

“He Has A Name”: Sense-Making and the Use of Twitter to Disrupt the Dominant Narrative in
the Wake of Michael Brown’s Death

By

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Thesis

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For Andrea, Dan, Ashley, and Dan III

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INTRODUCTION

On August 9, 2014, I was beginning my senior year of high school and, like many other people my age, was very active on social media websites. Usually, my time on these sites was spent connecting with friends, sharing photos, and laughing at funny jokes. However, this day was different. Twitter slowly began to erupt with messages about an incident that had taken place in Ferguson, Missouri. An unarmed, Black teenager had been killed by a police officer, and people quickly began to look for information and answers. One of the most chilling tweets on that Saturday afternoon was simply a photograph of a body lying in the street with no caption. The first tweet to actually mention the name of the victim was a simple “RIP Mike Brown.” By the end of the day, the story had been picked up by multiple national news sources, and all eyes were on Ferguson.

It is often human desire to make sense of how and why certain things happen, particularly in the wake of an event that disrupts one’s understanding of their world (Heverin & Zach, 2011; Stein, 2004; Stone & Pennebaker, 2002; Weick, 1993). The official term for this phenomenon is “sense-making” (or “meaning-making,” used interchangeably throughout this piece). This process is especially true with regards to catastrophic and/or tragic events, and it often takes place through communication with others (Eriksson, 2016; Heverin & Zach, 2011; Stone & Pennebaker, 2002). Since the early-to-mid 2000s, these conversations have increasingly taken place on social media platforms, such as Twitter or Facebook (Heverin & Zach, 2011; Pennebaker & Harber, 1993; Qu, Wu, & Wang, 2009).

Current research on sense-making focuses on events that are widely considered negative, such as natural disasters or mass shootings (Heverin and Zach, 2011; Pennebaker and Harber, 1993; Qu, Wu, & Wang, 2009). Existing research on sensemaking on social media categorizes

tweets in order to classify the content of tweets following a traumatic event during which the perceived threat has a clear beginning and end point (Heverin & Zach, 2011; Qu, Wu, & Wang, 2009). However, what is much less discussed is how sense-making comes into play with regards to the events that divide public opinion, which is why my research focuses on one of the most highly publicized police shootings to date, the killing of Michael Brown. The death of Michael Brown was also of interest to me because it illuminated a larger societal debate surrounding police brutality and violence at the hands of law enforcement. Police brutality and racial tension as a research category is unique because it reflects an embodied threat for many people, meaning that the threat is considered continuous, as opposed to having a clear beginning and endpoint (e.g. a tornado or terrorist attack).

Polarizing events and events that are not overwhelmingly considered by everyone to be negative present a particularly interesting investigation into sense-making. Whereas events that are universally considered catastrophic and/or tragic often foster a sense of public solidarity and unity, polarizing events, such as instances of police brutality, divide public opinion.

With any major news story, a dominant narrative often emerges, one that is driven by the reporting style and journalists. With such stories, including sensationalized instances of police brutality, these narratives often establish who is at fault, delineate who does and does not deserve blame, and heavily influence and shape public opinion (Hadley, 2013; Lorber, 1991). With increasing frequency, social media sites such as Twitter and Instagram are being used as arenas for delivering news and breaking stories in addition to the traditional channels of television, newspapers, and online websites. What started out as sites for purely social engagement have begun to serve as reliable sources of news (Broersma & Graham, 2012; Nielsen & Schröder, 2014). In fact, more people report using social media as a source of news than traditional print

newspapers (Shearer, 2018). Thus, observing Twitter discourse can illuminate the ways that the platform serves as an arena for rejecting dominant narratives being disseminated by news outlets and other sources and creating counternarratives to combat these narratives. This, in turn, allows individuals to regain a sense of agency and exercise some control over their circumstances.

This thesis investigates one such polarizing event, the 2014 killing of Michael Brown, in order to observe and analyze trends, language, and overall patterns in conversations that occurred on Twitter. I argue that existing categories are unable to account for the challenges to the dominant narrative that polarizing events engender, such as a reshaping of what is considered to be the “critical period” following a trauma or catastrophe. By adding the “narrative challenge” category, this research shows how social media provides a space for combating hegemonic discourse and cultivating counternarratives, allowing users to serve as active participants in reshaping constructed meanings of the world around them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sense-Making

Sense-making describes how individuals structure the unknown in the world so that it is possible to act and exist in it. The term was first introduced by organizational theorist Karl Weick, who sought to focus on adding *meaning* to decisions that then manifest themselves in behavior (Weick, 1993). Traditionally, the accepted disciplinary focus was centered more on decision-making. Sense-making (also interchangeably referred to as meaning-making) describes the steps that individuals take in order to bridge the cognitive gaps that they experience, particularly in the face of a traumatic event (Heverin and Zach, 2011). It has also been described as a “negotiation” of meaning, indicating that there is some sort of process taking place when

attempting to come to terms with why a particular event has taken place (Eriksson, 2016). Weick's framework laid the groundwork for understanding that sense-making hinges on a process of trying to fill in cognitive holes through negotiation.

Understanding *why* people sense-make in the first place is essential to understanding this concept. Sense-making is imperative in conceptualizing our sense of belonging in the world around us. Everyone, from white supremacists to terrorists to politicians to activists to policymakers to police officers, acts and operates based on the meaning that they construct in their world, because we use our “constructed meaning” to influence how we should act in the world around us (Chater and Loewenstein, 2015). Sense-making is driven by a desire to simplify how we see the world around us and can explain a large number of phenomena that we observe, including: seeking out information, rejecting information, and seeking out confirmation bias (Chater and Loewenstein, 2015). Sense-making warrants research attention because it directly impacts how we construct meaning of the world and thus how we see ourselves fitting into it. This, in turn, directly influences our actions.

There are a variety of ways in which humans can make meaning. Writing, speaking, and reading are just a few of the ways that we attempt to process events that take place in our lives. Heverin and Zach identified eight primary categories of sense-making: sharing information, negotiating information, seeking information, discussing a solution, discussing individual actions, explaining “why,” discussing awareness, and talking about possible outcomes. Information, they concluded, is critical to the meaning-making process at the beginning of a crisis (Heverin and Zach, 2011).

Social Media and Meaning-Making

In today's internet-driven world, sense-making often takes place online on social media sites, including Twitter (Heverin & Zach, 2011). Online discourse presents a new arena to understand how sense-making occurs, especially its social aspects. The online sphere is increasingly being accepted by scholars as a research site worth exploring. Simon Lindgren (2012), a professor of sociology at Umeå University in Sweden analyzed online discourse and networking following a school shooting and found that patterns support an emerging media landscape where the audience has a growing role in co-producing content and discourse (Lindgren, 2012). Eriksson's (2016) research indicated that Twitter can be an instrumental forum used to "make-meaning" of a collectively traumatizing event. This same study also found that different discussion topics were more salient during different reaction stages following an event, suggesting that the process of understanding why/how a tragic event takes place is an evolving process (Eriksson, 2016). Many now well-known campaigns, such as the Black Lives Matter movement, have gained traction on social media, as individuals attempt to place meaning behind certain events.

Heverin and Zach (2011) concluded that hashtagging and contributing to conversations can support a sense of community and that hashtagging can connect others to a crisis or major event. They also found that information is critical to the meaning-making process at the beginning of a crisis. All of these studies support the use of Twitter and online fora as a site of exploration for observing the sense-making and collective coping strategies of others.

The "Critical Period" of a Crisis

Following the onset of a crisis or a "triggering event," there is a period of time during which the incident in question is most salient and the threat perception the highest (Shrivastava,

1987). Scholars have deemed this period of time as the “critical period” of a disaster, and it is characterized by a sense of chaos and urgency as well as a crisis of meaning, with individuals’ conceptualization of their world being challenged (Stein, 2004). Karl Weick called this sudden crisis of meaning the “cosmology episode” where people begin to realize that the world is no longer orderly and rational (Weick, 1993). This threatened sense of being prompts individuals to try and fill in the cognitive gaps that often accompany a crisis of meaning (Dervin, 1983). The duration of this period varies depending on the event, but previous research has found that it lasts anywhere from a few minutes to typically no more than a few days following a triggering event. Following a disaster, this period ends when the threat of immediate danger has passed and aftermath has concluded (Stein, 2004). Worth noting is the difference between the critical period and the *incubation period*, which describes the much longer period of time prior to a triggering event that can go on for months or even years leading up to a certain event. (Stein, 2004). The critical period is typically much shorter than the incubation period and is marked by a much more heightened sense of danger.

Social Media as an Anthropological Site of Research

Social media has been shown to be a valid anthropological site of research. It can create lasting social ties among strangers by allowing previous strangers to form bonds and relationships (Ostertag & Ortiz, 2017). Social media has also become an arena for the documentation and challenging of incidents of police brutality. Hashtags in particular can serve as field sites by functioning as an indexing tool to locate language in a specific context, such as referring to a particular event (ie. #mikebrown). They can link tweets regardless of topic and disseminate news before the mainstream media (Bonilla & Rosa, 2011). As Eriksson’s research found, social media can be used to manage collective trauma and process experiences that

individuals go through. She also concluded that different event interpretations could be made by connecting them to other phenomena (Eriksson, 2016).

Challenging Dominant Narratives

Throughout American history in particular, dominant narratives have been integral in shaping social and cultural climates. From our nation's fraught racial history, to debates over LGBTQI+ rights, to gendered social norms, these dominant narratives influence public perception and often dictate who does and does not have a voice. Typically, dominant narratives are driven by the dominant culture. Psychologist Judith Lorber coined the concept of the "A-Categories," which refers to individuals who belong to a dominant group and thus shape the most pervasive narratives in popular discourse. With regards to race, in the United States, the A-Category is most certainly white people, and African Americans fall into the "not-A" category (Lorber, 1991). This system of stratification has placed severe limitations on whose voices are heard and what perspectives receive the most legitimacy. In order to challenge dominant narratives, it is imperative to highlight the oppression and inequalities against certain groups that have often prevailed unquestioned (Hadley, 2013). Often, these hegemonic narratives rely on a "concealment of power relations involved," that not only serve to strengthen the dominant narrative, but also allow these institutions to continue largely unchallenged. Mass media plays a major role in perpetuating hegemonic ideals (Stige, 2002).

The Death of Michael Brown

In recent history, police brutality has become a contentious issue in the United States. Broadly defined, police brutality describes "the use of any force exceeding that reasonably necessary to accomplish a lawful police purpose" (*Dictionary of American History*, 2003). The

killings of individuals including Michael Brown, Freddie Grey, Philando Castille, and Eric Garner and the protests that subsequently ensued pushed the issue to the forefront of the public eye. In 2008, police officers in the United States used physical force on approximately 344,000 people (Feldman, 2015). Even more recently, in 2013, interactions with police officers led to an estimated 100,000 emergency room visits (CDC, 2013). This has led many to conclude that police brutality is not only an issue of race but a public health issue as well.

On August 11, 2014, 18-year-old Michael Brown was killed in Ferguson, Missouri by Officer Darren Wilson. Brown was accused of stealing from a convenience store, which led to the confrontation between him and Wilson. Brown was unarmed when he was killed. His death led to a barrage of controversy and outrage from protestors both in Ferguson and throughout the world who felt that his death was a gross miscarriage of racial injustice. It also elicited a strong response from those who felt that his death was not unjust and supported the officer and Ferguson police department. This led to a divided nation and made this case one of the most divisive and salient topics in the news and media in 2014. Because of how contentious Brown's death was in public discourse, it made it a prime topic of focus for my research.

METHODS

Basic Twitter Information

Twitter is a social media platform that allows users to send short messages called tweets (limited to 140 characters in 2014) via cellphone, online, or other electronic sources. In the wake of Michael Brown's shooting, Twitter was used to communicate information and opinions about the killing. Many of these tweets were signaled with hashtags (#) which are conventionally used to categorize tweets that are about a common topic.

Sampling Framework

To select my dataset, I chose to focus on tweets following two important developments: the killing of Brown on August 9, 2014 and a grand jury's subsequent decision not to indict Officer Darren Wilson on November 24, 2014.

Due to Twitter's terms of service, users are prohibited from collecting and publishing Twitter data (such as text from tweets), except for Tweet IDs, which are unique numerical identifiers that every tweet is given. In order to convert the data from Tweet ID in JSON format to comma-separated values (or csv), (a process called "hydrating"), I created a Twitter application programming interface (or API) account, which allows one to access Twitter features without going through the traditional interface. In this case, the API was what granted me permission to convert the files from JSON to csv format.

I used Hydrator, an Electron-based desktop application, to "read" the Tweet ID JSON files so that the tweet information was converted from ID numbers to actual readable text. The csv that was created for each day (via Hydrator) contained 34 variables, including the text of each tweet, time a tweet was sent, user location, and number of favorites. With this information, analysis was performed based on the data gathered, using an integrated developer environment called RStudio. Using this software, I uploaded each csv for the days of study and coded to perform three basic analyses of the tweets: word frequency, most retweets, and most favorites.

Data Source

Three researchers: Deen Freelon, Charlton D. McIlwain, and Meredith D. Clark compiled a data set of 40,815,975 tweets corresponding to at least one of 45 keywords (see Figure 1) (Freelon, McIlwain, & Clark, 2016). Their data was collected every day from June 1, 2014 to

May 31, 2015, a period which encompassed my desired timeline. It is worth noting that Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark data retrieved their data on July 15, 2015, so any tweets that had been protected or deleted prior to that time were excluded from the dataset. Because of the concurrence of this data with my desired one, I decided to use Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark’s data for my observation and analysis. Although the tweets followed 45 hashtags and keywords, not all directly related to the killing of Michael Brown, I hypothesized that tweets related to Brown’s death would be salient, as my chosen dates of observation were immediately after two central occurrences. (This was later confirmed by word frequency analysis confirming that words related to Mike Brown were most salient).

▶ "akai gurley"	▶ "tamir rice"	▶ #jeramereid
▶ "black lives matter"	▶ "tanisha anderson"	▶ #johncrawford
▶ "dante parker"	▶ "tony robinson"	▶ #jordanbaker
▶ "eric garner"	▶ "tyree woodson"	▶ #kajiemepowell
▶ "eric harris"	▶ "victor white"	▶ #mckenziecochran
▶ "ezell ford"	▶ "walter scott"	▶ #michaelbrown
▶ "freddie gray"	▶ "yvette smith"	▶ #mikebrown
▶ "jerame reid"	▶ #akaigurley	▶ #philipwhite
▶ "john crawford"	▶ #blacklivesmatter	▶ #tamirrice
▶ "jordan baker"	▶ #danteparker	▶ #tanishaanderson
▶ "kajieme powell"	▶ #ericgarner	▶ #tonyrobinson
▶ "mckenzie cochran"	▶ #ericharris	▶ #tyreewoodson
▶ "michael brown"	▶ #ezellford	▶ #victorwhite
▶ "mike brown"	▶ #ferguson	▶ #walterscott
▶ "phillip white"	▶ #freddiegray	▶ #yvettesmith

Figure 1: "Beyond the Hashtags" Hashtags and Keywords

Hashtags and keywords featured in the tweets retrieved in the "Beyond the Hashtags" study.
(Retrieved via: <http://dfreelon.org/2017/01/03/beyond-the-hashtags-twitter-data/>)

Retweets as Primary Dataset

The primary data set for this study was the top 10 retweets from the 7 days following each event of focus, for a total sample of 140 tweets. A retweet is a tweet that has been re-posted onto another user’s Twitter page. In other words, if a user posts a tweet to their feed (and their

page is not private), other Twitter users can “retweet” the message onto their own personal profiles. In this way, certain tweets can quickly gain traction and become disseminated throughout the Twitter sphere, as the constant retweeting exposes the original tweet to users who may not follow the original account. Even users that choose not to retweet a popular tweet can still be exposed to it due to its presence on another person’s page. There are no limits to the amount of time a tweet can be retweeted (Twitter.com). In my dataset, the 140 retweets were retweeted over 800,000 times cumulatively.

Content Analysis

“Online Community Response to Major Disaster: A Study of Tianya Forum in the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake” serves as a frame of reference for my content analysis of incident-related tweets. Qu, Wu, and Wang identify 4 categories of identifying tweet themes: information-related, opinion-related, emotion-related, and action-related. I used these categories for my analysis as well of top retweets as well as an additional category called “narrative challenging.”

A period of 7 days following each event was chosen based on existing research identifying the “critical phase” of crises as typically lasting up to a few days following the triggering event. Because this research focuses on a polarizing event, and existing research typically focuses on widely accepted traumatic events, the length of the critical phase in this case was not clear, so seven days were chosen in order to encompass the approximated length of the critical phase.

Categories of Analysis

Information Category:

The information category of tweets included tweets that *shared* factual information with the Twitter community, *sought* information from other family members, and *gathered* information to form collections of knowledge in order to educate others.

Opinion Category:

The opinion category encompassed tweets that *criticized* others, including the government or other organizations. It also included *generic statements of opinion* that didn't necessarily criticize anyone, but expressed personal belief or sought the opinions of others.

Emotion Category:

The emotion category included tweets *expressed* personal feelings as well as tweets that expressed *emotional support* for others. Qu, Wu, and Wang included *sensemaking* as a subcategory within this classification, but this paper extends sensemaking beyond simply the emotional category, so it was not exclusively coded to this category for this research.

Action Category

This category included tweets *proposing actions* to the general public as well as tweets *describing* tweets to others. The category also included tweets that *coordinated* the actions of others.

Narrative Challenge Category:

In order to determine preliminary criteria for the narrative challenge category, existing research on the challenging of dominant narratives was incorporated. Scholars in the field have identified several ways that dominant narratives can be challenged:

- Giving visibility to systems of oppression that have been accepted as the norm (Hadley, 2013)
- Challenging the idea of whiteness as the norm and/or of whiteness as superior (Jenson, 2011)

RESULTS

Event 1: The Death of Michael Brown

The first event of focus was the 7 days immediately following Michael Brown's death: August 9-15, 2014. As touched on earlier, it is important to note that only tweets that have not been deleted or protected were able to be retrieved using the hydrator software. After hydrating each data set, the Hydrator software provided a summary of the number of actual tweets that were able to be retrieved from the Tweet IDs as well as the percentage of tweets that have been deleted (see Table 1). For the first dataset, between 36-39% of tweets were deleted or made private by the Twitter user, meaning that the deleted tweets were no longer available for analysis.

Date	Total Tweet IDs	Total Tweet IDs Hydrated	Percent Deleted
Aug 9th	87,782	53,499	39%
Aug 10th	305,146	187,361	39%
Aug 11th	492,976	317,247	36%
Aug 12th	429,320	265,886	38%
Aug 13th	1,127,521	721,911	36%
Aug 14th	1,853,331	1,152,089	38%
Aug 15th	842,786	541,146	36%

Table 1: Event 1 Hydrator Tweet Retrieval Summaries
Hydrator Tweet retrieval summaries for each of the Event 1 days in focus.

Word Frequency

The first variable that was observed was the most frequently tweeted words from each of the first six days following Brown’s death. The results of this data retrieval for the top twenty tweeted words on each day are shown in the tables below (see Appendix A).

Most of the top words for the first six days after Brown’s death include basic details about what happened and who was involved-words like “unarmed,” “shot,” “black,” and “police.” As the days went on, we also saw an increase in words that indicated more details about the event including framing of the victim and killer. This included words like “unarmed,” “teen,” “story,” and “family.” Darren Wilson’s name did not appear in the top word frequencies until day 7, August 15th, 2014.

Retweet Content Analysis

Categories of Retweets

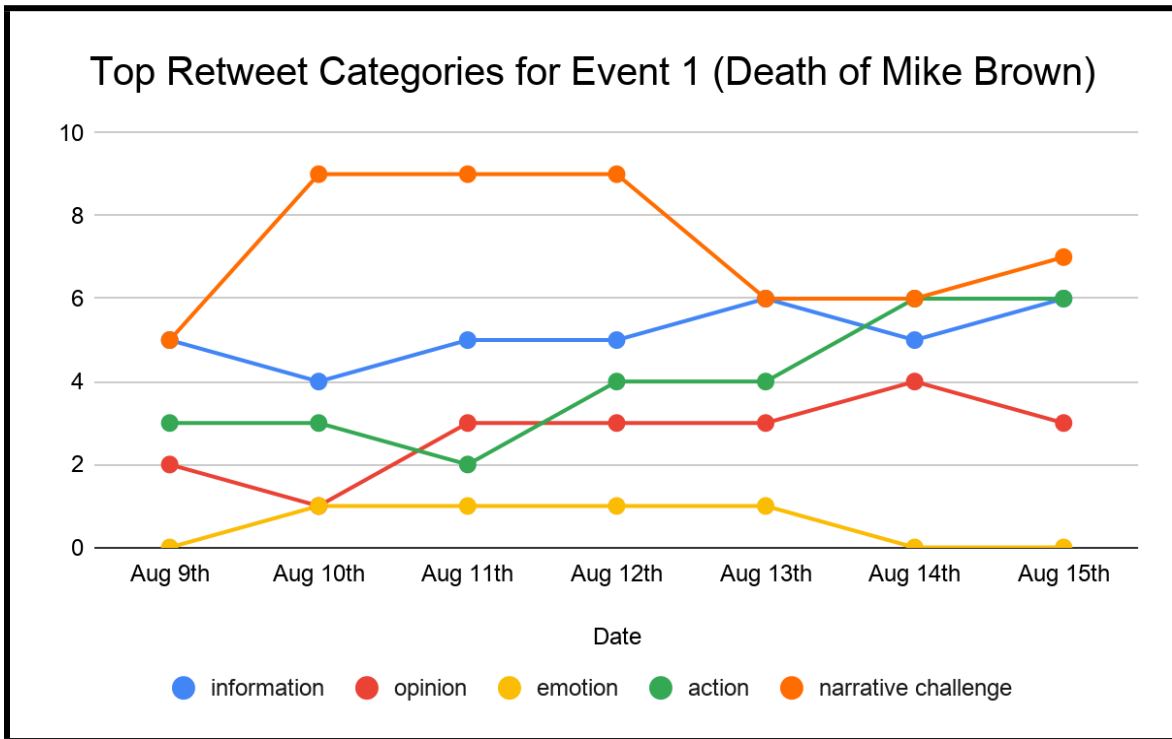


Figure 2: Top Retweet Categories for Event 1 (Death of Michael Brown)

This graph shows the top retweet categories in the 7 days following the killing of Michael Brown. The narrative challenge category was consistently either the top or tied with another category for the most number of tweets.

Type of Retweet (categories non-exclusive)	Number of Tweets	Percent of Total Dataset
information-related	30	43%
opinion-related	19	27%
action-related	28	40%
emotion-related	4	6%
narrative-challenging	51	73%

Table 2: Event 1 Retweet Category Percentages

This table displays the number and percent of total dataset for each category of top retweets for the 7 days following the death of Michael Brown.

Information Related:

43% of the tweets were information-related. Some examples of information-related retweets from the data set can be found below.

@AntonioFrench: They came all the way from India to #Ferguson. [photo URL included]

@LizPeinadoSTL: Men armed with nothing but phones ordered to get on their knees. I witnessed tear gas thrown at them in #ferguson [photo URL included]

These tweets fell into the information category because they included basic facts and/or observations about the events taking place in Ferguson and gave information to other Twitter users, such as protestors traveling to Ferguson from across the world to show solidarity or actions being taken by police against protestors.

Opinion-Related:

27% of the tweets were opinion-related. Some examples of opinion-related retweets from the data set can be found below.

@MichaelSkolnik: Mike Brown wasn't a thief. Jordan Davis wasn't a thug. Trayvon Martin wasn't a burglar. They're our #SonsAndBrothers [photo URL attached]

@attorneycrump: Such a powerful image from the students of Howard University. #MichaelBrown [photo URL attached]

These tweets were classified as opinion-related because they expressed personal beliefs of the individual disseminating them, beliefs that could be disputed by others. For example, the second

tweet describes an image as “powerful,” an observation with which others may not necessarily agree but that expresses the viewpoint of the Tweeter.

Action-Related

40% of the tweets were action-related. Some examples of action-related retweets from the data set can be found below.

```
@lolitasaywhat: PAY ATTENTION as "teen" becomes "man,"  
                "community" becomes "mob," and "murder" becomes  
                "alleged shooting." #Ferguson #medialiteracy
```

These tweets fell into the action category because they proposed or attempted to coordinate action from the general public. In the first tweet, for example, the user tells others to “pay attention,” prompting an action from other readers.

Emotion-Related

6% of the tweets were emotion-related. Some examples of emotion-related retweets from the data set can be found below.

```
@MichaelSkolnik: Mike Brown wasn't a thief. Jordan Davis  
                wasn't a thug. Trayvon Martin wasn't a  
                burglar. They're our #SonsAndBrothers [photo  
                URL attached]
```

These tweets were classified as emotion-related, because they expressed personal feelings and/or emotional support for others. In the tweet above, the user states that Brown, Davis, and Martin are “sons and brothers,” both expressing their emotional reaction and attempting to elicit an emotional response from others.

Dominant Narrative Challenging

73% of the tweets were related to challenging dominant hegemonic discourses. Some examples tweets related to challenging dominant narratives can be found below.

@lolitasaywhat: PAY ATTENTION as "teen" becomes "man,"
"community" becomes "mob," and "murder" becomes
"alleged shooting." #Ferguson #medialiteracy

@cmclymer: Apparently, 50 white men protesting a black
president = "citizenship". 50 black men grieving
dead black child = "an angry mob". #MikeBrown

@MichaelSkolnik: Ferguson police are only ones saying
#MikeBrown stole something from store. Parents
went to store + workers said they never called
police.

These tweets fell into the narrative-challenging category because they explicitly challenged existing systems, drew parallels to historical events, and challenged the idea of whiteness. The first tweet specifically references media literacy and calls out news outlets by mentioning the differences in language that are used when reporting events. The second tweet directly challenges the concept of Whiteness by comparing the language differences that occur when discussing the behavior of Black vs. White people. The third tweet example directly challenges Ferguson police officers by offering a contradiction to the official report given by law enforcement regarding the events leading up to Brown's death.

Event 2: Darren Wilson's Non-Indictment

The second event of interest was the decision by the grand jury to not indict Darren Wilson, the police officer who shot and killed Brown.

Date	Total Tweet IDs	Total Tweet IDs Hydrated	Percent Deleted
Nov 24th	3,420,934	2,206,548	35%
Nov 25th	2,321,367	1,466,163	37%
Nov 26th	886,725	553,699	38%
Nov 27th	364,595	225,847	38%
Nov 28th	399,537	256,955	36%
Nov 29th	305,368	197,658	35%
Nov 30th	289,297	187,690	35%

Table 3: Event 2 Hydrator Retrieval Summaries
Hydrator Tweet retrieval summaries for each of the Event 2 days in focus.

Word Frequency

The top words after the news that Wilson would not be indicted began with including basic information about what had just taken place, such as “decision,” “jury,” and “grand.” There were also mentions of Tamir Rice, a 14-year-old Black child who was killed that same day. The #blacklivesmatter hashtag appeared in the dataset for the first time during this timeframe. As days went on, there were increased mentions of words related to protest, such as “protest,” “protestors,” and “justice.” Word related to Tamir Rice’s death were also increasingly mentioned. As with every other day in the dataset, #ferguson was the most tweeted word for each day in Event 2 as well. References to Darren Wilson, such as “Wilson,” “Darren,” and “officer” also appeared in the dataset.

Retweet Content Analysis

Types of Retweets

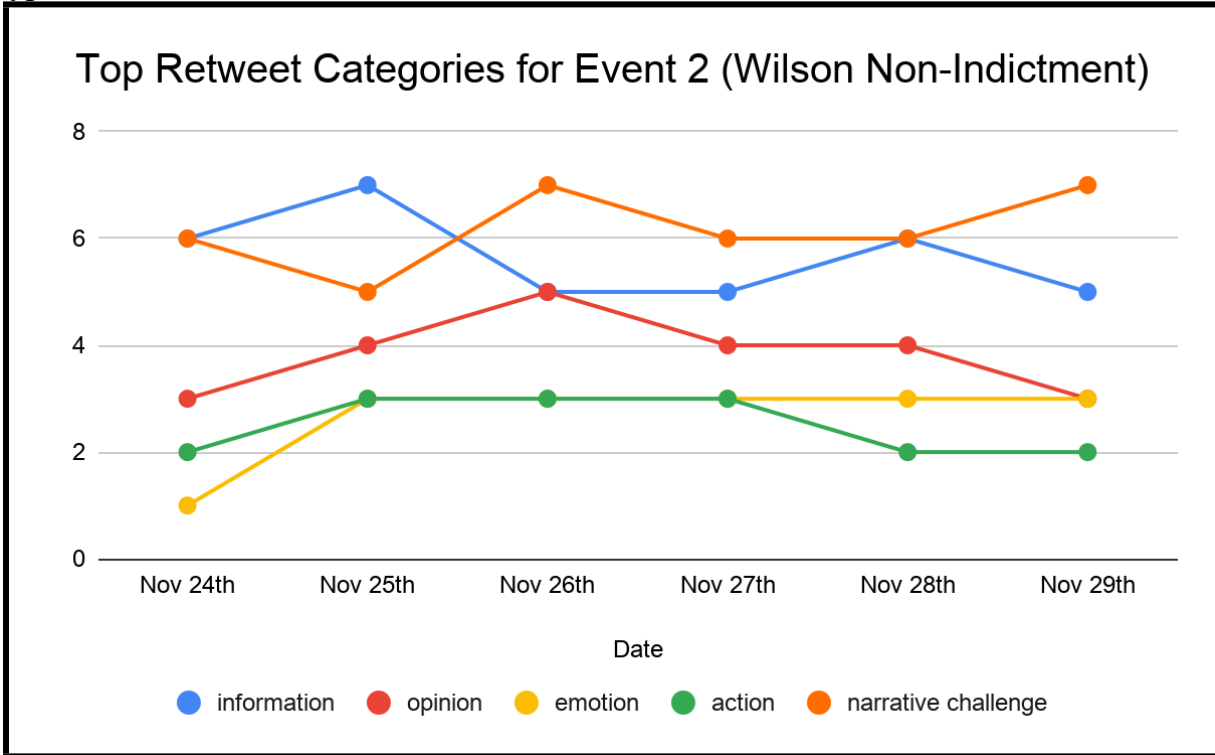


Figure 3: Top Retweet Categories for Event 2 (Darren Wilson Non-Indictment)

This graph shows the top retweet categories in the 7 days following a grand jury’s decision not to indict Officer Darren Wilson. The narrative challenge category and information categories consistently had the most retweets.

Type of Retweet (categories non-exclusive)	Number of Tweets	Percent of Total Dataset
information-related	40	30%
opinion-related	16	12%
action-related	16	12%
emotion-related	19	14%
narrative-challenging	42	32%

Table 4: Event 2 Retweet Category Percentages

This table displays the number and percent of total dataset for each category of top retweets for the 7 days following the grand jury’s decision not to indict Officer Darren Wilson.

Information Related:

30% of the tweets were information-related. Some examples of information-related retweets from the data set can be found below.

@AntonioFrench: Happening now in #Ferguson where #MikeBrown was killed. [photo URL included]

This tweet was categorized as information because it included basic information about events taking place in Ferguson including a photograph of what was taking place.

Opinion-Related:

12% of the tweets were opinion-related. Some examples of opinion-related retweets from the data set can be found below.

@kobebryant: The system enables young black men to be killed behind the mask of law #Ferguson #tippingpoint #change

@mikebrowncover: Why is #Ferguson important? Because war torn countries are sending messages of hope to US citizens. [photo URL included]

These tweets fell into the opinion category because they expressed the personal thoughts and feelings of the individuals who sent them. The first tweet is a criticism of the judicial system and expresses the opinion that it enables the deaths of black men. The second describes the events in Ferguson as “important,” which reflect the personal beliefs of the Tweeter.

Action-Related

12% of the tweets were action-related. Some examples of action-related retweets from the data set can be found below.

@ComplexMag: Michael Brown's family has released an official statement. [photo URL included, see below]

We are profoundly disappointed that the killer of our child will not face the consequence of his actions.

While we understand that many others share our pain, we ask that you channel your frustration in ways that will make a positive change. We need to work together to fix the system that allowed this to happen.

Join with us in our campaign to ensure that every police officer working the streets in this country wears a body camera.

We respectfully ask that you please keep your protests peaceful. Answering violence with violence is not the appropriate reaction.

Let's not just make noise, let's make a difference.

Figure 4: Statement from Michael Brown's Family

This tweet was classified as action-related because within the statement issued by Michael Brown's family, his parents encouraged others to join them in their fight for making body cameras a requirement for police officers.

Emotion-Related

6% of the tweets were emotion-related. Some examples of emotion-related retweets from the data set can be found below.

@voice: had been holding off on posting this poem i wrote on #ferguson, but i've realized that young voices must be heard too [photo URL included, see below]

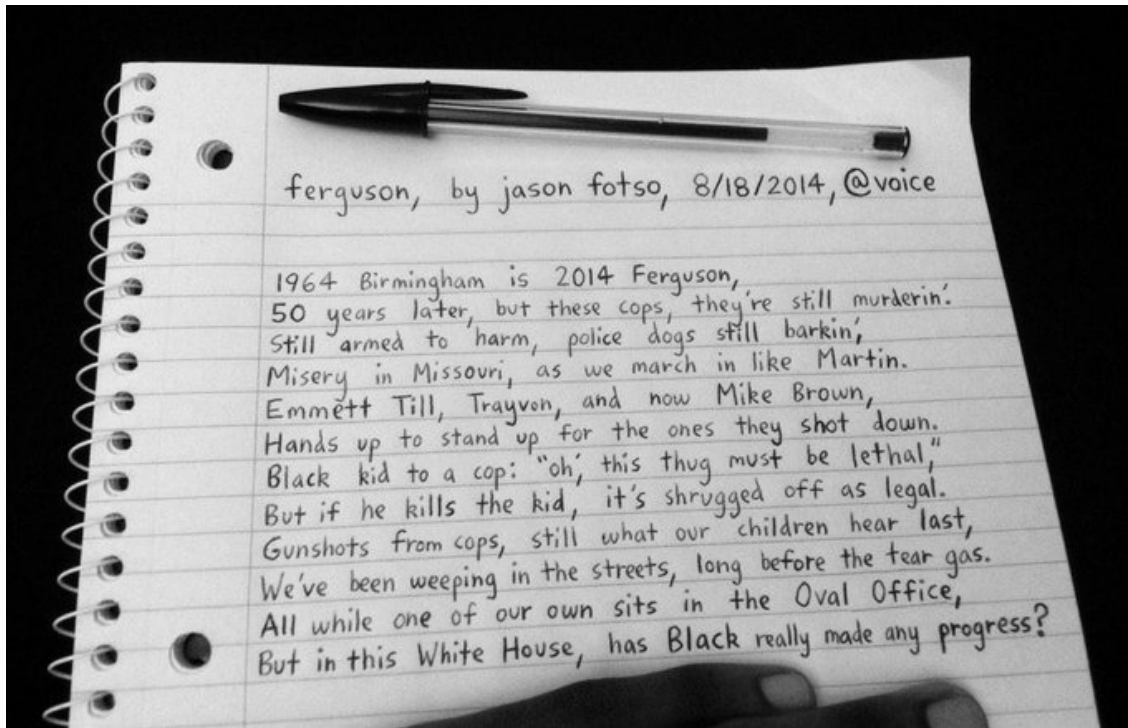


Figure 5: "ferguson" Poem by Jason Fotso

This is an example of a tweet that fell into the emotion category because it displays the personal feelings of the poet through the emotional tone of the poem.

Dominant Narrative Challenging

73% of the tweets were related to challenging dominant hegemonic discourses. Some examples tweets related to challenging dominant narratives can be found below.

@kobebryant: The system enables young black men to be killed behind the mask of law #Ferguson #tippingpoint #change

@arthur_affect: WTF is the impulse behind changing #BlackLivesMatter to #AllLivesMatter. Do you crash strangers' funerals shouting I TOO HAVE FELT LOSS

@CrystalLewis: In case you still don't know why there's so much outrage in #ferguson... (via @creativerobd) #handsup #DONTSHOOT [photo URL included, see below]



Figure 6: Narrative Challenging Illustration

The first tweet specifically criticizes the criminal justice system regarding its treatment of Black individuals. The second tweet criticizes the “All Lives Matter” movement (which rose to counter the Black Lives Matter movement) and gives a parallel example to further emphasize the user’s point. The last tweet shows a comparison of how law enforcement has treated white vs. Black suspects by comparing Michael Brown and Tamir Rice’s case (both killed by police) with two white mass shooters who were apprehended alive by police.

DISCUSSION

This thesis sought to investigate the validity of adding a “narrative challenge” category of tweet classification, particularly following a polarizing event. Through the observation of word

frequencies for each of the 14 days in question, as well as a crude content analysis of the top ten retweets for each of the 14 days, categories were identified, and the “narrative challenge” category was found to be prominent. For both of the events in question – the killing of Michael Brown and the grand jury’s decision to not indict Darren Wilson – the narrative challenge category was either the most frequent category or tied with “information” for the top category. This was only the exception for one day (Nov 25th), when the information category was the most prominent. On that day, narrative challenging was the second most prominent category. Because the coding categories in question were not mutually exclusive, there was often overlap with the information and narrative challenging categories.

Based on the results of my data analysis, it was concluded that the “narrative challenge” theme was prominent enough to warrant its own category of classification. I found that Qu, Wu, and Wang’s 4 categories of tweet classification (information, opinion, emotion, and action-related), while certainly relevant to traumatic events, did not fully encompass the nuances present in the online discussion of an event as polarizing as the killing of Michael Brown. Recognizing the need for an additional category based on observation of online discourse, I found that the addition of a “narrative challenge” category was necessary and justified. I identified three primary themes within this narrative challenge category following my research: comparing the differences in treatment of Black vs. White people, drawing parallels to previous instances of injustice or mistreatment (i.e. Civil Rights era), and directly challenging/contradicting existing systems of information including law enforcement and the media.

These findings suggest that previous research into tweet classification coding has not adequately considered the nuances that arise when investigating divisive events. Although

former research has identified the significance of the “information” category, especially in the *critical period* following a traumatic event (Heverin and Zach, 2011), there has been little to no mention of the significance of creating counternarratives during this same period. I argue that these results indicate that the forming of counternarratives immediately following a crisis of meaning is crucial, as it can allow individuals the chance to regain some control of the narrative and challenge dominant assumptions. Many of the tweets following into the narrative challenge category made direct comparisons between media conceptualization of Black and White individuals, explicitly challenged accounts of law enforcement officials, drew parallels to the Civil Rights Era and our nation’s tense racial history, and continuously tried to humanize Mike Brown as a person and loved one. This creation of counternarratives quickly garnered traction among Twitter users, hence the thousands of retweets and engagement, and illustrated the counternarrative formation that was taking place following Brown’s killing.

Results both challenge and support existing research that has been done into the sense-making processes of individuals following an event of crisis. The use of hashtagging was vital not only to data collection but also to the dissemination of tweets regarding Brown’s death. As Bonilla and Rosa found, hashtags served as an indexing tool to identify relevant tweets and to spur on digital activism (Bonilla and Rosa, 2011). As displayed in the tables above, #ferguson was the single most tweeted word in the gathered dataset. The gathered data also supports existing literature on the sensemaking patterns of individuals following a crisis, although previous studies have looked through a slightly more limited lens. For example, I found evidence supporting the fact that information is crucial to the critical period following a traumatic event (Heverin and Zach, 2011). Many of the top retweets from the days following Events 1 & 2 included basic facts about what had occurred, statements from the Ferguson police department,

and detailed glimpses into what was going on in Ferguson, and the information category was consistently in the top 2 most prominent categories.

One challenge that these results offer is to the conceptualization of the “critical period” of a crisis. Although this period has been defined as having a duration of a few minutes to several days after an event (Stein, 2004), research that led to this conclusion has focused on events that 1. Are overwhelmingly considered to be negative or traumatic and 2. Posed immediate physical danger to others. Whereas Stein’s research focuses on events that are considered dangerous in a “traditional” sense (meaning that the threat passes after no more than several days), my decision to focus on police brutality is unique in that it centers on an event in which the danger and threat is perceived as continuous by many people. For example, one of the top retweets on August 10th, the day after Brown’s killing, mentions the fact that survival tips were being given to Black youth in order to allow them to live through encounters with the police. This type of embodied threat, I believe, warrants a reevaluation of what is considered the “critical period” of a polarizing event, such as a police shooting or the cruel treatment of immigrant children at the border because, for many, the perception of threat lasts well beyond a few days following the initial triggering event.

CONCLUSION

The implications of this research are far reaching, but there are three main points of importance. Sense making is an integral process to understand because: 1) it is motivated by our desire to simplify the world, 2) it can help us make sense of a variety of phenomena, including confirmation bias and curiosity, and it 3) informs how we make sense of the world around us. Understanding sense-making involves also understanding how people make-meaning of events that are polarizing or not necessarily considered by the vast majority of the public to be harmful

or negative. This has direct implications for health because the meaning-making process of individuals via their chosen language can shed light on other mental processes of these individuals, including collective coping and the management of collective trauma.

Retweet patterns for the first 7 days after Michael Brown's killing indicated that tweets challenging dominant narratives were the top category across each day (see Results section). This information preliminarily suggests that the tweet patterns following polarizing events differ from that of non-polarizing ones. Previous studies have indicated that the "information" category is typically dominant during the onset of a crisis, with many people seeking facts and details about what has occurred (Heverin and Zach, 2011; Pennebaker, Qu, Wu, Zang). However, in this case, the "narrative challenging" category was clearly the most dominant in the top retweets, either equaling or exceeding the number of tweets in the information category. This suggests a need for a more comprehensive analysis of tweets following polarizing events, as these are often understudied. Based on this, we can conclude that existing research has not sufficiently accounted for differences that take place in public online discourse surrounding a polarizing versus a much more "non polarizing" topic.

Based on the results found in this study, it is our recommendation that researchers pay more attention to the differences in online sensemaking processes following polarizing versus non-polarizing events. While many of the existing literature remains sufficient for mass-traumatic events, such as a terrorist attack, the nuances that take place when an event is divisive warrant more heavy consideration. The inclusion of a "narrative challenge" category of classification indicates awareness of the ways that dominant narratives are not always accepted as fact by the masses. As this study analyzed the top 10 retweets each day, these were

microblogs that were engaged with by thousands of people, not just a select few users, meaning they resounded with these individuals enough for them to “retweet” on to their pages.

Throughout history, the challenging of dominant narratives has been a necessary step in the process of dismantling oppressive systems and providing information outside of the mainstream channels. With regards to Michael Brown’s death, this was no different. Several of the top retweets in the dataset included direct contradictions to information provided by Ferguson police, directly called out media outlets and law enforcement, and offered intimate glimpses into the protests taking place in Ferguson that were often absent in the media coverage. Photograph URLs and hyperlinks were very frequent, giving an inside look into the goings-on at Ferguson. Similar to news coverage of the Civil Rights Movement, the images of protests in Ferguson compelled people to consider the (true nature of American justice) and challenge their existing beliefs about the country (Freelon, 2018). This leads us to conclude that Twitter was able to serve as a platform to challenge the dominant narratives being reported about Michael Brown’s death, not only through opinions, but through pictures, videos, and eyewitness accounts as well.

Further study could dive deeper into the “narrative challenge” category. There is room for deeper exploration into this classification method that could include the introduction of subcategories to differentiate between the ways people challenge dominant narratives. This could not only shed light into how this category shapes public perceptions following a polarizing event, but it can also add to the sensemaking conversation. Previously indicated categories (information, opinion, emotion, action) were not found to sufficiently embody the significance of collective sensemaking in relation to changing narratives.

APPENDIX A

Event 1 and Event 2 Retweets

August 9th

1. @MichaelSkolnik: HE HAS A NAME: Mike Brown, 17 years old, was shot and killed by the police in Ferguson, MO. He was unarmed. RT! [photo URL attached]
2. @brennamuncy: Someone please remind me what year it is again? #ferguson <http://t.co/33cebmojwV>
3. PAY ATTENTION as "teen" becomes "man," "community" becomes "mob," and "murder" becomes "alleged shooting." #Ferguson #medialiteracy
4. @VICE: Eric Garner's Death Is the Latest in the Plague of Police Brutality Against Black Men <http://t.co/zfV5ywX3es> [photo URL attached]
5. @BET: John Crawford, a 22 yr-old father was shot + killed in a Ohio Walmart for holding a toy gun [photo URL attached]
6. @cmclymer: Apparently, 50 white men protesting a black president = "citizenship". 50 black men grieving dead black child = "an angry mob". #MikeBrown
7. @MichaelSkolnik: HE HAS A NAME: Ferguson police fatally shoot unarmed teenager Michael Brown [photo URL attached]
8. @MichaelSkolnik: Multiple witnesses have told the media in #Ferguson, that Mike Brown had his hands up when he was shot "multiple" times by police officer.
9. @The_LadyLavish: #MikeBrown this is truest thing I've ever saw. [photo URL attached]
10. @Remroum: Wow. John Crawford was gunned down by police in Walmart 'after he picked up a toy gun' [photo URL attached]

August 10th

1. @MichaelSkolnik: HE HAS A NAME: Mike Brown, 17 years old, was shot and killed by the police in Ferguson, MO. He was unarmed. RT! [photo URL attached]
2. brennamuncy: Someone please remind me what year it is again? #ferguson [photo URL attached]
3. @MichaelSkolnik: Mike Brown wasn't a thief. Jordan Davis wasn't a thug. Trayvon Martin wasn't a burglar. They're our #SonsAndBrothers [photo URL attached]

4. @MichaelSkolnik: "A riot is the language of the unheard." ~Martin Luther King, Jr. #Ferguson [photo URL attached]
5. @AntonioFrench: Happening now in #Ferguson where #MikeBrown was killed. [photo URL attached]
6. @lolitasaywhat: PAY ATTENTION as "teen" becomes "man," "community" becomes "mob," and "murder" becomes "alleged shooting." #Ferguson #medialiteracy
7. @BET: John Crawford, a 22 yr-old father was shot + killed in a Ohio Walmart for holding a toy gun [photo URL attached]
8. @MichaelSkolnik: Ferguson police are only ones saying #MikeBrown stole something from store. Parents went to store + workers said they never called police.
9. @WomenOnTheMove1: Survival lessons for Black Youth. This is what The USA has come to! #MikeBrown #Ferguson [photo URL attached]
10. @cmclymer: Apparently, 50 white men protesting a black president = "citizenship". 50 black men grieving dead black child = "an angry mob". #MikeBrown

August 11th

1. @MichaelSkolnik: HE HAS A NAME: Mike Brown, 17 years old, was shot and killed by the police in Ferguson, MO. He was unarmed. RT! [photo URL attached]
2. @brennamuncy: Someone please remind me what year it is again? #ferguson [photo URL attached]
3. @MichaelSkolnik: Mike Brown wasn't a thief. Jordan Davis wasn't a thug. Trayvon Martin wasn't a burglar. They're our #SonsAndBrothers [photo URL attached]
4. @MichaelSkolnik: "A riot is the language of the unheard." ~Martin Luther King, Jr. #Ferguson [photo URL attached]
5. @LizPeinadoSTL: Men armed with nothing but phones ordered to get on their knees. I witnessed tear gas thrown at them in #ferguson [photo URL attached]
6. @AntonioFrench: Happening now in #Ferguson where #MikeBrown was killed. [photo URL attached]
7. @erinpeep: People aren't trying to make it a race issue. It already is. Why couldn't Mike's yearbook pic be used? #Ferguson [photo URL attached]
8. @VICE: Eric Garner's Death Is the Latest in the Plague of Police Brutality Against Black Men [photo URL attached]

9. @BET: John Crawford, a 22 yr-old father was shot + killed in a Ohio Walmart for holding a toy gun [photo URL attached]
10. @MichaelSkolnik: Ferguson police are only ones saying #MikeBrown stole something from store. Parents went to store + workers said they never called the police.

August 12th

1. RT @chrislhayes: I interviewed the key witness to the Michael Brown shooting last night. The police haven't. Think about that.
2. @wilw: Hey Media? Maybe instead of sending cameras to Robin Williams' house to be ghoulish, you could send cameras to #Ferguson to be journalists.
3. @MichaelSkolnik: HE HAS A NAME: Mike Brown, 17 years old, was shot and killed by the police in Ferguson, MO. He was unarmed. RT! [photo URL attached]
4. @brennamuncy: Someone please remind me what year it is again? #ferguson [photo URL attached]
5. @MichaelSkolnik: Mike Brown wasn't a thief. Jordan Davis wasn't a thug. Trayvon Martin wasn't a burglar. They're our #SonsAndBrothers [photo URL attached]
6. @MichaelSkolnik: "A riot is the language of the unheard." ~Martin Luther King, Jr. #Ferguson [photo URL attached]
7. @LizPeinadoSTL: Men armed with nothing but phones ordered to get on their knees. I witnessed tear gas thrown at them in #ferguson [photo URL attached]
8. @AntonioFrench: Happening now in #Ferguson where #MikeBrown was killed. [photo URL attached]
9. @erinpeep: People aren't trying to make it a race issue. It already is. Why couldn't Mike's yearbook pic be used? #Ferguson [photo URL attached]
10. @BET: John Crawford, a 22 yr-old father was shot + killed in a Ohio Walmart for holding a toy gun [photo URL attached]

August 13th

1. @jackfrombkl: The Civil Rights Act is 50 years old. These two pictures were taken 50 years apart. Behold our progress. #Ferguson [photo URL attached]
2. @chrislhayes: I interviewed the key witness to the Michael Brown shooting last night. The police haven't. Think about that.

3. @wilw: Hey Media? Maybe instead of sending cameras to Robin Williams' house to be ghoulish, you could send cameras to #Ferguson to be journalists.
4. @attorneycrump: Such a powerful image from the students of Howard University. #MichaelBrown [photo URL attached]
5. Wow...A man picks up burning tear gas can and throws it back at police. #ferguson pic by @kodacohen @stltoday [photo URL attached]
6. @MichaelSkolnik: HE HAS A NAME: Mike Brown, 17 years old, was shot and killed by the police in Ferguson, MO. He was unarmed. RT! [photo URL attached]
7. @brennamuncy: Someone please remind me what year it is again? #ferguson [photo URL attached]
8. @MichaelSkolnik: Mike Brown wasn't a thief. Jordan Davis wasn't a thug. Trayvon Martin wasn't a burglar. They're our #SonsAndBrothers [photo URL attached]
9. @occupythemob: What the wife of the #ferguson chief of police has to say on her Facebook [photo URL attached]
10. @OccupyOakland: Palestinian citizens are tweeting to the resisters in #Ferguson with support & tips on dealing with tear gas! #gaza [photo URL attached]

August 14th

1. @jackfrombkln: The Civil Rights Act is 50 years old. These two pictures were taken 50 years apart. Behold our progress. #Ferguson [photo URL attached]
2. @chrishayes: I interviewed the key witness to the Michael Brown shooting last night. The police haven't. Think about that.
3. @wilw: Hey Media? Maybe instead of sending cameras to Robin Williams' house to be ghoulish, you could send cameras to #Ferguson to be journalists.
4. @attorneycrump: Such a powerful image from the student of Howard University. #MichaelBrown [photo URL attached]
5. @AntonioFrench: This woman who was helping to calm the crowd last night got shot by a rubber bullet later on. #Ferguson [photo URL attached]
6. @ndilettante: PLEASE RT THERE IS TOO MUCH MISINFORMATION GOING ON. #Ferguson [photo URL attached]

7. @manofsteele: Wow...A man picks up burning tear gas can and throws it back at police. #ferguson pic by @kodacohen @stltoday [photo URL attached]
8. @MichaelSkolnik: HE HAS A NAME: Mike Brown, 17 years old, was shot and killed by the police in Ferguson, MO. He was unarmed. RT! [photo URL attached]
9. @brennamuncy: Someone please remind me what year it is again? #ferguson [photo URL attached]
10. @ayalaprager: When the present looks like history, somehow, somewhere, we got it awfully, terribly wrong. #Ferguson #MikeBrown [photo URL attached]

August 15th

1. @jackfrombklm: The Civil Rights Act is 50 years old. These two pictures were taken 50 years apart. Behold our progress. #Ferguson [photo URL attached]
2. @chrishayes: I interviewed the key witness to the Michael Brown shooting last night. The police haven't. Think about that.
3. @wilw: Hey Media? Maybe instead of sending cameras to Robin Williams' house to be ghoulish, you could send cameras to #Ferguson to be journalists.
4. @attorneycrump: Such a powerful image from the student of Howard University. #MichaelBrown [photo URL attached]
5. @AntonioFrench: This woman who was helping to calm the crowd last night got shot by a rubber bullet later on. #Ferguson [photo URL attached]
6. @ndilettante: PLEASE RT THERE IS TOO MUCH MISINFORMATION GOING ON. #Ferguson [photo URL attached]
7. @manofsteele: Wow...A man picks up burning tear gas can and throws it back at police. #ferguson pic by @kodacohen @stltoday [photo URL attached]
8. @MichaelSkolnik: HE HAS A NAME: Mike Brown, 17 years old, was shot and killed by the police in Ferguson, MO. He was unarmed. RT! [photo URL attached]
9. @brennamuncy: Someone please remind me what year it is again? #ferguson [photo URL attached]
10. @ayalaprager: When the present looks like history, somehow, somewhere, we got it awfully, terribly wrong. #Ferguson #MikeBrown [photo URL attached]

Nov 24:

1. @voice: had been holding off on posting this poem i wrote on #ferguson, but i've realized that young voices must be heard too [photo URL included]
2. @nbcwashington: Two men ran from Atlanta to #Ferguson to pay tribute to #MichaelBrown and call for justice. [photo URL included]
3. @mikebrowncover: Why is #Ferguson important? Because war torn countries are sending messages of hope to US citizens. [photo URL included]
4. @UncleRUSH: Police sensitivity training ,diversity initiatives, body cameras for police and a fucking arrest. Would be a good start...
5. @fox13now: Woman 'jokingly' waving gun says, "We're ready for #Ferguson," & accidentally shoots self in the head, dies. [photo URL included]
6. @AntonioFrench: They came all the way from India to #Ferguson. [photo URL included]
7. @JuddLegum: These two men just ran 550 miles, from Atlanta to Michael Brown's memorial In Ferguson [photo URL included]
8. @MrPooni: Black child Tamir Rice murdered for holding a gun in an state where white people are free to roam around like this: [photo URL included]
9. @MattTW: Your media guide to the differences between #Ferguson and #pumpkinfest [photo URL included]
10. @AntonioFrench: A military man upset about the militarization of #Ferguson [photo URL included]

Nov 25th:

1. @jackfrombkln: The Civil Rights Act is 50 years old. These two pictures were taken 50 years apart. Behold our progress. #Ferguson [photo URL included]
2. @ComplexMag: Michael Brown's family has released an official statement: [photo URL included]
3. @JayChillinBro: "Darren Wilson never stood over Mike Brown's body" - Bob McCullough [photo URL included]
4. @CrystalLewis: In case you still don't know why there's so much outrage in #ferguson... (via @creativerobd) #handsup #DONTSHOOT [photo URL included]
5. @voice: had been holding off on posting this poem i wrote on #ferguson, but i've realized that young voices must be heard too [photo URL included]

6. @kobebryant: The system enables young black men to be killed behind the mask of law #Ferguson #tippingpoint #change
7. @BBCBreaking: Full statement from family of #MichaelBrown after #Ferguson ruling [photo URL included]
8. @nbcwashington: Two men ran from Atlanta to #Ferguson to pay tribute to #MichaelBrown and call for justice. [photo URL included]
9. @LoganRhoades: Cities around the nation react to #Ferguson [photo URL included]
10. @mikebrowncover: Why is #Ferguson important? Because war torn countries are sending messages of hope to US citizens. [photo URL included]

Nov 26

1. @jackfrombkn: The Civil Rights Act is 50 years old. These two pictures were taken 50 years apart. Behold our progress. #Ferguson [photo URL included]
2. @ComplexMag: Michael Brown's family has released an official statement: [photo URL included]
3. @JayChillinBro: "Darren Wilson never stood over Mike Brown's body" - Bob McCullough [photo URL included]
4. @CrystalLewis: In case you still don't know why there's so much outrage in #ferguson... (via @creativerobd) #handsup #DONTSHOOT [photo URL included]
5. @voice: had been holding off on posting this poem i wrote on #ferguson, but i've realized that young voices must be heard too [photo URL included]
6. @kobebryant: The system enables young black men to be killed behind the mask of law #Ferguson #tippingpoint #change
7. @BBCBreaking: Full statement from family of #MichaelBrown after #Ferguson ruling [photo URL included]
8. @nbcwashington: Two men ran from Atlanta to #Ferguson to pay tribute to #MichaelBrown and call for justice. [photo URL included]
9. @LoganRhoades: Cities around the nation react to #Ferguson [photo URL included]
10. @mikebrowncover: Why is #Ferguson important? Because war torn countries are sending messages of hope to US citizens. [photo URL included]

Nov 27

1. @jackfrombkln: The Civil Rights Act is 50 years old. These two pictures were taken 50 years apart. Behold our progress. #Ferguson [photo URL included]
2. @ComplexMag: Michael Brown's family has released an official statement: [photo URL included]
3. @JayChillinBro: "Darren Wilson never stood over Mike Brown's body" - Bob McCullough [photo URL included]
4. @CrystalLewis: In case you still don't know why there's so much outrage in #ferguson... (via @creativerobd) #handsup #DONTSHOOT [photo URL included]
5. @voice: had been holding off on posting this poem i wrote on #ferguson, but i've realized that young voices must be heard too [photo URL included]
6. @kobebryant: The system enables young black men to be killed behind the mask of law #Ferguson #tippingpoint #change
7. @BBCBreaking: Full statement from family of #MichaelBrown after #Ferguson ruling [photo URL included]
8. @nbcwashington: Two men ran from Atlanta to #Ferguson to pay tribute to #MichaelBrown and call for justice. [photo URL included]
9. @arthur_affect: WTF is the impulse behind changing #BlackLivesMatter to #AllLivesMatter. Do you crash strangers' funerals shouting I TOO HAVE FELT LOSS
10. @LoganRhoades: Cities around the nation react to #Ferguson [photo URL included]

Nov 28

1. @jackfrombkln: The Civil Rights Act is 50 years old. These two pictures were taken 50 years apart. Behold our progress. #Ferguson [photo URL included]
2. @ComplexMag: Michael Brown's family has released an official statement: [photo URL included]
3. @JayChillinBro: "Darren Wilson never stood over Mike Brown's body" - Bob McCullough [photo URL included]
4. @CrystalLewis: In case you still don't know why there's so much outrage in #ferguson... (via @creativerobd) #handsup #DONTSHOOT [photo URL included]

5. @voice: had been holding off on posting this poem i wrote on #ferguson, but i've realized that young voices must be heard too [photo URL included]
6. @kobebryant: The system enables young black men to be killed behind the mask of law #Ferguson #tippingpoint #change
7. @BBCBreaking: Full statement from family of #MichaelBrown after #Ferguson ruling [photo URL included]
8. @nbcwashington: Two men ran from Atlanta to #Ferguson to pay tribute to #MichaelBrown and call for justice. [photo URL included]
9. @arthur_affect: WTF is the impulse behind changing #BlackLivesMatter to #AllLivesMatter. Do you crash strangers' funerals shouting I TOO HAVE FELT LOSS
10. @LoganRhoades: Cities around the nation react to #Ferguson [photo URL included]

Nov 29th

1. @ComplexMag: Michael Brown's family has released an official statement: [photo URL included]
2. @JayChillinBro: "Darren Wilson never stood over Mike Brown's body" - Bob McCullough [photo URL included]
3. @CrystalLewis: In case you still don't know why there's so much outrage in #ferguson... (via @creativerobd) #handsup #DONTSHOOT [photo URL included]
4. @voice: had been holding off on posting this poem i wrote on #ferguson, but i've realized that young voices must be heard too [photo URL included]
5. @BBCBreaking: Full statement from family of #MichaelBrown after #Ferguson ruling [photo URL included]
6. @nbcwashington: Two men ran from Atlanta to #Ferguson to pay tribute to #MichaelBrown and call for justice. [photo URL included]
7. @arthur_affect: WTF is the impulse behind changing #BlackLivesMatter to #AllLivesMatter. Do you crash strangers' funerals shouting I TOO HAVE FELT LOSS
8. @LoganRhoades: Cities around the nation react to #Ferguson [photo URL included]
9. @mikebrowncover: Why is #Ferguson important? Because war torn countries are sending messages of hope to US citizens. [photo URL included]
10. @ToluseO: Outside the #Ferguson police station [photo URL included]

Nov 30th

1. @jackfrombklm: The Civil Rights Act is 50 years old. These two pictures were taken 50 years apart. Behold our progress. #Ferguson [photo URL included]
2. @ComplexMag: Michael Brown's family has released an official statement: <http://t.co/oD3rJ1D1sZ> [photo URL included]
3. @JayChillinBro: "Darren Wilson never stood over Mike Brown's body" - Bob McCullough [photo URL included]
4. @CrystalLewis: In case you still don't know why there's so much outrage in #ferguson... (via @creativerobd) #handsup #DONTSHOOT [photo URL included]
5. @voice: had been holding off on posting this poem i wrote on #ferguson, but i've realized that young voices must be heard too [photo URL included]
6. @kobebryant: The system enables young black men to be killed behind the mask of law #Ferguson #tippingpoint #change
7. @BBCBreaking: Full statement from family of #MichaelBrown after #Ferguson ruling [photo URL included]
8. @nbcwashington: Two men ran from Atlanta to #Ferguson to pay tribute to #MichaelBrown and call for justice. [photo URL included]
9. @arthur_affect: WTF is the impulse behind changing #BlackLivesMatter to #AllLivesMatter. Do you crash strangers' funerals shouting I TOO HAVE FELT LOSS
10. @LoganRhoades: Cities around the nation react to #Ferguson [photo URL included]

APPENDIX B

Event 1 Most Frequently Tweeted Words

Most frequently tweeted words from each day: August 9th-August 15th, 2014

	Aug 9	Aug 10	Aug 11	Aug 12	Aug 13	Aug 14	Aug 15
1	#ferguson	#ferguson	#ferguson	#ferguson	#ferguson	#ferguson	#ferguson
2	<u>#mikebrown</u>	<u>#mikebrown</u>	brown	brown	brown	police	brown
3	police	brown	<u>#mikebrown</u>	michael	police	brown	michael
4	brown	police	mike	police	michael	<u>#mikebrown</u>	police
5	mike	mike	police	<u>#mikebrown</u>	<u>#mikebrown</u>	michael	<u>#mikebrown</u>
6	black	michael	michael	mike	mike	mike	mike
7	unarmed	rt	shooting	shooting	shooting	people	officer
8	shot	black	people	death	people	ferguson	ferguson
9	killed	unarmed	rt	black	black	black	robbery
10	michael	shot	black	<u>#michaelbrown</u>	ferguson	rt	shot
11	eric	people	<u>#michaelbrown</u>	ferguson	shot	<u>#michaelbrown</u>	shooting
12	rt	killed	robin	people	rt	shooting	<u>#michaelbrown</u>
13	cops	shooting	williams	rt	cops	obama	chief
14	garner	rip	shot	shot	<u>#michaelbrown</u>	cops	video
15	people	<u>#michaelbrown</u>	ferguson	browns	death	happening	wilson
16	rip	cops	looting	williams	browns	shot	darren
17	times	ferguson	death	obama	cop	news	black
18	<u>#ericgarner</u>	family	browns	robin	witness	missouri	store
19	shooting	story	unarmed	killed	gas	live	suspect
20	ferguson	teen	family	officer	tear	media	cop

Event 2 Most Frequently Tweeted Words

Most frequently tweeted words from each day: November 24th-November 30th, 2014

	Nov 24	Nov 25	Nov 26	Nov 27	Nov 28	Nov 29	Nov 30
1	#ferguson	#ferguson	#ferguson	#ferguson	#ferguson	#ferguson	#ferguson
2	jury	brown	brown	brown	brown	brown	brown
3	grand	michael	michael	michael	michael	michael	michael
4	decision	mike	mike	mike	#blacklivesmatter	ferguson	ferguson
5	brown	#blacklivesmatter	wilson	#blacklivesmatter	mike	officer	police
6	michael	people	police	police	black	police	mike
7	police	<u>#mikebrown</u>	darren	<u>#mikebrown</u>	<u>#mikebrown</u>	wilson	wilson
8	ferguson	police	ferguson	black	police	darren	officer
9	<u>#tamirrice</u>	ferguson	browns	browns	protestors	mike	darren
10	mike	black	black	ferguson	ferguson	resigns	#blacklivesmatter
11	tamir	wilson	<u>#mikebrown</u>	de	people	shot	black
12	shooting	darren	#blacklivesmatter	video	#blackoutblackfri day	#blacklivesmatter	<u>#mikebrown</u>
13	rice	justice	people	wilson	browns	black	de
14	officer	grand	justice	people	#blackfriday	<u>#mikebrown</u>	shot
15	shot	browns	de	tamir	wilson	protestors	resigns
16	announcement	jury	<u>#michaelbrown</u>	thanksgiving	protest	people	protestors
17	wilson	<u>#michaelbrown</u>	shot	darren	white	shooting	people
18	<u>#mikebrown</u>	<u>#fergusondecision</u>	video	shooting	darren	white	white
19	black	decision	officer	family	<u>#tamirrice</u>	en	<u>#darrenwilson</u>
20	gun	de	<u>#fergusondecision</u>	rice	friday	protest	<u>#michaelbrown</u>

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