious approach toward interacting with others that have an avowed difference of opinion or a different perspective. However, this would require an entire infrastructural shift in social media platforms.

Anticultural Praxis on the Internet

These case studies offered unique contributions in social media research. The individual self in each of these content areas remained centralized, but the angles were slightly different for each case study. In the #Jesuis case, many contributors were content with simple proclamations of themselves as Charlie or in religious prayer. For #Yolocaust, the lens reflected back on the transgressions of individual social media users, and ideological consensus was developed with a few defectors. As the #NoDAPL case suggests, the digital twin can take on a life of its own to accomplish things not reasonably possible in the physical world. The digital twin can extend its influence and resources into the tangible reality of the North Dakota protestors, such as offering goods and services to aid their efforts (Wertheim, 1999, p. 250). These findings are important interventions in the current scholarly conversation, and they suggest more directions for future media scholarship. These case studies demonstrated that social media are not social, and communication on social media platforms tend to be monologic rather than dialogic.

For the casual social media user, this may seem like an absolutist position. Granted, there were instances where tweets gained viral notoriety, such as the tweets posted by Coelho in the #Jesuis case study and Shapira in the #Yolocaust study. Although some of these meaningful and viral Twitter exchanges were happening, they were few and far between. The tweets that were shared, liked, and received comments on the platform were outliers. When considering the whole, content on Twitter resulted in an individualized ideological echo chamber or a respective simulacrum. The intended external audience of tweets were the user themselves, an unknown audience, or one that may not exist. However, these tweets presented the appearance of a public diary wherein the Twitter user revealed ideas and aspects of their humanity that they would not otherwise disclose in other forums (Humphries, 2018). As noted in chapter 1, Sally's experience

of bullying on Ask FM represented the foul underside of this form of widespread anonymity (Combi, 2015). As the figures in each respective study visually demonstrated,[45] there were some tweets that were shared, but their circulation rate after one retweet dropped off dramatically. Unless a user has the following of Coelho or Shapira, the most one could expect of a tweet's sharing capacity would be a single retweet, if there is one at all. The data of these case studies supported social media content as performative poses. There are lessons to be learned from these findings, beginning with the role of the hashtag:

RQ 1: How important is the hashtag to the communication of the user's ideology and politics?

The case studies represented the various ways in which users avowed their connection to Charlie, their personal distancing of transgressive behavior at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, and the online response to misdirected geolocational markers in North Dakota. For each case study, users had particular ideological positions, which were clearly marked by the hashtag they used:

(1) #JesuisCharlie and #IamCharlie represented the protection of free speech; whereas, #JenesuispasCharlie and #IamnotCharlie disowned the xenophobic speech of *Charlie Hebdo*.

(2) #Yolocaust represented consensus politics with minimal variation.

(3) Consensus politics were partially represented in #NoDAPL, and their ideological positions were focused on particular issues, such as #WaterIsLife.

The ideological positions of users appeared distinct through Twitter's hashtag metadata. However, ideological perspectives are far more complex than a hashtag could possibly represent, but this limited finding should be considered in future inquiry.

[45] See figures 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 4.9, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6

Limitations

The limitations of this study should be considered by future researchers seeking to reproduce and/or extend this work. The Octoparse software did not have the capability to pull users' marked locations, which would have been necessary to construct a mapped visualization using digital humanities tools. For a future project, this might be a useful exercise to show how the virally successful tweets do traverse the globe. This resource might also suggest new strategies to address social media.

Although the likes of each tweet were not extensively analyzed in this project, I took a preliminary look at their patterns, and they most closely resemble the retweet visualizations. For this reason, likes were not used as a major point of analysis. However, it might be an endeavor for consideration in future research.

The third case study also presented another limitation that could not be overcome for this current project. The users checking in on Facebook were not necessarily the same individuals contributing to the corpus of tweets contained in the study. Despite recent allegations about Facebook privacy, according to Picchi (2018), access to original data about Facebook check-ins were limited. Secondary sources such as Kennedy (2016) noted one million check-ins at Standing Rock, but Octoparse could not scrape the data needed to generate a reasonable corpus for an independent verification of this total. Future research is warranted to corroborate this figure.

If future technology permits, a cross-reference of the Standing Rock Facebook check-ins and users' actual locations according to their IP addresses would be an intriguing contribution to the foundation established by this dissertation. However, the content on Twitter offered more of the number and numeral connection considered most important by Kittler (2006). Even if this

dissertation project could have addressed the limitations outlined above, the findings regarding social media and the digital twin would likely remain unchanged.

User Limitations

Another limitation of this study is one that a researcher cannot mitigate on their own, and the responsibility for addressing this limitation lies in the contributions of Twitter users themselves. It is unclear how many of the tweets in the corpus were not engaged due to the lack of motivation on the part of other users. It is possible that many people found the content of these tweets intriguing, but they chose to scroll past them perhaps out of boredom or the assumption that the tweets were enough on their own without their interaction. For many casual users, this is an aspect of social media disengagement of which more users are becoming aware (Xiong, Cho, & Boatwright, 2018, p. 1-3). It is up to the individual user to meaningfully engage with tweets they deem worthy of such interaction. If this practice is expanded to the Twittersphere broadly, the potential for Twitter's utility and sociability will have a higher likelihood of realization.

On the other hand, the aforementioned limitation can also manifest in the opposite direction. There were users that contributed too much and consumed large amounts of communicative space. As discussed in the #Yolocaust case study, user Tom Tree created a notable spike in the data concerning *white genocide*. Although none of Tom Tree's tweets received any likes, retweets, or comments, the user's racist public diary remains part of the #Yolocaust story, according to Humphries (2018). As a cyclical internal dialogue, Tom Tree offered nothing new in their proliferation of tweets, and instead suggested the need for users to self-impose a limitation on their own tweets and the content contained in them. The problem

with too many contributors and too few moderators will remain if these tendencies remain personally unchecked.

The final limitation is in the Twitter structure at the time these case studies were active. During the time of each peak noted on the visualizations generated by digital humanities tools,[46] the character count permitted on Twitter was 140-characters. The pilot of the character expansion to 280 began in September 2017, and it was implemented across the Twitter platform in November 2017 (Collins, 2017). Users have mixed feelings about this expansion. In future research on Twitter, this character limit change will undoubtedly impact the findings, because more content will be available in a single tweet, rather than users creating a chain of tweets to convey their complete message.[47] However, the complexities extend beyond the communicative power of mere character limitations:

> "The move comes at an awkward time for Twitter, which has been facing criticism and pressure from shareholders, Congress, President Donald Trump and everyday people who use it. Among the most-discussed complaints have been concerns that the company negligently mishandled the daily harassment some people experience on its service and that it allowed propaganda on the platform that illegally influenced the 2016 presidential election.[48] It's probably no surprise that the company's user count has stalled at 330 million accounts, and that's after Twitter admitted to having overcounted user numbers for three years" (Collins, 2017).

[46] See figures 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.23, 4.7, 4.8, 5.2, and 5.3
[47] User Devenir meilleur(e) had to number tweets to create a sense of continuity for their message. See figures 3.15 and 3.16 for examples.
[48] Similar to the Facebook backlash (See Picchi, 2018).

As these criticisms mounted, it was unclear how contributions by users and research conducted on Twitter will be impacted in the future. The nature of social media platforms, particularly Twitter, necessitates the need for more scholarly intervention.

The findings of these three case studies are useful in establishing modes of communication over a period between 2015 – 2017, which can lend insight into how our current social media practices can become more sociable. Of the many reasons for selecting these case studies, one line of reasoning is consistent for them all: They represent the average neglected content and social agenda on Twitter. The lifespan of most trending topics is very short, and the algorithmic process for Twitter's selection of trending topics is not publicly known (Sydell, 2011). All of the case studies featured in this dissertation project were considered trending topics at one time, but a collective lack of engagement led to their halflife and ultimate entropy. Future research can benefit from examining trending topics with longer staying power. #MeToo is a strong exemplar that has received scholarly attention (Xiong, Cho, & Boatwright, 2018; Garcia, 2018). #NeverAgain represents the movement established by the Parkland, Florida teen survivors from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (Bhuyan, 2018; Alter, 2018). It is evident that continued scholarly engagements with these and future case studies will aid in more effective cultural praxis and media scholarship.

The Cultural Legacies of Hashtagged Content

The legacies for the case studies analyzed in this dissertation suggest what *not* to do in online content. Although we have seen nodal moments in particular tweets (e.g., Coelho and Shapira), the fact remains that most tweets are quietly rejected by the Twitter community through a lack of likes, comments, and retweets. However, the status quo requires a certain amount of pointed engagement with public actors similar to Coelho or Shapira to achieve

trending status (Sydell, 2011). This is how these three case studies became viral despite a lack of widespread engagement by the Twitter public. Therefore, the exemplars discussed in each case study stand out for the simple fact that they garnered support in only a select group of tweets. Therefore, Twitter's social and viral exemplars are a rarity, and they are small parts used to represent a significantly larger whole. Twitter's (2018) rhetoric of "free expression" makes it appear social, but the cacophony of voices in the name of "freedom" makes sociability impossible in Twitter's current form. The remaining research questions sought to address this disparity.

RQ 2: How do hashtags shape the expression of ideology within online message streams?

RQ 3: How are hashtags used to create competing echo chambers?

RQ 4: How can these competing content streams be turned to create meaningful communication, if at all?

The findings from the three case studies offer directions to improve tweets and other social media interactions going forward. These possibilities include the following:

(1) Tweets should be concerned with a specific audience that will be already predisposed to consider the tweets' content. Perhaps the audience is a collection of users they can direct their messaging at using the @ symbol, or it is an audience that may exist outside of one's Twitter followership (but not outside of their ideological perspective). Recognizing the narrative probability and reliability needs of this specific audience will guide one's language use and references (Fisher, 1989).

(2) Users should be aware of existing content, which can be searched using individual hashtags. With this information in mind, users can offer content for consideration, and thus increase the likelihood of engagement by the simulacrum as a whole.

(3) The third recommendation involves respectful content and maintains rhetoric that is not sexist, racist, and homophobic. Tom Tree's tactics are a good example of what *not* to do. This may seem self-evident, but the content in the overall corpus for this project shows that some users do not consider this notion before firing off a tweet.

(4) Users should follow up. Like other modes of interaction, such as emails or setting up meetings, one often has to follow up to ensure something happens. A singular tweet that is not engaged cannot accomplish much on its own. The user should consider revisiting earlier ideas from the echo chamber/simulacrum in follow up tweets. The #MeToo movement did not take off until nearly a decade after Tarana Burke created the term, according to Garcia (2017), so the same potential may be afforded for meaningful tweets that have yet to gain a respective simulacrum.

(5) Have the "better" ideological echo chamber, or one that you think is empirically positive.

These approaches will not assist a user in stepping outside of the ideological echo chambers or simulacra they inhabit on social media, but they may provide an outlet for maximizing a user's experience within these silos. These proposed rules for engagement need not be limited to Twitter and should also be considered for other platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, etc.

Some caution should also be exercised, because trolls often lurk on Twitter. Their primary goal is to stir the pot and upset as many people as possible (Phillips, 2015). Once a troll is identified, interaction with their posts should be limited, if a user chooses to consider their

tweets at all. Find users and tweets that are of interest within the ideological echo chamber and focus energy there.[49]

In the earlier discussion regarding ideology in chapters one and two, the pervasive nature of the ideological fishbowl is difficult to overcome, and perhaps impossible. Using the rules of engagement outlined above, social media users can attempt to account for their own partial view and beliefs. Our fragmentation is a condition of our being, but we can make efforts to work within the structure with which we have been presented on Twitter.

Creators of social media face the unique challenge of surveying and developing their platforms. Working within the existing structure, changes could be made to revert back to earlier user interfaces from the earlier stages of social media. Facebook, Twitter, and other early platforms were primarily organized chronologically, which would allow a user to "catch up" on what they missed since their last visit. This allowed users to connect with friends and followers that might not share the same views, which would normally be filtered out via the platform's algorithm. Little is known about the inner workings of popular social media algorithms, but the effect is clear: Their social media typically feed users a stream of performative poses that reflect and reinforce their existing beliefs. Bail (2018) cautioned against these structural barriers to online dialogic communication. Reinstituting a "catch up" chronologically organized feed could allow for oppositional messages to be presented by friends and followers, which could lessen the likelihood of users doubling down as a defense tactic against those who disagree.

Continuing with the current structure, social media creators could also include an opt-in feature to work around some of the filtering aspects of their respective algorithms. Facebook has

[49] Facebook and other platforms algorithmically limit one's exposure to dissenting opinions in favor of showing content that supports one's political view. This limitation can be sidestepped, but it is up to the individual user to seek out users not featured on their generated feed.

been characterizing individual users' political preferences for years (e.g., from very conservative to very liberal). Other platforms undoubtedly do the same, but they are less transparent about these designations. These categorizations may work in a user's favor. That is, they might motivate users to explore diverse opinions. Users may well be interested in reviewing the posts of users categorized differently (e.g., liberal users may want to hear from their conservative friends). Users could be prompted to indicate their interest in hearing more from those categorized in an oppositional group, so their feed is more representative of other perspectives. Creating the option to control these features could make users more confident in what they are seeing in their social media feeds. They could feel as if their feeds reflect what they want to see as opposed to what the platform thinks they want to see or read. These are simple changes that could be made relatively quickly and without changing the structure of the platform drastically.

As new platforms are built, creators can consider these options and many other modalities to increase representation of content that might promote idea exchange rather than the echoing of performative poses. Creating new technology to create the possibility of dialogic communication on social media and/or developing platforms with more dialogic potential to follow-up and potentially replace social media would be productive ways to move forward. Moving forward also necessitates the inclusion of as many user groups as possible.

This research in combination with Combi's (2015) study of digital natives such as Sally, Ryan, and Julia present another opportunity to engage with people with differing experiences. Educators from current and future generations will have an easier time connecting with their digital native students. Engaging in educational content that allows digital natives to thrive in their natural habitat, if you will, is an important lesson to consider moving forward. Many classrooms are already capitalizing on these resources. Outside of the traditional educational

context, these rules for user engagement and social media creators' engagement may also positively impact face-to-face and online conversation one may have with others in these spaces.

Connecting with others is the ultimate goal of this project, because the monologic status quo on Twitter should concern everyone, even those who do not personally invest time in social media usage. For example, Tom Tree's data spike in figure 4.13 showed how an unengaged monologue can send a message into the Twitter void. It is unclear how many people saw Tom Tree's messages and scrolled past. Tom Tree used the right metadata to send the message out there, which was the #Yolocaust marker. However, nothing happened. Tom Tree demonstrated a problematic use of electronic word of mouth, or eWOM, particularly in the form of hashjacking. Speaking for speaking's sake is not inherently bad, but the tendency for the content to devolve presents a significant concern for sociable media. Generally speaking, eWOM is concerned with content sharing, "while disregarding other behavioral responses" (Alhabash & McAlister, 2015, p. 1318). This "disregard" results in a one-way approach to content, which can take the form of *intra*personal content. Although *intra*personal content tends to exist in journal or diary writing, users like Tom Tree are placing these kinds of messages on social media (Humphries, 2018). This exercise does not encourage reasonable discourse.

As with many communication phenomena, the effects of one problem often pour into others, or preexisting manifestations may simply be repeated. Social media content is an explosion of the preexisting problems in media studies, which include:

(1) Insularity and marginalization

(2) The pervasive nature of racist and sexist rhetoric

(3) Limited motivations for challenging the status quo.

If more people continue to productively engage in social media interactions and research, the regressive communication patterns observed in this dissertation project have the potential for changing course.

When we are born, we are without language, and we develop critical inquiry and thought over time. This inquiry allows us to engage in dialogue with others and to serve as communication contributors. If we collectively regress back to the monologic moment of our initial respective being, as it occurred in these three case studies, we face the possibility of monologue as our only outlet. Content on media platforms are performative poses left on the virtual bookshelf as a staged persona and identity. However, interventions like the one employed in this dissertation project will offer us perspective. Employing the aforementioned rules for engagement will play a role in navigating our respective ideological echo chambers. If changes are made, Twitter and other social media platforms might finally become true social media. Though, as we have seen, the burden of change will be on those who would make social media social.

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