

GIVING CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVISM PATTERNS OF #BLACKTIKTOKSTRIKE ON TIKTOK

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ABSTRACT

While the overwhelming flow of content on social media platforms allows for an ease of access to information and entertainment, it also blurs the lines for the original content creators to receive the proper credit to their intellectual property. With TikTok's success among other social platforms, many TikTok dances were reused and their owners did not receive credit for the choreography, specifically when created by minority groups. As a result, the black TikTok community has gone on a content strike on the app and refused to create any new dances. The strike is a form of social media activism and as such, all users participating are creating awareness content under the hashtag #BlackTikTokStrike. The aim of this study is to analyze the patterns of social media activism in the videos shared under the mentioned hashtag. The study uses a purposive sampling method to selectively pick the sample. All videos were analyzed in reference to (a) storytelling analysis, (b) audio and music, (c) technical elements, and (d) protest paradigm. The findings illustrate patterns in all aforementioned themes of social media activism in the TikTok strike movement. Users of the hashtag often resorted to a humorous tone of storytelling. The videos also shared a song for the same artist across many videos. Additionally, participants of the social media movement shared mostly raw and uncut videos although more than half of said videos include graphics like images, infographics, and text. Lastly, users took to the platform to call out artists, redirect credit to original creators, and call for immediate action.

Keywords: Black TikTok Strike, Social Media Activism, TikTok, Credit, Intellectual Property, Protest Paradigm, Dance crazes, Black.

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INTRODUCTION

With the overwhelming stream of daily information and entertainment content, creative ideas lose their origin and credit is often lost. Newer platforms like TikTok contribute a massive amount of creative content daily due to their skyrocketing users, totaling around 1 billion users with 86% percent of said users having posted at least 1 TikTok video (Iqbal, 2021). TikTok is famous for quick and witty video creation, specifically dance videos. In recent times, many TikTok stars have generated/accumulated millions of followers after sharing their videos dancing to popular pop music.

Charli D'amelio is one of the many stars that began her climb to stardom and was able to secure millions of followers overnight. After posting her hit video dancing the Renegade, she quickly rose to fame and many of her followers followed suit with her dance video (@CharliDamelio). Because of this video and the many that she posted next, she became a celebrity and was granted opportunities to star in movies, release singles, model for brands, become a brand ambassador, and so much more. However, it was widely mistaken that she choreographed the Renegade. In fact, the original choreographer, Jalaiah Harmon, is a black creator that wasn't given any credit for the dance until months later (Lorenz, 2020). This is one of the many cases where black creators' content goes unnoticed and non-credited. As a result, black creators and supporters have gone on a content strike (McClay, 2021) on the app to draw attention to the ways social platforms might compensate their active users.

The campaign took action from June 18th with a kickstart from black creator Erick Louis. In his video he says "Black people carry the app" and his caption hints at the misrepresentation and recognition of black creators. His video was viewed over half a million times (Pruitt-Young, 2021) and received immense support and encouragement from TikTok users.

This study aims to analyze the content of modern social media activism in reference to #BlackTikTokStrike movement through the storytelling patterns its users used. Additionally, the paper will discuss the lack of representation of minority groups on social media platforms and loss of due credit to creative and intellectual property.

Purpose of The Study

The purpose of the study is to understand the lack of representation of minority groups on social media platforms through analyzing the storytelling patterns implemented by TikTok users in support of black people's movement, #BlackTikTokStrike, to encourage social justice by giving credit where it's due. The research further investigates multiple

forms of social media activism that aided the supporters of this movement like clicktivism and slacktivism. Furthermore, the study will look into symbolic interactionism as forms of social media identity and socialism in reference to the videos using the hashtag #BlackTikTokStrike.

Main Research Question

What are the social media activism patterns followed by black creators on #BlackTikTokStrike in the videos to support the movement?

Sub Questions

1. What storytelling approaches did TikTok users utilize to express themselves?
2. Did users use profanity language in their videos?
3. How did the videos employ technical elements to convey the messages?
4. Were the protest paradigm indicators used by TikTok users to support the cause?

Significance of The Study

The study aims to shed light on how #BlackTikTokStrike video content highlights social injustice on social media platforms. The lack of representation of black people on global platforms like TikTok is a crucial matter that — although well researched and discussed — is often subject to neglected attendance. Furthermore, the study aims to discuss social media activism in light of recent movements that support black people in a creative industry where credit is often lost to minority groups. This study's significance rests in the findings of social media activism efficiency in aiding its activists eliminate obstacles and attain specified goals.

Limitations

The study is based on the analysis of videos under a relatively highly used hashtag with over 8.5 million views, as the numbers on the app show. In relevance to this information, it is crucial to know that users tend to use hashtags that are gaining momentum, in their captions, to attain more engagement on their videos, regardless of the hashtag's relevance to the user's video. With that being said, under the hashtag #BlackTikTokStrike, only the selected 109 were correctly used within the context of the hashtag, thus forming a limitation of relevant content to study. Furthermore, the social media movement used more hashtags like #TikTokStrike and #BlackTikTok. Although both hashtags had more videos of relevance, their inclusivity of the movement makes it hard to pursue the research within the given timeframe to conduct the study. Lastly, many content creators share videos on TikTok without utilizing its strongest engagement tool: hashtags. As such, many videos falling under the category of social media activism, and bearing black TikTok strike specifically, might have been posted on the platform without the use of the movement's hashtags.

Theoretical Framework

For this content analysis study, the theoretical framework used is the social exclusion theory. The social exclusion theory focuses on the lack and denial of rights, goods, and services that are available to a greater majority of people and not to a marginalized group (Park, 2012). In this study, the theory will examine how black TikTok creators initiated the strike as a result of loss of due credit to marginalized groups due to the unequal power dynamics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the process of discovering the literature gap concerning this subject, the study reviewed multiple academic and non-academic resources to aid the content analysis on TikTok. This literature review studies the existing relevant literature and identifies the multiple theories and content patterns that will be later analyzed in this study.

The article "Copyrighting TikTok Dances: Choreography in the Internet Age" by Johson aims to clarify the several aspects of creating content for "dances" on the social platform TikTok. Johson states on the origin of famous routine dances on the app that oftentimes, they are young women of color. In his comment, he acknowledges the strong influence of the app and its power to provide lifetime experiences to its stars. For instance, a successful dance video might go viral and launch a new career path for the dancer in the video -- as opposed to the creator of the dance -- offering endorsement deals, advertisement agreements and more. Thus, in order to understand this new trend in the entertainment industry the researcher uses qualitative methods by researching content creators and what skills they use to create their content on TikTok. Furthermore, the paper examines the methods of content creation, and explores the importance of the laws established by TikTok to assign choreography rights to its choreographers. The study concludes that it is crucial to prove the intellectual property rights of TikTok content creators, even if some audiences perceive the content on this platform as "random" dance moves. As a global social platform, it is necessary for TikTok to recognize talents and protect the copyright of content creators.

In the 2021 article, "Are Black Creators Really on 'Strike' From TikTok?" Lorenz and Zornosa express different points of view on the social movement happening on TikTok. Starting with Erick Louis' statement that "black people are carrying the app" and that the content strike can prove that. As a result of this kickstarter, non-black people were forced to come up with dance choreographies on their own, instead of relying on black people's content. Additionally, the article touches on Megan Thee Stallion's recent music video that supports the essence of the social movement, that being black women acting as essential workers of the society and underlining the idea of how black people support the economy. The article concludes with an analysis of the declining amount of dance trends

on TikTok as a result of major content creators moving to more diverse content, like vlogging.

In their study “‘It's Viral!’ -- A study of the behaviors, practices, and motivations of TikTok Social Activists” they explored the theme of social activism and dug deeper into the motives behind it. The study revealed that motivation and inspiration for posting social activist content comes from a wide range of personal sources. Furthermore, the main driving force for picking TikTok over any other platforms is its ability to spread messages much faster and with less effort. In addition, according to the interviews, a crucial stage of content creation and social activism is engagement and interaction with other activists and viewers.

“Beyond lip-synching: experimenting with TikTok storytelling” by Hennemanaims is a study that clarifies the importance of storytelling on global platforms like TikTok. The research uses qualitative and quantitative methods to show the different ways through which TikTok users get the chance to convey a particular message that should be delivered through a short video. Furthermore, the study discusses TikTok’s utilization of different rules and patterns for portraying stories. When surveyed, 64.71% out of 35 students agreed or strongly agreed that TikTok is a useful platform through which journalists could reach new audiences. This published journal finds the importance of integrating the rules and methods of storytelling and journalism with the rules of creating content on TikTok. However, this process is expected to happen while maintaining the credibility and value of the information or message being delivered. Moreover, the interest of media organizations in general, and the platform TikTok in specific, is explored in Henneman’s paper by introducing new methods used by content creators to prepare reports or illustrated stories. This type of informative content has a purpose, yet, it tailors to the new demand and short attention span of the 15 seconds videos targeting the new generation.

The paper “Social Media and Activism” written by Cammaerts explains the position of social networking sites on social movements and how activists consider it a blog to write and record their point of view freely. The 2015 paper defines social movements and how they shed light on social issues in order to find solutions. The emergence of social media networks has led to the convergence of channels and introduced the form of social power, this was in the interest of social activists. It further explains how social networking is an immediate medium that enables different types of communication practices such as one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many multi directional communication which make it easier for activists to spread their words. The article aims to clarify the importance of social networking in today’s world and understanding how social activists are using social media to gather and coordinate direct actions.

The study “Algorithmic Folk Theories and Identity: How TikTok Users Co-Produce Knowledge of Identity and Engage in Algorithmic Resistance” analyzes survey data and conducts interviews in order to understand the concept of algorithmic representational harm. The paper utilizes “folk theories as a productive framework for how users come to

theorize and make sense of their experiences on an algorithmic platform in relation to identity.” The study revealed the ways these theories created various identities, and demonstrated how this motivated and influenced user behavior to resist or wield power over how their identities are understood by the algorithm. The study found that folks' theories led participants to attempt to resist the algorithm to shape their "algorithmic identity." In addition, results describe how the behaviors of participants changed to align and shape their algorithmic identities, and understand themselves.

Written by Wang (2020), a Ph.D. candidate in health communication and technology, the study “Humor and camera view on mobile short-form video apps influence user experience and technology-adoption intent, an example of TikTok” examines the psychological responses of the audience by short-form videos on TikTok. In her study, she presents the alternative reactions to multiple video formats, by conducting participatory online questionnaires, that proves her theory that the significant effects of video content and camera angles have on the viewers’ perception. Moreover, the study presents important statistics that back up the theory in both fields, psychology and technology. This resonates with the study as it emphasizes the relationship of storytelling forms and the psychological interaction of the audience to the shared content. The findings of the study are of relation to the social media activism theory, since these multiple forms of video storytelling can be translated to support desired agendas and reach a global, or niche, audience. The article suits this content analysis through the methods it pursues in identifying the narrative performance of TikTok, yet lacks the specificity of the content that the study aims to follow.

The study; “Analysis of The Representation of The 2019 Lebanese Protests and The 2020 Beirut Explosion On TikTok” by Alhamarna, Al Wawi, ElSayed, Ammar, and Harb, aims to scrutinize how both the Lebanese protests of 2019, and the catastrophic explosion of Beirut’s port, were presented on TikTok, between October 2019, and October 2020. The study analyzes how the protests and explosion were highlighted on the platform, while taking into account the archetype of protests in general, as well as conducting narrative analysis. Through the 40 TikTok videos selected, it becomes noticeable how a bulk of the creators tackled the subject with a humorous approach through different TikTok technical tools as well as storytelling formats. The results showed that some videos included narration of the events taking place, while others were in the form of parodies. The study’s relevancy in analyzing social media activism present on TikTok through themes like storytelling and TikTok technicalities’ utilization aid the current study in terms of user choice and audience perception.

“This Is Just How I Cope” is an academic article written by Herrick, Hallward, and Duncan. The article discusses the blurred boundaries of awareness between ED recovery and pro-ED content on the social media platform, TikTok. In their article, the authors, along with two coders, systematically analyzed 150 TikTok videos under the hashtag EDrecovery across 5 themes, all of which were examined by their video formats, storytelling forms, and content creation inspiration. The results discuss the relationship of sharing personal

experiences through the use of viral video formats and succinct storytelling. The article aids the study since its points of examination can be applicable to this study, irrespective of the topic's relevancy.

All of the above studies covered different essential aspects of black strike on TikTok, like social media platforms role in social activism nowadays with an overview look on #BlackTikTokStrike to analyze users' patterns. However, the gap that will be analyzed in this study, is how the #BlackTikTokStrike content highlighted social injustice by using forms of storytelling on social media, and TikTok in particular. That is why this study takes a new page in analyzing social media users' content that is related to social activism.

METHOD

The sample used in this quantitative content analysis was based entirely on primary data collected through the social media platform, TikTok. In this section, the sampling methods and data collection techniques will be further explained and specified with the frames and indicators leading the study.

Sampling Methods and Data Collection

The research used a purposive sampling technique to filter out the primary and relevant videos under the hashtag #BlackTikTokStrike. A total of 109 videos underwent content analysis in this study on the basis of 5 themes (a) TikTok context, (b) storytelling analysis, (c) audio and music, (d) technical elements, and (e) protest paradigm. The sample was selected depending on the videos' content and their relevance to the social movement. As shown in Table (1), a total of 601 videos were shared under the hashtag #BlackTikTokStrike and only 109 of them are of relevance.

Table 1: Sampling Methods

Population	TikTok videos under the hashtag #BlackTikTokStrike
Population #	601
Sample Population	Videos relevant to the social movement under the same hashtag
Sample Population #	109

Methods of Data Analysis

The study uses content analysis procedures that focus on a set of thematic codes for frames that are derived from social media movement literature. In the frame label 'TikTok Context' the analysis relied on the identity of the video published. The frame label "Music and Audio" focuses on an analysis of the songs, language, and diction used. 'Technical Elements' analyzes graphics and any additional special effects. The fifth frame label, 'Protest Paradigm', addresses the social activism patterns and analyzes the presence of artists' recognition as well as calls for action, if any.

Table 2: Theoretical Framework

Frame Labels	Attributes and Specification
TikTok Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Link accessed - User account - Date released - Duration - TikTok Caption - Views - Likes - Comments - Was it a duet?
Storytelling analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Was an informative approach used? - Was a humorous approach used?
Music and Audio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is the word “black” used? - Is the word “white” used? - “Thot Shit” song used? - Is profanity language used in videos? - Is the language polite?
Technical Elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Were different camera angles used? - Was it raw (no cuts)? - Were graphics used? - Were filters used? - Were effects used?
Protest Paradigm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is the video addressing the platform TikTok? - Is the video addressing specific TikTok stars? - Is the video recognizing specific uncredited black creators? - Is the video calling for action?

FINDINGS

Videos that cover black strike on Tik Tok with the use of #BlackTikTokStrike hashtags were analysed in detail and findings were listed in four separate tables. (Table 3) contains the preferred storytelling approach of the users in the videos. The findings in the table show that users relied on a humorous tone to deliver their messages rather than a serious tone. In (Table 4), the videos were analysed based on the audio and music and the used form of language. The table shows a considerably large usage of Megan Thee Stallion's music. (Table 5) shows the utilization of TikTok's technical elements and whether or not users preferred using graphics and keeping their videos raw. The findings show high percentages of uncut and raw videos as well as videos that relied on graphics. In the final table (Table 6), the type of message covered in the videos was analyzed in terms of the protest paradigm. The findings in the table show that users heavily relied on the social media platform to call for action.

Table 3: Approaches Used in Videos

STORYTELLING ANALYSIS	# OF VIDEOS	PERCENTAGES
Videos that use an informative approach?	38	34%
Videos that use a humorous approach?	55	50.5%

Table 4: Audio Usage in videos

AUDIO AND MUSIC	# OF VIDEOS	PERCENTAGES
Videos that use the word black	66	60.6%
Videos that use the word white	23	21.1%
Videos that use the song "Thot Shit"	30	27.5%
Videos that use profanity language	40	36.7%
Videos that use polite language	59	54.1%

Table 5: Different Technical Elements

TECHNICAL ELEMENTS	# OF VIDEOS	PERCENTAGES
Videos that use different camera angles	9	8.3%
Videos that are raw/uncut	69	63.3%

Videos that use graphics	80	73.4%
Videos that use filters	34	22%
Videos that use effects	20	18.3%

Table 6: Protest Paradigm Aspects

PROTEST PARADIGM	# OF VIDEOS	PERCENTAGES
Videos that address the platform TikTok	34	31.2%
Videos that address specific TikTok stars	13	11.9%
Videos that recognize uncredited black creators	32	29.6%
Videos calling for action	51	46.8%

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the patterns of social media activism under the hashtag #BlackTikTokStrike. The videos analyzed, having fallen under the criteria of purposive sampling, although shared the same topic, differed in methods of delivery. As such, the findings show the patterns that users resorted to when advocating for the content strike. In relation to the social exclusion theory, it becomes evident through the videos that users feel marginalized since the findings show 29.8% of the users directly recognize the miscredit in their posts and a good 46.8% call for action.

While TikTok is having its vast share of users creating innovative content that includes original ideas, dances, and approaches it also paves the path for the scattering of rights, in which along with the popularity of the trend, comes the ambiguity of its copyright owners, and hence results in the discrediting of the original creator. However, what makes matters more complicated is the evident truth that only minority groups seem to be victims of this miscredit. The loss of creative minds' ownership to their own content not only diminishes the efforts and creative ideas of those who created them, but also places TikTok in a position of endangering intellectual properties.

The norm in which Tik Tok is used as a platform for storytelling and social activism is believed to represent an unprecedented approach to tackling serious and noteworthy

topics in an ingenious and innovative method. That said, it relates to Todd Henneman's discussion on lip-synching and its utilization within the storytelling context. In his article, he explains that the videos analyzed are not simply used to entertain, rather they contain the crucial elements of journalism and storytelling. Yet, that can be done through a fun and light hearted manner as the findings of this study prove that 50.5% of the users resorted to this storytelling approach.. On such a note, it becomes evident that storytelling on Tik Tok is not by any means restricted to humorous content, rather the umbrella of storytelling contains various strings of societal matters. In fact, it is proven that delivering topics through TikTok's storytelling archetype adds additional value on what is being depicted, where it delivers the message successfully, while also sticking to the elements of innovative storytelling, no matter how sensitive the topic is.

In this study, video creators were more inclined to discuss their point of view using polite language to reach a larger group of audience without using profanity language. However, with that being said, 36.7% used profanity language to convey their points. Furthermore, as evident by the findings, 73.4% of the videos used graphics adding valuable information, graphs, and pictures that help demonstrate the ideas to the audience. Plus, most creators did not use neither filters nor effects showing that those are just additions that create a more artistic side and have nothing to do with the social movement when a short video creative app is the platform. The study also finds that most users of the hashtag, 63.6%, tend to avoid cuts and montages and rather post raw videos.

In comparison to the 2021 article "Are Black Creators Really on 'Strike' From TikTok?" The content analysis discovers that users heavily resorted to using the music of Megan Thee Stallion, specifically her song "Thot Shit". This pattern, as explained in one of the videos analyzed, is due to the participant's collective decision to withhold from creating dance choreography to new, famous music in an attempt to prove a point that white creators cannot create dances without black choreography. Within the founded quantitative results, 27% of the content used Thee Stallion's music.

Regarding social media activism, the 2015 paper for Cammaerts states how social media became a powerful tool for activists to spread their word. Indeed, in the findings 46% of video creators are calling for action showing that it's easier to reach an audience and make a difference through social media platforms. Similar to the study "Analysis of The Representation of The 2019 Lebanese Protests and The 2020 Beirut Explosion On TikTok'," the findings deducted a great amount of humor presented within the videos, as most took a more humorous approach than an informative approach, although within different contexts, showcasing how humor is more likely to be present through content relaying significant campaigns, possibly due to the attraction it receives.

The findings of this study exemplify the work of the "Algorithmic Folk Theories and Identity" article. The videos analyzed in this study differed in the diction used to explain the movement. For example, some videos used the word "black", or "white", or both. The findings conclude 60.6% and 21.1% of the videos use these words, respectively. Those

videos gained a minimal amount of engagement, which explains how the algorithm works in favor of content shared.

The findings of the study by Herrick, Hallward, and Duncan, were close to the findings in this study. The hashtag BlackTikTokStrike got misused between people actually supporting the movement and people that support a different cause related to people of colour. That resonates why in the findings, not all the users called for action as would be expected, and only 46.8% of the videos did, while other videos were discussing other racial inequalities.

In relation to Wang's findings of the camera angle and storytelling power on the audience, the findings of this study are in agreement with the theories. The findings show that more than half of the videos that supported the strike were non-edited by 63.3%, and thus played comfortably with the psyche of the audience. Videos with graphics, like texts and pictures, also attracted a larger audience as previously mentioned. Furthermore. The use of effects and filters by 22%, and 18.3%, respectively, created a pattern of familiarity and comfort to the audience.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzes the social activism movement content on the platform TikTok regarding the content strike by black content creators in the time frame of its beginning of June 2021, to the last video posted under the hashtag #BlackTikTokStrike as of November 20th, 2021. The study uses purposive sampling to select the relevant videos that would undergo analysis by the frames mentioned above. Concluding the findings and discussion, this study finds that there was an inclination to create social activism videos of the Black TikTok Strike in a humorous tone rather than a serious one. The paper also highlights that, although TikTok is a social media platform that is heavily reliant on short and quirky dance videos, it is also a great platform to deliver messages to an audience and call for guaranteed action.

RECOMMENDATIONS

When studying the TikTok strike, it is recommended to study a more inclusive hashtag given a longer timeframe. Other hashtags covering the movement include #TikTokStrike with over 16.9 million views and #GiveCreditToTheOriginal with over 6.9 million views. Additionally, since many users participate in social media activism at the time of movements, it is recommended to study hashtags during their momentum in order to cover users' videos that do not use relevant hashtags. Lastly, with the easy access to social media platforms, it has become relatively easy to lead a social movement on these apps. As such, it can further support the study to compare Black TikTok Strike to other relevant social movements and study similar or differing patterns between the activists' shared content.

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