



BLACK LIVES MATTER'S DIGITAL ACTIVISM STRATEGY IN TRANSNATIONALIZING THE POLICE BRUTALITY ISSUE IN EUROPE IN 2020

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ABSTRACT

This research tends to examine Black Lives Matter's Digital Activism Strategy in Transnationalizing the Police Brutality Issue in Europe in 2020. The authors tend to describe how social movements against racism and police brutality which originated in the United States could spread to Europe, in a scale which has not happened previously before Black Lives Matter. This research uses descriptive qualitative research method. The results of this research show that Black Lives Matter has used digital activism strategy in Trans-nationalizing the police brutality issue in Europe in 2020 by providing accessibility, visibility, popularity, and ecosystem. In terms of accessibility, Black Lives Matter provides to a digital network capable of distributing information. Besides that, Black Lives Matter increases visibility by showing the uniqueness of Black Lives Matter as compared to other movements. Next, Black Lives Matter could attract many supporters, which increased its popularity. Finally, Black Lives Matter could spread the movement in other regions based on similar roots, routers and routes, proofing its suitability in the European society's ecosystem.

Keywords: Black Lives Matter, Digital Activism, Transnationalization, Police Brutality, Racism

INTRODUCTION

This research tends to describe Black Lives Matter's digital activism strategy in transnationalizing the police brutality issue in Europe in 2020. Racism has remained a problem in the United States (US). Racism is a form of discrimination towards a certain race or group, which resulted to an unequal access towards education, medical care, civil rights, income, and other necessities (Smedley, 2012). Police brutality is an example of racial discrimination, indicated by the use of much violence towards civilians, which may involve hitting, intimidation, verbal abuse, psychological and physical pressure. African Americans have faced police brutality longer than other race or ethnics (Taylor, 2018).

This is indicated by light skinned police's harsh treatment towards African Americans, which resulted in police brutality (Moore, 2010).

Since the 20th century, many efforts had been done to oppose police brutality. African Americans have fought for their rights by demonstrating in the streets through social movements. In 1955, after the murder of Emmett Till, Martin Luther King Jr. led a peaceful campaign to gain international support. In 1957, a conference was held to push for a constitution which protects civil rights. Freedom Rides peaceful marches also happened in the US to support racial equality in 1961 (Wilkins, 2014).

With the advancement of technology, the struggle to oppose police brutality has transformed into digital activism. Digital activism utilizes technology as a media to promote various social movements, especially in democratic countries (Rahmawan, et. al. 2020). In 2012, the murder of Trayvon Martin due to police brutality has triggered a national petition to arrest Zimmerman, the police alleged responsible for the incident (Blackpast, 2020). Websites, Facebook, Twitter, and various digital platforms had been used to voice the society's demand for justice, which is accessible worldwide (Charlton & McIlwain, 2020).

Alicia Garza, a citizen of Oakland, California was frustrated following the prison release of Zimmerman. In 2013, Garza posted a message in Facebook, which initiated the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. Afterwards, Opal Tometi and Patrisse Marie supported Garza to develop Black Lives Matter into a digital-based social movement which fight for justice for victims of police brutality. This social movement allows other races to participate in supporting the cause. As the number of supporters increase, Black Lives Matter became known internationally through digital activism.

Black Lives Matter demonstration also happened in 2014, following the death Eric Garner and Michael Brown due to police brutality (Blackpast, 2020). The hashtag #BlackLivesMatter was initially used in Twitter, in response to Trayvon Martin's death. From July 2013 until May 2018, Pew Research Center have recorded that the hashtag has been used almost 30 million times in Twitter, with 17.002 average uses per day. This hashtag has been trending in the US, especially when there were African Americans who became victims of police brutality (Hill, 2020).

On 20 May 2020, a video of George Floyd's death after being abused by white-skinned police has spread quickly in social media. Subsequently, #BlackLivesMatter hashtags had been used 8.8 million times in 2020, which marked the highest use of this hashtag in social media to oppose police brutality. Besides from Garza and Cullors, other activists, celebrities, musicians, artists, and fast-food franchises have also posted contents using #BlackLivesMatter hashtag on social media.

Besides from the US, Black Lives Matter protests have also taken place in Europe, supported by ethnic minorities. In Europe, four out of five people who experienced police brutality are immigrants. Fair Trials have collected data in Europe, which show that most of the 2.571 respondents interviewed have experienced violence from police because their identities are treated as foreigners in Europe. This discrimination has happened since the arrest until trial process (Norris, 2022).

Black Lives Matter have mobilized masses in Europe to push for their first draft policy on anti-racism. After the Floyd tragedy, there have been 83 Black Lives Matter protests in Germany on 26 May until 30 July 2020, attended by 200.000 people (Milman & Ajayi, 2021). In Italy, there were 150 protests in many cities. Thus, Black Lives Matter have developed into an international movement in 2020 (Porta & Lavizzari, 2021). This research tends to examine how Black Lives Matter, a US-based social movement have transnationalized the police brutality issue in Europe in 2020 through digital activism.

METHOD

This research uses descriptive qualitative research method. Digital Activism is a movement which uses the internet and digital media as main platforms to mobilize the masses for political action (Karpf, 2016). Activists could use the internet to manage the organization's reputation, communicate and coordinate between social movements, fundraising, routine spending, and members gathering. to spread awareness to the society. This research uses social media as an example of tools used for digital activism to organize, coordinate and share information (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). In this case, smartphones have been used by Black Lives Matter activists to record incidents of police brutality and share it online. Through social media such as Twitter, Black Lives Matter has transnationalized the issue of police brutality from the US to Europe.

Rahmawan, et.al. (2020) explained that there are four digital activism strategies, including accessibility, visibility, popularity and ecosystem. Firstly, accessibility means that digital activism uses platform network to spread information and coordinate political or social movements. Secondly, visibility describes how much the movement is seen by the society, the clarity of contents, value, and uniqueness which distinguished it from other movements. Thirdly, popularity of the social movement's success in increasing society's awareness would also increase society's support to the movement. Finally, ecosystem is the environment where the social movement is developed, in order to spread the message to other parties supporting the same cause.

Transnationalization of social movement happens when the network of this social movement spread across at least two countries. Transnationalization could refer to the expansion of the social movement, which started psychologically as shared concern among individuals towards certain issues. Later on, the shared concern systematically grew into social movements in the society as initiated by activists (Schiller & Faist, 2010).

The Black Lives Matter is considered a New Social Movement. New Social Movements were originated in the 1960s and 1970s to indicate communities' alternative understanding of social issues. Transnationalization of new social movements have broaden the discussion of social issues from a domestic into an international movement (Sulfihas, 2021). For instance, Black Lives Matter started domestically in the US, through collective action for change in response to police brutality cases. Afterwards, Black Lives Matter grew into a global concern, when activists in European countries also held similar movements demanding for racial equality.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Black Lives Matter's digital activism strategy in transnationalizing the issue of police brutality in Europe in 2020 involves four strategies, namely accessibility, visibility, popularity, and ecosystem. Black Lives Matter has utilized social media to expand their movement, by transnationalizing the issue of police brutality from the US to Europe. Black Lives Matter movement in Europe is characterized by activists voicing out various issues such as post-colonialism, anti-fascism, anti-police brutality and solidarity towards ethnic minorities.

Black Lives Matter’s Digital Activism in Increasing the Accessibility of Police Brutality Issue in Europe

Before the existence of Black Lives Matter, it was difficult to help victims of racial-based police brutality in Europe, since the issue of racism was rarely discussed in Europe. Besides that, there was limited accessibility, or the availability of digital network in distributing information on racial equality. Black Lives Matter’s digital activism strategy has increased accessibility, for instance by providing information and fundraising for victims of police brutality. As a result, 121 newspapers discussed Black Lives Matter, and the European Union planned to draft a policy on racism.

Activism requires digital technology, such as the internet to reach a wide range of network simultaneously (Rahmawan, et. al. 2020). In Europe, citizens from 16 to 24 years of age are considered as digital natives, or active internet users. Digital natives utilize social media to create and share online contents. Social media is a crucial tool for political and social campaign organized by activist movements. Hence, society in democratic countries have more access in voicing out their concern towards political, economic and social issues through digital activism (Joyce, 2010).

On 26 February 2012, George Zimmerman, a light skinned man shot Trayvon Martin, an African American teenager in Florida (Charlton & McIlwain, 2020). Two weeks after this incident, the Department of Justice issued an investigation. On 16 March 2012, Standford police released a recording from a 911 call on the night Zimmerman shot Martin. On the same day, the New York Times featured an article “the Curious Case of Trayvon Martin”, written by Charles Blow, an African American columnist. Subsequently on 19 March 2012, internet activists organized a Million Hoodie March to urge authorities to arrest Zimmerman (Charlton & McIlwain, 2020). The news of this activism spread digitally through social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and other platforms.

A year later, in July 2013, Alicia Garza saw the news that Zimmerman has been released from prison in Florida. In response, Garza wrote on Facebook a post which contains “Black Lives Matter” (Mahdawi, 2020). During the same period, #BlackLivesMatter was reposted more than a thousand times a day (Ransby, 2018). Thus, the term “Black Lives Matter” became generally known to public in the US.

The “Black Lives Matter” slogan have sparked various movements by local organizations which organized peaceful protests and political lobbying. There are many organizations under the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) established in December 2014, such as the Black Lives Matter Global Network, which consists of organizations and individuals interacting and collaborating. In August 2016, Vision for Black Lives drafted a policy platform as an inspiration for African Americans to oppose police brutality, supported by 50 organizations which collaborated through the M4BL ecosystem (M4BL, 2016).

Three weeks after protests in Ferguson, Patrisse Khan-Cullors and activist Darnell Moore organized online followers of #BlackLivesMatter to participate in the supporting the protest in Ferguson. More than 500 people responded the call. Through this occasion, Black Lives Matter Network (BLMN) was known as Black Lives Matter Global Network (BLMGN). In 2017, Black Lives Matter has 43 branch movements in the US, UK and Canada (Ransby, 2018).

Since the 21st century, Black Lives Matter movement has three groups which assume leadership based on feminist dark-skinned ethics, each group with a female dark-skinned leader (Bell, 2021). The founder of Black Lives Matter created the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation, Inc., which organized fundraising through blacklivesmatter.com. The donation is published transparently. Besides form donation, the website also records the names of victims of police brutality so that the cases are not forgotten by the society (Britannica, 2023).

George Floyd’s death has sparked various anti-racism protests in other countries, especially in Europe. Previously, the European Union has already implemented a policy to evaluate data of discrimination based on sex, disability, and age. However, the data has not been sorted based on racial identity due to reluctance of some European Union member states (Hernata, 2020). After the Black Lives Matter protests took place, the European Commission urged a new approach in data collection on discrimination based on racial and ethnic identity as well.

In Denmark, the there are many young activists who organized protests against police brutality for the first time. Black Lives Matter Denmark (Black Lives Matter DK) was established by an African immigrant. Although previously Denmark has not treated

the issue of racism seriously. Nevertheless, there were 121 newspaper articles which discussed Black Lives Matter movement in Denmark between 26 May until 12 July (Milman & Ajayi, 2021). Thus, Black Lives Matter has provided access for European society to access news related to anti-racism and police brutality.

Black Lives Matter's Digital Activism in Increasing the Visibility of Police Brutality Issue in Europe

Visibility means uniqueness, or added value which highlight the movement, as compared to other movements (Rahmawan, et. al. 2020). Visibility on this context is the trending Black Live Matter posts on social media. Social media's algorithm provides higher visualization towards popular contents instead of public issues. The recommendation feature on social media provides visualization for similar contents which the user like.

Before Black Lives Matter, there has not been a discussion on racism, nor protest on racial equality in Germany (Milman & Ajayi, 2021). Since George Floyd's death, there has been increasing support for Black Lives Matter, as social media influencers have promoted #BlackLivesMatter to increase visibility of the movement. This shows the increasing visibility of racial-based movements through digital activism in Europe.

Since the death of Mike Brown on 9 August 2014 due to police brutality, hashtags such as #Ferguson, #MikeBrown, #JusticeforMikeBrown, and #Handsupdontshoot spread rapidly throughout social media. Even so, the prosecutor of St. Louis County, Robert McCullough refused to file the case to court. On the same day, Twitter users posted 3.420.934 tweets in response to the decision. Activists protested in the streets of Ferguson (Charlton & McIlwain, 2020). Thus, since 24 November 2014, #BlackLivesMatter grew from initially an online trend into a social movement.

Black Lives Matter activists have utilized Twitter to provide live reports of the movement. The movement refused the claim that the current political representation is enough to represent Black people's rights (Ransby, 2018). Dark skinned women became advocates who lead the Black Lives Matter movements, which became the fundamental basis of the movement (Bell, 2021). They support the Black Lives Matter movement

protests based on the belief that if Black people could gain their rights, then other minorities' rights would also be accommodated. Some participants of the protest voiced out systemic and fundamental reform, freedom from violence, and gender expression to end police brutality (Ransby, 2018).

The Black Lives Matter movement in Europe started by the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag in social media, calling activists to march in street protests. On 6 June 2020, Floyd's death sparked anti-racism protests in Germany against police brutality, which has never happened before in the country. The protests in Germany were mostly organized by African diaspora, many of them women without prior experience in activism. This movement has a strong connection with Black Lives Matter movement in the US, signified by a moment of silence held during the protest to commemorate Floyd's struggles. This also reminded German society of Oury Jalloh's death, a Black prisoner who found burnt inside of his cell (Douglas, 2020).

In 2020, there had been 83 Black Lives Matter protests in Germany, which had mobilized almost 200.000 activists in the streets. The peak of this movement happened after Floyd's death on 25 May, with the participation of 75% of the total number of Black Lives Matter activists in the country. In conclusion, the visibility of Black Lives Matter as a social movement has increased in Europe through digital activism.

Black Lives Matter's Digital Activism in Increasing the Popularity of Police Brutality Issue in Europe

The popularity of social movements is measured by the ability of the social movement to attract attention and gain support from the society (Rahmawan, et. al. 2020). Previously, a video of Arbery's death due to police brutality had been uploaded in social media by a witness. However, it didn't get attract much attention in Europe. Protests on racial issues in Italy also didn't get much support from the society. Conversely, after the #BlackLivesMatter became the second most trending hashtag in Twitter in 2020, the video of Floyd's death was reposted 50 million times each week in Twitter, and social media posts on protests in Italy had been reposted 10.900 times in Twitter.

Trayvon Martin's death due to police brutality in 2012 and Zimmerman's release in 2013 triggered protests in many countries. Black Lives Matter protests after Michael

Brown's death in August 2014 were broadcasted in news channels and spread through tweets, with millions of people watching. After that, African-American communities in the Mid-West gathered hundreds of people in the streets, expressing their concern on systemic racism (Hsu, 2018).

In 2017, Black Lives Matter Global Network (BLMGN) has members in the US, United Kingdom (UK) and Canada (Ransby, 2018). Non-governmental organizations started to use #BlackLivesMatter in their social media posts, which increased the popularity of the movement. Furthermore, Black Lives Matter was nominated to get the Nobel Peace Prize in 2021, because this movement has the potential to become the largest movement striving for civil rights in American history, which became viral through social media.

Black Lives Matter protests, which started in the grassroots level has developed into a transnational movement through social media. Twitter has become one of the most popular social media to post #BlackLivesMatter contents. Within thirty days after Floyd's death, Black Lives Matter has been mentioned 80 million times in various social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, and blogs. According to Social Media Analysis Center from the University of Connecticut, social media has been utilized to coordinate global protest against police brutality. According to the Drum, the use of #BlackLivesMatter in Instagram had increased 4000% in May as compared to in January.

On 6 June, hundreds of people gathered in almost 550 locations in different countries to protest against police brutality. #BlackLivesMatter was reposted 10.900 times in Italy. The existence of Black Lives Matter's digital activism strategy in social media was indicated by the use of hashtags and retweets, which boosted its popularity.

Black Lives Matter's Digital Activism in Widening the Ecosystem of Police Brutality Issue in Europe

Social movements need to be well organized, in order be accepted in certain ecosystems, to ensure that the movement is suitable to appear in other regions in the world. The social movement needs to convey an important message to relevant stakeholders involved, whether activists or target audience. Even so, not all members of the society will support specific issues raised by the movement, if it's seen as not suitable in the society (Rahmawan, et. al. 2020).

To broaden its ecosystem, social movements need to understand the cultures of the targeted audience. Culture involves social and material values in social interaction, such as relations between religion, race, ethnic, family, gender, organization and modern institutions (Hutchinson, 2017). Social community, collective action network, and social movements in the world frequently change. Individuals and society members collaborate to continue previous movements' struggles to striving for change in the society. Interaction between societies across information and communication network also help the cause of the movement (Lim, 2021).

Social activism's ecosystem could be examined in more details through the concepts of roots, route and router by Merlyna Lim (Rahmawan, et. al. 2020). Firstly, Roots means finding out the main cause, perhaps historical or contextual, which stimulated series of events in the society. Roots stimulate collective action in social movements. In terms of roots, Black Lives Matter protests became prominent in Europe since the video of Floyd's death was reposted in social media.

Secondly, Routes means the complexity of communication, media and space used by social movements, and how suggestions or ideas of the movement arise, develop, and spread into a tangible movement. Social movements usually appear in public spaces or ecosystem through mass protests to attract media attention. In terms of routes, Black Lives Matter utilizes hashtags to communicate up to date posts related to the movement in social media.

Finally, Routers are elements of connectivity, actors, and network within social movements. This concept involves telecommunication technology infrastructure, which combines the digital and analog elements, human and machine, and interaction and roles of traditional and contemporary media in the social movement's dynamics (Rahmawan, et. al. 2020). In terms of routers, Black Lives Matter has brought together activists, celebrities, musicians, artists, and even fast-food franchises together to voice out anti racism and police brutality.

In Italy, Black Lives Matter movement protests took place with higher societal involvement than reported in the news. The protests in Italy took place as follows: 54,3% in the North, with 26,0% participants; 17,9% in Central Italy with 19,9% participants, and 27,8% in Southern Italy with 34,1% participants. Black Lives Matter protests in Europe

also raised other social issues such as Afro-Italians and citizenship, especially from second generation migrants, urging to accept the notion of not white but Italian. Black Lives Matter Rome have also contacted other movements outside of Europe, such as Women's March and The World is Watching from the US (Milman & Ajayi, 2021).

In terms of framing, Black Lives Matter is seen as a chance to counter racism not only towards black people, but also police brutality, structural and institutional violence. For instance, racial-based violence towards Willy Monteiro and Idy Diene in Italy. Generally, activists and organizations have localized issues in Italy. Individuals have voiced out their personal experience facing racism. As a result of this protest, *Il Manifesto*, an Italian newspaper reported that police brutality happened due to discrimination and misuse of power, as a part of the structural injustice (Milman & Ajayi, 2021).

In conclusion, Black Lives Matter have broadened its ecosystem, indicated by its roots, routes, and routers. Just like in the US, police brutality in Italy has started to unfold. From Floyd's video, activist strive for justice and multiracial equality for all societies. Before Black Lives Matter, racism was a rarely discussed issue in Europe. Subsequently, there has been 150 protests on racial equality since Floyd's death in 2020.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that Black Lives Matter's strategy in transnationalizing the issue of police brutality in Europe in 2020 happened by providing accessibility, visibility, popularity, and ecosystem. Initially, Accessibility includes the availability of digital network to distribute information in different countries to access information on police brutality, donation for victims, and schedule of protests. Secondly, Visibility includes the uniqueness which makes the movement stand out, initiated by three dark-skinned women who symbolize struggle for rights. Floyd's video online also increased visibility of Black Lives Matter in European countries. Thirdly, Popularity means the movement's ability in attracting attention through digital network with #BlackLivesMatter hashtag in Twitter in 2020. Finally, Black Lives Matter have also broadened the movement's ecosystem from the US to Europe, by localizing issues in domestically, voiced out by black people, migrants, and racism victims. Although the US and Europe have different history on racism, support towards racial equality and anti-police brutality have increased in Europe in 2020 due to the Black Lives Matter movement.

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