TWITTER USE BY MILLENNIAL BLACK WOMEN

DURING THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

by

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the use of Twitter by millennial black women leading up to the 2016 presidential election. While young blacks use Twitter at higher rates than their white counterparts, there is no research that focuses specifically on their Twitter use. Using the uses and gratifications theory, this research explores this demographics' usage through a three-phase research study. First, a survey was completed by nearly 300 millennial black women and found that their top five uses/gratifications were entertainment, information seeking, pastime, social interaction and expression of opinions. Next, focus groups were conducted and three major themes emerged: Twitter is where this demographic is receiving its news, connecting with others for entertainment purposes and expressing their opinions to varying degrees. Due to the political climate in which these focus groups were conducted, another major topic of discussion was how the election was playing out on social media. Finally, a content analysis of the focus group participants' tweets was conducted and, while it had several limitations, revealed that social interaction, expression of opinions and relaxation/pastime were the top three uses. This research demonstrates that the uses and gratifications theory is highly relevant to social media research. It also provides valuable insights on walled gardens given the political backdrop. Finally, it appears to be the first research study focused specifically on how millennial Black women are using Twitter to engage politically and otherwise.

I: INTRODUCTION

From newspaper to radio, radio to television, television to computer, the evolution of technology has unfolded right before the eyes of its consumers. Today, we seek to understand what people do with many forms of media, increasingly social media. Blackplanet and Myspace were two of the first social networks that offered users a place to connect with friends online. Facebook emerged in 2005 originally targeting the college demographic, but eventually it branched out to the general public. Twitter was launched in 2006, limiting its users to 140 characters and creating a place for short and simple messages. Since its launch, Twitter has gained momentum and now averages 313 million monthly users (Twitter.com, 2017). In 2015, The Pew Research Center estimated that 23% of all adult Internet users have a Twitter account (Duggan, 2015, p. 8). Additionally, after surveying 664 respondents who identified as Black or African American about their technology use, Smith at The Pew Research Center (2014) found that they are using Twitter at a higher rate than their peers. Forty percent of African Americans from ages 18-29 have a Twitter, which is 12% more than Whites of the same age (Smith, 2014, p. 2). These findings illustrate that Twitter is especially popular among millennial African Americans. While there is some debate about what year the first millennials were born, this generation is understood to include those who reached adulthood during the 21st century. Millennials are known for their familiarity with technology and digital media. Therefore, it is important to dig deeper into how this group is using Twitter. Elihu Katz's (1959) was the first to ask "What do people do with the media?" and using his Uses and Gratifications Approach, which seeks to identify the functions mass communication serves for different people, is ideal for research of this kind (p. 2).

Theory: Uses and Gratifications

In the 1940s, Lazarsfeld and the Bureau of Applied Social Research were the first to explore how the media influences people's decision making processes. Specifically, they explored the role and influence of the radio. Their research suggested that the radio has its "greatest success" with those who have some "predisposition towards listening" (Lazarsfeld & Stanton, 1941, p. 173). This research also looked at radio and newspaper consumption by junior and senior high school students. Among this demographic, radio was found to be the most important and the preferred source of news. However, researchers found that those who consumed large amounts of news from both the radio and newspaper reading, were "superior in their knowledge of the news to those with less broad habits of news consumption (p. 191). These findings laid the groundwork for more in-depth research into the theory of uses and gratifications by Elihu Katz. In 1959, Katz suggested that the field of mass communication would only be able to save itself by asking "What do people do with the media?" (p. 2). The main idea behind the uses and gratifications theory is that different people can use the same mass communication message for different purposes (DeFleur, 2010, p. 294). McQuail, Blumer and Brown (1972) identified four categories of needs: diversion, personal relationships, personal identity of individual psychology and surveillance. In 1973, Katz, Gurevitch and Haas assembled a list of possible social and psychological needs said to be satisfied by exposure to mass media. They classified the 35 needs and formed five seemingly meaningful groupings:

1. *Cognitive*: Needs related to strengthening information, knowledge and understanding

2. *Affective:* Needs related to strengthening aesthetic, pleasurable and emotional experience
3. *Integrative:* Needs related to strengthening credibility, confidence, stability and status
4. *Social integrative:* Needs related to strengthening contact with family, friends and the world
5. *Tension-release:* Needs related to escape (Katz, et al., 1973, p. 166-167)

While most of the uses and gratifications research thus far had looked at more traditional forms of media (i.e. radio, newspaper, television), more recent research has begun to focus on newer forms of media such as the Internet and social media. Research conducted by Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) found five primary motives for use of the Internet, including interpersonal utility, pastime, information seeking, convenience and entertainment. A few years later, Ko, Cho and Roberts (2005) found that consumers who have high information, convenience and/or social interaction motivations for using the Internet tend to stay on a website longer. Research has now shifted to explore why people are using social media specifically. While some research exists on the usage of Facebook, the following research will focus specifically on Twitter.

This research project was heavily influenced by the research conducted by Rachel Kraft in 2010. It relates most closely to the topic of uses and gratifications of Twitter, specifically as it relates to political engagement. Kraft's research explored how and why people use Twitter and addressed how they perceive the credibility of tweets by politicians. Overall, her research showed that respondents used Twitter for three main reasons: "to get a snapshot of information about what's happening in the world around them, to interact with others, and to be entertained" (p. 61). About a third of respondents reported using Twitter to keep up with current events. Additionally, 36 % indicated that

they use Twitter because they can "trust the information they receive from it" (p. 31). Interestingly, Twitter ranked just below online newspapers in terms of credibility. When exploring how credible participants found tweets from politicians to be, the younger audience ages 18-24 found it to be more credible than the older audience who was 25-34. This finding is not surprising since this younger audience grew up using social media. Kraft's research showed that Twitter is a useful medium for politicians to use to interact with young voters. Additionally, individuals identified entertainment, interpersonal utility and temporal utility as the main motivations for using Twitter. Kraft also found that while 47% of respondents said they use Twitter to find out what other people find to be important issues of the day, only 29.8% of individuals agreed with the statement, "I use Twitter to keep up with current issues" (p. 47). The following research will further the literature on the uses and gratifications of Twitter, focusing on one of its most active demographics.

II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media

Boyd and Ellison (2007) defined social network sites (SNSs) as:

> Web based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-
>
> public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with
>
> whom they share a connection and view the traverse their list of
>
> connections and those made by others within the system. (p. 211)

While each channel is different, they all incorporate these three main services in one form or another. Based on this definition, the first social media site, SixDegrees.com, launched in 1997. Several other SNSs were created between 1997 and 2001, including BlackPlanet, a social networking site that was geared toward African American users. Facebook originally launched in 2004 but was only available for use by Harvard students. Eventually Facebook expanded to everyone in 2005. The authors remind us that available research suggests that most SNSs support pre-existing social relationships. While Twitter was not discussed here, they note that Facebook is used to "maintain existing offline relationships or solidify offline connections, as opposed to meeting new people" (p. 221). This article provides a good background on social network sites and how they had evolved up to 2008.

An exploratory study conducted by Whiting and Williams in 2013 sought to explore the uses and gratifications theory in regards to social media. It included 25 in depth interviews with people aged 18–56 years old. The authors found 10 uses and gratifications themes displayed in the table below.

Table 1. Whiting & Williams' Top Uses & Gratifications Themes.	
Theme	**%**
1. Social interaction	88%
2. Information seeking	80%
3. Pastime	76%
4. Entertainment	64%
5. Relaxation	60%
6. Expression of opinions	56%
7. Communication utility (providing them with topics to discuss with others)	56%
8. Convenience utility (easy to access and use at any time)	52%
9. Information sharing	40%
10. Surveillance/knowledge about others	32%
Whiting & Williams, 2013, p. 366-377	

This research provided valuable introductory insights into how people are using social media in general and was used as a foundation for the following research.

Twitter

Johnson and Yang (2009) found two primary motivations for Twitter use, social motives and information motives. Social motivations include having fun, being entertained, relaxing, seeing what others are doing, keeping up with family, etc., while information motivations include getting information (e.g facts, links, news, knowledge, ideas), giving or receiving advice, learning new things, meeting new people, etc. One interesting finding was that there was not a significant relationship between the social gratifications and amount of Twitter use; however, there was a significant difference between the information gratifications and Twitter use. The data suggests that Twitter is used more as an information source than as a way to satisfy social needs and the more time a user spends on Twitter for information motives, the more satisfied they are with

Twitter. In 2014, Johnson conducted further research to test the 2009 findings. He surveyed 242 Twitter users and again found support for the idea that information gratifications significantly predicted Twitter use, but social gratifications did not.

Chen's 2011 research sought to explore whether Twitter is merely noise as some claim or whether it helps to fulfill the need for connection and comradery. After surveying over 400 people online, this research found that, similarly to previous research on Facebook, those who use Twitter are likely to feel more connected to other users (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007; Steinfeld et al., 2008; Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009, Chen, 2011). The act of both tweeting and sending @replies on Twitter was shown to be important to those who use the medium to connect with others through this social channel. The author's hypothesis that Twitter is more than just virtual noise was supported with his findings that people are using Twitter to gratify their need to connect.

In 2014, The Pew Research Center conducted its own research on the kinds of conversations that take place most frequently on Twitter. They found the following six types to be most common:

1. *Divided*: Polarized crowds discussing different topics and disagree with each other. These conversations are most often seen in political discussions.
2. *Unified:* Tight crowds who form close communities and share ideas and information with each other. These conversations are most often seen with professional topics where participants are all a part of the same conference or group.
3. *Fragmented*: Brand clusters that form around products and celebrities. These conversations are most often seen around brands, public events or popular subjects.

4. *Clustered:* Community clusters created around global news events and popular topics, communities form around multiple news sources and are mostly disconnected from each other. These conversations are most often seen around global news events.

5. *In-Hub & Spoke:* Broadcast networks that are often triggered by news media outlets and pundits who have loyal followers who retweet them but little interaction happens among members of the audience. These conversations are most often seen with media outlets or famous individuals.

6. *Out-Hub & Spoke:* Support networks are created when companies, government agencies or organizations respond to complaints and customer requests. These conversations are most often seen with companies and services with customer support (Himelboim et al., 2015).

Mass Media and Political Involvement

In 1948, Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet released their research findings from studying participation in the 1940 presidential election. They found that those with a higher level of interest "had more opinions on issues involved in the election, participated more in election events and exposed themselves more to the stream of political communication" (p. 41). These interested people were most likely to be older men from urban areas with higher levels of education and a better socio-economic status. *The People's Choice*, a book studying the 1940 presidential election by Paul Lazarsfeld, first proposed the idea of the "the two-step flow of communication." This theory suggested that information from the mass media would first reach opinion leaders who would then pass relevant information along to the "less active sections of the community" (p. 151). Opinion leaders were defined as those who are "most concerned about the issue as well as most articulate about it" and those whom people turn to for advice about issues (p. 49). It is important to note that opinion leaders were not always the socially prominent or

richest people in a community. Instead, they are found in all occupational groups. They demonstrate greater political alertness, are more exposed to political communications and talk politics more than others. Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet concluded that personal contacts seem to be more effective than the mass media because "their coverage is greater and they have certain psychological advances over the formal media" (p. 150). The following five characteristics are cited as reasons why personal contacts may be more influential: 1. Non-purposiveness of personal contact, 2. Flexibility when countering resistance, 3. Rewards of compliance, 4. Trust in an Intimate Source and 5. Persuasion without conviction (p. 152-157). Interestingly, those who made their voting decision later in the campaign were more likely to mention personal influences when explaining how they made their final decision. The authors close by suggesting that those campaigns who have more enthusiastic supporters and can mobilize grass-roots support have "great chances of success" (p. 158).

In 1956, Katz discussed the two-step flow of communication and its limitations. Katz suggested that the first limitation of the 1948 research it that it asked respondents if they themselves were "advice givers," instead of "Who do you turn to for advice on X issue," which he proposed presents an issue of validity. Katz goes on to discuss other studies that furthered the initial findings of the 1940 Voting Study, including The Rovere Study, The Decatur Study and The Drug Study. These studies showed that the subject matter has a lot to do with determining who will lead and who will follow (p. 73). Additionally, they found that influence is related to 1) the personification of certain values (who one is), 2) competence (what one knows) and 3) strategic social location (whom one knows) (p. 73). Most importantly, these studies corroborated the finding that

opinion leaders are more exposed to the mass media than are those whom they influence and more specifically, they are exposed to mass media in their specific sphere of influence (fashion, public affairs, etc.).

Eulau and Schneider (1956) note that participation in politics in largely determined by 1) the degree to which an individual has internalized political expectations and 2) the degree to which he appraises his role as being politically significant and effective. These "facets" constitute the concept of relatedness as it was used in this research (p .130-131). The research focused on five dimensions of political involvement: competence, affect, identification, exposure and participation. The most relevant to this research is exposure. Eulau and Schneider found a positive relationship between political relatedness and degree of exposure to the mass media. While relatedness was used as the independent variable, the authors question whether relatedness may be dependent on exposure. Furthermore, the researchers note that "the ultimate test of a person's relatedness to public affairs is the degree of his participation" (p. 139). The turnout of the 1952 election showed that those who are more related were more likely to vote.

In 1979, Quarles helped to further the research on media use and voting behavior. She was interested in two different types of interest: 1) general interest in day-to-day political affairs or political interest and 2) interest in the immediate political situation, or campaign interest (p. 412). Her belief was that if knowledge of a political system is considered political interest, than this would breed political system knowledge, which would be expected to contribute to accuracy. Accuracy was defined as "the degree to which respondents were able to correctly identify the major-party candidates' publicly stated positions on the major issues of the 1972 presidential election" (p. 418). Quarles

wanted to know whether newspapers or network news were better at informing the public. She found no significant difference between new and seasoned voters. Readership of public affairs stories in the newspaper was found to be positively correlated with accuracy for young voters, but not for older voters. This means that while the newspapers were instrumental in providing information to younger voters, older voters had other means of acquiring their political information. Additionally, younger voters were more likely to read the newspaper due to a campaign interest. In regards to network news, this research found that it has no effect on accuracy for either young or older voters. Neither group appeared to learn about candidates and issues via the network news.

Research conducted in 2001 by Shah, Kwak and Holbert, explored the relationship between civic participation, interpersonal trust and life contentment among Generation X, Baby Boomers and the Civic Generation. This research also studied how media use influenced these relationships focusing on four components: social recreation, product consumption, financial management and information exchange (p. 148). The researchers found that interpersonal trust and life contentment were significantly associated with civic engagement. Overall, Internet use was found to be positively but weakly related to civic engagement and interpersonal trust but was not related to contentment. However, when broken down by type of Internet usage, patterns began to emerge. People who used the Internet for social recreation (i.e. chat rooms, playing games) were less likely to engage in civic activities, trust others or experience life contentment. However, people who used the Internet for information exchange, were found to have a positive impact on all three criterion variables. Furthermore, people who spent more time watching TV were less likely to be participants in civic activities or

express contentment in life. However, people who watched hard news were more likely to be civically engaged and more content. Additionally, the number of hours spent reading newspapers on an average day and their consumption of public affairs content in newspapers were found to foster respondents' involvement in civic activities. Differences arose by generation in terms of what medium was found to be the best predictor of civic engagement. For Generation X, the use of the Internet for information exchange was found to most strongly predict civic engagement. Newspaper use was also found to strengthen engagement in civic activity. For Baby Boomers, TV use appeared to be the most important media variable. Information exchange on the Internet and hard news in newspapers were also found to enhance Baby Boomers' participation in civic engagement activities. For the Civic Generation, the use of the Internet for information exchange and both TV and newspaper hard news emerged as significant predictors of civic engagement. Shah, Kwak and Holbert note that many of these relationships appeared weak because at the time, the Internet was still "emerging as a mainstream medium" (p. 154). However, their findings suggested that how much time people spend online is less important than what they are doing online.

After the 2008 presidential election, Kushin and Yamamoto (2010) explored the impact that social media had on political decision making. Their research included three online media variables: attention to social media index, attention to traditional Internet sources index and online expression (p. 617-618). Political self-efficacy was also included as its own index. These indexes were compared with several controls including age, sex, political ideology and traditional media use. The results found that women and radio news consumers were more politically efficacious. However, other news attention

variables such as newspapers, TV news and magazines were not found to be significantly related to political self-efficacy. Furthermore, only attention to traditional Internet sources was shown to be positively associated with self-efficacy. In regards to situational political involvement, older respondents and those who paid particular attention to the newspaper were found to be more likely to be more involved in the election. Interestingly, magazines were found to be negatively associated with situational political involvement. Finally, online expression and attention to traditional Internet sources were found to be significant predictors of situational political involvement. This research is important because it adds to the growing body of research arguing that using social media for information seeking specifically does not lead to increased self-efficacy or political involvement.

Additional post 2008 election research conducted by Jung, Kim and Gil de Zuniga (2011) explored the indirect process through which the news media influence political participation. Their findings supported the idea that news media leads to political discussion, knowledge and efficacy, which in turn stimulates political participation. They were able to confirm all of their hypotheses the first of which suggested that high levels of news exposure is positively associated with political knowledge, political efficacy, interpersonal political discussion and online political messaging (ex. posting comments on political blogs, posting videos about current events and blogging about current events themselves). Furthermore, interpersonal political discussion was found to foster political knowledge, efficacy and political activities both offline and online. Online political messaging was also positively related to political efficacy, political participation offline and online. Interestingly, however, online political messaging was not found to enhance

political knowledge but did predict online and offline political participation. Additionally, online political messaging produced significant and positive influence on political efficacy and political participation. The researchers suggested that the opportunity to share opinions so freely online may lead to a "feeling of confidence to deal with politics" (p. 424). Lastly, this research did find that political knowledge and efficacy "produced significant mediating effects between communication variables and online and offline political participation" (p. 421). Communication variables were defined as news exposure, interpersonal discussion and online political messaging. Examples of offline political participation includes voting, speaking with public officials, sending letters, protesting, etc. Online political participation includes visiting campaign websites, donating to political campaigns online, signing up to volunteer, etc. In sum, while this research was able to confirm that news media and "online political messaging" indirectly lead to political participation, it also lays the foundation for future research to explore whether the same is true of social media.

The influence of opinion leaders is still being explored. Park (2013) explored the relationship between opinion leaders on Twitter and their political engagement. It is important to note that Park defined opinion leaders as those "characterized by higher social status, gregariousness and more social contacts" who tend to also be exposed to more news media content than non-leaders (p. 1641). One goal of Park's research was to understand whether opinion leaders were more politically engaged on social media. A total of 439 university students' responses were analyzed through an online survey. The research found that there was a significant association between Twitter opinion leadership and information seeking motivation. Park also found that opinion leaders were

using Twitter more frequently than those not considered opinion leaders. Most interestingly, their research found that those who are strong opinion leaders on Twitter were more likely to engage in political discussion with others as well as engaging in political activities. These findings are significant due to the influence these opinion leaders can have amongst their networks.

Bode and Dalrymple (2014) explored the idea that those who originally flocked to political blogs might now be using Twitter to engage politically. The authors surveyed "political Twitter users," who were identified based on the political candidates they follow on Twitter (p. 6). The survey asked questions about their demographics, but more importantly focused on media and Twitter variables. The media variables explored what type of political information the respondents might be exposed to outside of Twitter and to their understanding of the media. The Twitter variables looked at how they used Twitter to engage politically. Two dimensions of political Twitter use emerged, active political tweeting (which includes retweeting a politician, tweeting about politics or following a link from a tweet to a news story) and the "decision to expose oneself to political disagreement via Twitter" (p. 8). This research suggests that political Twitter users are predominantly white males who are highly educated with a household income of about $62,000 annually. These findings are particularly interesting because the average Twitter user has been said to be a female member of a minority group. Unsurprisingly, they are highly interested in politics and have a political knowledge nearly three times that of the overall population. Additionally, this research suggests that active engagement on Twitter is positively associated with online participation while exposure to disagreement on Twitter is negatively related to online political participation. A few other

relationships are worth noting. Political affiliation was found to be positively related to participation, with Republicans participating more than Democrats. These findings also suggest that age is negatively associated with participation, suggesting that older users were less likely to participate than younger users, which seems to contradict other research. However, this research begins to suggest that Twitter presents an "ideal subpopulation with which elites might want to communicate" as they are extremely interested in politics, likely to go to the polls and wealthy enough to contribute to campaigns (p. 16).

Past research has suggested that even non-political practices on social media can cultivate civic bonds and can lead to political engagement (Bakardijeva, 2009 and Dahlgren, 2009). Based on this, Yu's 2015 research focused on NPP (non-political, passive) and NPA (non-political, active) social media use and how it impacts political expression on social media. Non-political passive content was defined as consuming non-political content, whereas, non-political, active was defined as producing non-political content. She also looked at how political efficacy influenced the relationship between NPA use and political engagement. Yu hypothesized that NPA use is positively associated with political expression on social media and that NPA use is positively associated with political efficacy, which contributes to political expression. Both hypotheses were confirmed by Yu's survey of more than 1300 participants. Results also showed that these patterns are the same across Facebook and Twitter.

Research conducted by Loader, Vromen and Xenos (2015) explored how social media can be used by politicians and political "celebrities" to encourage the engagement of young people in politics. After surveying over 3,500 and opening 12 online discussion

boards for young people, ages16-29, in Australia, United Kingdom and United States to respond to, these researchers explored attitudes towards politicians and celebrities' social media use. Findings showed that initial reactions to politicians' use of social media was generally positive. Most participants saw their online presence on social media as necessary as a form of "two-way interactive engagement" (p. 408). However, participants were also concerned that politicians may be unaware of how to use social media correctly, and thus feared that using it incorrectly could cause more harm than good. Additionally, people liked when politicians mixed with celebrities (ex: Obama posting a photo with Will Smith), noting that it showed they are "modern and approachable" (p. 409). Lastly, this research explored those celebrities who use social media to engage politically. While the overall response was positive, respondents were concerned that these celebrities lack experience with the issues but because they are so popular, they could have too much influence. While the research found no significant difference between the three countries studied, it provided initial insights to how young people react to politicians who engage on social media.

African Americans and Political Involvement

Newhagen's 1992 research contributed to what appears to be the relatively small body of research that focuses on African Americans and political participation. Newhagen's research focused on the differences in both self and system efficacy across race and social class. System-based, or political efficacy, relates to the "perceived capacity of the political process to function" while internal, or self-efficacy, has to do with an "individual's sense of being able to cope with the system" (p. 387). In terms of newspaper reading, this research showed that more frequent exposure to newspapers did

increase self-efficacy; however, system efficacy was found to decrease as newspaper

reading increased, regardless of race. National television news viewing was also found to

increase self-efficacy regardless of race or education level. However, in terms of system

efficacy, whites remained fairly stable regardless of amount of television viewing,

however, black self-efficacy began high and decreased the more television they watch.

Talk radio was found to greatly increase self-efficacy. The same was found to be true

about "talking with others" which is most relevant for the research to follow, given that

social media can be seen as just a big conversation online (p. 391-392). Newhagen

suggested that as a whole, it appears that "education plays the largest role in predicting

efficacy for newspaper use, while race plays the greatest role for television news

viewing" (p. 392).

Inspired by Professor Stephen E. Bennett's book, *Apathy in America*, which

explored the decline of political interest between 1960 and 1984 and found that whites

are "usually, but not always" more interested in politics, Block (2007) studied those times

that Blacks' interest reached the levels of Whites' (Bennett, 1986, p. 72). Block

discovered that "political interest among African Americans tend to correspond with

important racial events in America's political history" (p. 14). Block cites the Civil Rights

Movement, Jesse Jackson's first presidential campaign in 1984 and Bill Clinton's defeat

of George H. W. Bush in 1992 as times when political interest of Blacks reached or

surpassed the interest of Whites. Block proposes that Blacks might "pay selective

political attention" and follow politics when it is most "relevant" to them (p. 16).

In 2012, Appiah and Hoffman hypothesized that attendance and involvement in

black churches would predict civic engagement and voter participation. While they were

not able to find support for all of their hypotheses due to a higher overall level of voter participation by Whites, their findings about media use variables were of particular relevance to the proposed research. Their research supported the idea that reading the newspaper and time spent using the Internet were positively linked to civic engagement and voting. Additionally, the study revealed a negative relationship between television viewing and both civic engagement and voting, which is consistent with past research as well. Since this study included a large number of African American participants, its findings appear to be relevant to the research that will follow.

News Seeking on Social Media

Gil de Zuniga (2012) explored the relationship between newsgathering on social networking sites (SNS) and social capital and civic participation as well as offline and online political participation. This research also explored how socio-demographics, general SNS use, network attributes, party identification, political efficacy, etc. would influence the results. Gil de Zuniga found support for his first hypothesis that predicted that use of SNS for news surveillance would increase social capital. His second hypothesis focused on the role of SNS use for news and whether it would predict civic participation. His research did find support for this claim. Additionally, the informational use of SNS for news was significantly and positively associated with both online and offline participation. In regards to online participation, political efficacy, news media use and political discussion network attributes had a positive impact on online participation. Political efficacy, news media use and the characteristics of people's discussion networks were found to be significant predictors of offline participatory activities. However, perhaps the most relevant finding for the purposes of this research was that young people

who are in a minority group with lower income and lower levels of education will be more inclined to use social media for news. Gil de Zuniga suggests that usually unprivileged citizens are beginning to consume news through a variety of channels, which can lead to "a healthier democracy" (p. 328). While this research suggests that those who use SNS for news are more likely to engage in online and offline participation, the research does not explore whether this is true for this specific demographic. This offers an opportunity for future researchers.

Additional 2012 research conducted by Lee and Ma explored the factors that influence news sharing on social media. They hypothesized that "information seeking will be positively associated with users' intention to share news on social media" (p. 333). Socializing, entertainment, status seeking and prior social media sharing experience were also hypothesized as actions that are positively associated with users' intention to share on social media. Their findings revealed that prior social media sharing experience and socializing were the top two factors that influence intention to share news on social media. One example they note is blog writers who are used to sharing their opinions on a regular basis will feel more comfortable sharing on social media as well. Additionally, status seeking was found to be a strong motivating factor to share news on social media. It appears that this satisfies a desire to appear credible and well-informed and can improve self-confidence and self-esteem, especially if they are eventually seen as an opinion leader. Entertainment was not found to significantly predict news sharing on social media, which contradicts previous research. Finally, this research suggests that "sharing news in social media may not only satisfy the current informational needs of oneself and others, but may also facilitate the fulfillment of future information seeking

needs" as users can go back and refer to it at any time (p. 337). It is important to note one

limitation of this research and that is that it does not differentiate between the impact of

different types of news, such as politics, science, entertainment and sports. The subject

matter of the news could influence their likelihood to share it.

The Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan fact tank whose mission is to "generate a

foundation of facts that enriches the public dialogue and supports sound decision-

making," has been contributing to the research on journalism and media, Internet, science

and religion and more since 2004 (Pew, 2017). Since 2000, The Pew Research Center has

been contributing to research about Internet usage and shortly after that began exploring

how people were using social media (Pew, 2017). In 2015, The Pew Research Center

published a report entitled "The Evolving Role of News on Twitter and Facebook" that

explored how users are beginning to encounter more news on both social networking

sites. Sixty-three percent of users said each platform "serves as a source for news about

events and issues outside the realm of friends and family" (p.7). These increases appear

across demographics, under 35, over 35, men and women. However, younger users were

more likely to see news than older users. The types of news being consumed on each site

varied slightly. Fifty-nine percent of users turned to Twitter for breaking news, nearly

twice as many as Facebook. Additionally, Twitter news users saw a wider variety of

topics. Sixty-seven percent of users reported regularly seeing at least 6 of 11 news topics

when compared with 57% of Facebook users. Twitter users reported seeing sports,

business, international and national government and political news more often than

Facebook users. Women reported seeing more entertainment, community and health

news on Facebook, but on Twitter, they reported seeing more posts about entertainment,

weather/traffic, crime and health which supports previous research. Men reported seeing the same topics at about the same rates on both channels. Interestingly, Facebook and Twitter users were just as likely to post about news. While both sites were found to be important secondary sources of news, they are more important for the younger demographic who was surveyed. Forty-nine percent of users under 35 said Facebook or Twitter was the most important or an important way they get news. Lastly, Facebook users were found to be more likely to post political content at 32% vs. Twitter at 25%. However, Twitter users were more likely to follow news outlets at 46%. This seems that it could be explained by the desire to receive breaking news via Twitter. Overall, this research speaks to the evolving role of Facebook and Twitter to not only provide entertainment, but to also provide information. Additionally, it supported Karlis' 2013 findings that young people are turning to social media to inform themselves about current issues.

According to The Pew Research Center (2016), the number of people seeking news on social media channels has increased since 2013. Sixty-two percent of users said they get news from Twitter, 18% said they do so "often." In 2013, just less than half of those surveyed used social media to consume news. Reddit, Facebook and Twitter users were the most likely to get news on each site with 70%, 66% and 59% respectively. Pew's research also demonstrated what percentage of users on each site were using it to get news compared to the total number of users. Sixty-seven percent of the population is on Facebook and 44% of those users reported using it to consume news. Sixteen percent of the population uses Twitter, and 9% of users reported getting news on the site. While Twitter may have a smaller user base, this research shows that more than 50% of its users

consume news on the site. YouTube's user base is 48% of the population but only 10% of users consume news on the site. Pew's research also looked at whether users on each site are consuming news by chance or are seeking it out. It revealed that YouTube, Facebook and Instagram users were more likely to get their news online mostly by chance, while Reddit, Twitter and LinkedIn users were slightly more likely to be seeking news when using the site.

Barack Obama's Presidential Campaigns

Barack Obama's 2008 campaign saw the highest young voter turnout since the 1972 election, with 52% of adults18-29 voting in the election and 68% of them voting for Barack Obama (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2008). This demographic was very important to Obama's success. They stayed connected with his campaign through blogs, social networks, text messaging, email lists, candidate's Web pages, social networking sites and photo and video sharing sites. Obama also employed his own social networking site, mybarackobama.com, an online platform that offered a blog, supporter profiles, fundraising pages and applications to manage affinity groups, videos, speeches, photos, etc. (Takaragawa & Carty, 2012). This strategy was "highly efficient and flexible in that it maximized group collaboration and gave individual volunteers tasks they could follow on their own schedule" (p. 78). The authors note that "citizen agency" was enhanced in terms of sharing information, organizing, recruiting, fundraising and participating in canvassing efforts as a result of volunteering organizing and mobilizing being far less bureaucratic than ever before (p. 85). Overall, Takaragawa and Carty remind us that the Obama campaign spurred a shift in the way we share and receive political communication, suggesting that it will be more peer-to-peer.

One highly relevant finding for the following research comes from Stern and

Rookey's 2012 research aiming to understand how spatial and regional variation, political

affiliation, race and other traditional markers of digital inequality impacted the general

use and perceived importance of the Internet to engage politically. They found that

African Americans were more likely to rate social media as more important than others

when using a form of media for political purposes. Additionally, Democrats were also

clearly invested in using forms of new media (examples include Internet and hand held

devices) for information when compared to those from other parties. Most interestingly,

African Americans, specifically Southern African Americans, "tended to view social

network sites as important for political and civil engagement" (p. 535-536). While this

research found that new media are being used as a means to gain political information, it

is important to consider the idea of "media multiplexity" presented by Stern in 2008,

which says that "people have a number of choices of the mode of communication they

prefer to use based on the particulars of a given situation" (p. 536). However, their

overall finding was that social networks can indeed be used to mobilize underrepresented

groups.

Barack Obama's 2008 campaign is said to have mirrored that of John Kennedy's

in 1960 (Bimber, 2014). The New York Times wrote the following:

> One of the many ways that the election of Barack Obama as president has
> echoed that of John F. Kennedy is his use of a new medium that will
> forever change politics. For Mr. Kennedy, it was television. For Mr.
> Obama, it is the Internet. (Miller, 2008, para. 1)

Bimber discussed the many ways that people could interact with Obama on social media

during the 2008 election noting that they could like Obama's page on Facebook, post

comments about their feelings for others to see, watch and comment on "viral" videos, make and display their images (ex: profile pictures), tweet or retweet messages related to the campaign, donate money at the exact moment they felt like it, etc. This broad portfolio of communication media allowed people to "match their own personalized interests and styles of participation to what the campaign was doing" (p. 134). As a result of these efforts and his unique fundraising strategy of a "highly personalized ground-game," Obama and the Democratic Party raised approximately $1 billion from dedicated donors (p. 135). Bimber notes that social media was integral in 2008, serving as a way to broaden the political conversation in the U.S. by drawing in those not otherwise likely to express themselves in a political manner on social media. However, communication efforts during the 2012 election targeted specific groups of people and diminished voter turnout and Bimber notes that this is one of the "unattractive features of such campaign efforts (p. 146).

While the research above explores the successes of using social media to reach potential voters, research from Yamamoto and Kushin (2014) explored the ways in which online media led to political disaffection among young adults during Obama's 2008 campaign. Using a sample size of 407 respondents, these researchers found that those who paid more attention to social media to receive campaign information were more politically cynical and apathetic. They also found that those who paid attention to traditional Internet sources for campaign information were less skeptical. Finally, those who expressed their political views through social media were more politically skeptical. Overall, the results imply that "political information on social media has negative political implications" (p. 439). The authors suggest that this is because unlike traditional

journalism that involves fact-checking, etc., social media relies on personal views and opinions. Their research also found support for the idea that social media allow us to retreat to our "walled gardens" where we can choose to receive only content that supports our beliefs (Boyd, 2008, Baumgartner & Morris, 2010, Yamamoto & Kushin, 2014).

Finally, Hwang (2016) references Obama's 2008 and 2012 campaigns to discuss the future of campaigning as it relates specifically to social media. She begins by outlining how Barack Obama used social media so effectively and efficiently that he won the election by nearly 200 electoral votes and 8.5 million popular votes. Hwang highlights how the 2008 and 2012 candidates utilized social media and used it to their advantage. However, what made Hwang's article significant is its discussion of the upcoming 2016 election. She notes that candidates are now focusing heavily on online efforts to further their campaign and "engage the increasingly wired American constituency" (p. 31). They are using targeted advertising and other digital tactics as a cheaper alternative to traditional advertising. Additionally, this transition to a focus on social media also benefits the public by producing a positive democratizing effect as constituents are more involved in the political process. Social media is an interactive and inclusive platform where "users are encouraged to like, share, and comment on posts to express their views, creating somewhat of an online forum for political discourse not just amongst voters, but also with candidates, politicians, news reporters, and experts" (p. 51). However, Hwang also notes while social media can potentially increase participation, it can also "degrade the quality and political complexity of conversation as well" due to the 140 character limits, etc. (p. 52). Lastly, the author notes that candidates should still attempt to master social media as their growing popularity can translate into offline

advantages. Social media will without a doubt change the future of campaigns and Hwang's final statements provide further justification for the following research.

African Americans and Social Media

Based on the statistics shared previously that African Americans use Twitter more than any other race, Andre Brock reminds us that it is important to consider why. His research on the Interface found that Twitter sets itself apart from other SNS due to the simplicity of both its interface and utility (Brock, 2012). The goal of co-founder Jack Dorsey was to make it so simple that users would not even think about what they were doing (Sagolla, 2009). Additionally, hashtags came up as an integral part of the Twitter user experience. For Black Twitter, they provide a way for users to get involved with the overall discussion but to participate as an individual. Overall, Brock found that while Black Twitter is not representative of the entire Black community, it is a place of online cultural discourse that highlights the creativity and tech literacy of the culture.

In Sharma's 2013 essay about Black Twitter, he discusses that "Black Twitter" has become evident due to the large number of African American Twitter users. This spurs the creation of "Blacktags," or particular hashtags that are associated with Black Twitter users and focus on a racial aspect, such as #ifIwasblack and #onlyintheghetto. Often as a result of their popularity, these hashtags trend on Twitter and reach a large audience producing as Sharma calls it "emergent racial aggregations" (p. 48). He also argues that these hashtags "interrupt the whiteness" of Twitter (p. 48). Overall, Sharma furthered the initial examination of how race can play out online.

Further examination of Black Twitter by Florini (2014) explored how African Americans use of "signifying," defined as the use of figurative language, indirectness,

doubleness, and wordplay, acts as a powerful tool for Black Twitter (p. 223). The author

notes that in a place where blackness could be easily hidden, Black Twitter offers an

interesting look into this culture online. Florini (2014) states that signifyin' requires that

participants possess certain forms of cultural knowledge and competencies. This

knowledge can range from that of Black popular culture or celebrity gossip to knowledge

of how to navigate the U.S. culture as it relates to race in general. The author notes that

this acknowledgement of their race online has the ability to "carve out social space for

collective Black racial identities" (p. 235).

Research from Murthy, Gross and Pensavalle (2016) explored Twitter use in

major cities. They used Twitter's Stream API data to examine activity in certain urban

areas and collected more than 275 million tweets from 50 cities in the country. Next, they

did a content analysis of these tweets to identify not only a user's demographic

information but also what they tweeted about. Up to 100 recent tweets were examined.

The study found that in cities with large black populations, there is a stronger relationship

with ITI, or intertweet internal. This means that on average African Americans tweet

faster than other racial groups. Another interesting finding was that almost 50 percent of

the top Twitter users in the sample were Black. Overall the research found that there are

"significant differences in Twitter use by race" (p. 44). The authors note the following in

closing:

> Twitter has been an important site of Black cultural production and this
> has been manifested through practices such as the circulation of Black
> hashtags, 'Blacktags'…We believe there is a politics of Twitter use that
> needs to be unpacked and our results highlight the possibility that

particular groups, such as young Black people, see Twitter as a space
where they can be vocal. (p. 44-45)

Wortham's 2016 article "Black Tweets Matter" defined Black Twitter as "a constellation
of loosely formed multifaceted communities created spontaneously by and for black
Twitter users who follow or promote black culture" (p. 22). Wortham notes that Black
Twitter "has become a powerful force for political activism, lightning-fast cultural
commentary – and place to just hang out" (p. 21). The article discusses the ways in
which Twitter facilitates activism and notes that the Black Lives Matter movement was
started on Facebook but quickly spread on Twitter. As of September 2016, the hashtag
#BlackLivesMatter had been used 30 million times. "Twitter…completely changes the
way activism is done, who can participate and even how we define it," says Wortham (p.
21). The author suggests that Twitter removes the distance between those who were once
powerless and the very powerful. Additionally, Black Twitter offers the opportunity to be
"immersed and participate in a black community, even if you don't happen to live or
work in one" (p. 24). Users "hang out" on Twitter, watching the BET Awards and
Scandal or participating in a hashtag discussion such as
#ThanksgivingWithBlackFamilies. Wortham concludes by noting:

> What Black Twitter has done is alter the terms of the game. It's proven
> itself a nimble, creative, provocative way to talk about race and inequality
> and culture. Sure, there is still much more to be done, but Twitter has
> made this a national conversation, and that's a good start. (p. 24)

Lee (2017) explored how Black Twitter has challenged "dominant, oppressive and biased
narratives" of the mainstream media (p. 7). She suggests three specific ways in which
Black Twitter has been a "digital homspace for black bodies: 1) redefinition, 2) enforcing

counter-narratives, testimonials and 3) organizing and building communities" (p. 7).

According to Lee, the blacktags #IfTheyGunnedMeDown and #DangerousBlackKids were examples of Black Twitter users fighting to define their own identities and combat the negative representations of black lives being portrayed in the media. Enforcing counter-narratives often happened through those on the front lines of protests in Ferguson, etc. One example given by Lee was a video that was taken in Ferguson of an officer saying he was going to shoot protestors if they didn't back up. This video made it to mainstream news outlets which not only showed a different side of the protests, but also got the officer removed from the Ferguson detail according to Twitter. The hashtags #CrimingWhileWhite and #AliveWhileBlack allows users to share their personal testimonies about interactions with police across the country and, as a result, highlighted "discrepancies between police interaction and race and violence" (p. 10). These hashtags sparked a national and global conversation about the inequalities that exist in America. Finally, Black Twitter offers healing through organizing and building community among users. Lee lists several organizations who gained popularity on social media: Black lives Matter, Ferguson Action, This Stops Today, Million Hoodies Movement for Justice, Hands Up United and the list goes on. Social media served as a digital space in which these groups as well as other users could spread knowledge and history. Twitter proved to be invaluable to organizers who can post one tweet and share it with millions of people within seconds. Lee states that similar to mainstream mass media, "social media also has the power to shape attitudes and beliefs of the masses" (p. 13). "Black Twitter worked to undermine implicit and explicit bias in mainstream news, while also uniting folks in these

spaces through self-identification and a redefining/reclaiming of blackness," she said (p. 13).

Justification

The research presented above does an excellent job of scratching the surface of several topics related to uses and gratifications theory, mass media and political engagement, as well as social media and Twitter use. It shows that African Americans are using Twitter heavily, specifically to engage politically and keep up with current events. However, there is currently no research exploring how Black women specifically are using Twitter. Moreover, research shows that they are using it at an extremely high rate, and therefore, understanding their usage patterns will further the research on this topic, and hopefully offer new insights. As unique as the 2016 presidential election was, it provides an interesting back drop for this research and exploring how people used Twitter during this time period will most definitely yield interesting findings.

Research Questions

Findings stating that younger African Americans are using Twitter at higher rates than their peers beg the questions why and how they are using this social network. Additionally, if African Americans use Twitter at a higher rate than their peers, might their motivations for use also differ? While some Twitter users simply enjoy sharing their 140 character thoughts with the world, others use the site to stay up to date on current news, keep up with friends, and interact with their favorite celebrities. This research seeks to understand why Black millennial women (ages 18-34) are using Twitter. It is also the researcher's hope to learn if one major reason is to engage politically. This

research seeks to take a snapshot of Twitter usage among this demographic during a

changing time in the United States as we leave the Obama era and experience the 2016

election.

The research questions based on the previous literature review are:

- **Research Question 1:** How do young Black women, ages 18-34, use Twitter most often?
- **Research Question 2:** Are Black women, ages 18-34, using Twitter to engage politically? If so, how?

III: METHODOLOGY

To explore the uses and gratifications of Twitter by Black women 18 to 34 years old during the 2016 election season, a survey was circulated on social media. The survey was posted by the researcher on Facebook and Twitter. It was quickly shared by the researcher's friends and family as well as young professional groups in a large southern city. Social media posts asked users to participate in a short survey via Google Sheets. Demographic data was collected along with high-level information about how participants use Twitter most often. The following uses and gratifications were presented:

- Social interaction
- Information seeking
- Information sharing
- Pastime
- Entertainment
- Relaxation
- Expression of opinions
- Communication utility (to gather topics to discuss with others)
- Convenience utility (easy to access and use at any time)
- Surveillance/knowledge about others
- Other

The final survey question asked whether respondents would be interested in participating in focus groups in their city. Survey responses were collected for two weeks and drove the development for the next phase of this research, focus groups.

After the survey was closed, focus groups were scheduled with those who expressed interest in participating in further research on this topic. Two focus groups, each consisting of 6-8 young black women, were conducted to provide further context around participants' Twitter use. The focus groups took place in October of 2016, capturing timely data and dialogue about Twitter use during the months leading up to the

election. Both focus groups were held in the community space at an apartment complex where they were recorded for future reference.

Lastly, a content analysis of participants' tweets was conducted to further explore utilization. It was critical to compare the survey and focus group results to the observed Twitter content to analyze whether inconsistencies existed in reported usage. The content analysis served as the last step to validate the data collected.

IV: RESULTS

Phase 1: Survey

After two weeks of being circulated on social media, the survey had a total of 313 respondents. Of those 313 respondents, 17 were discarded because they were not female, Black or Twitter users. This left a total of 296 respondents who completed the survey.

The first survey question asked about frequency of Twitter use. More than 60% of respondents stated that they use Twitter multiple times a day. Fifteen percent responded that they use Twitter less than once a week. These percentages suggest that most respondents were either heavy users or light users with few in the middle. Approximately 12% of respondents reported using Twitter a few times a week. Only 6.1% reported using Twitter once a day and 4.1% reported using Twitter once a week.
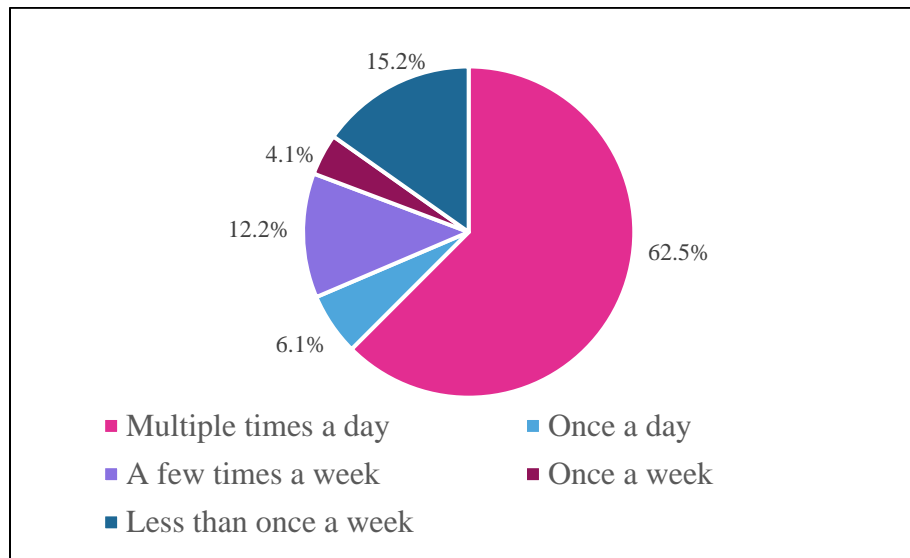
Figure 1. Frequency of Twitter Use.

The next question asked "Which of the following do you use Twitter for?" and allowed respondents to check all that apply. *Table 2* and *Figure 2* show the responses to the question.

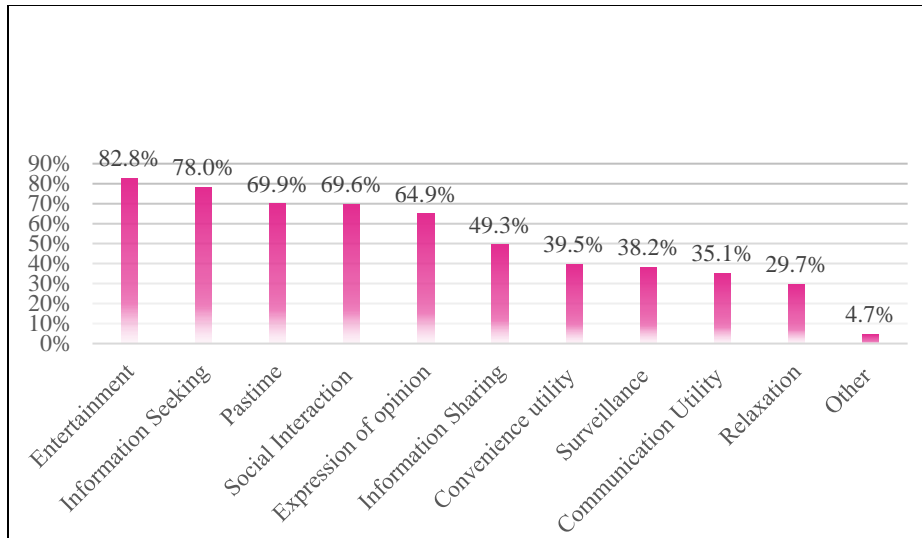| Table 2. Kelley's Top 10 Uses & Gratifications Themes.	
Theme	%
1. Entertainment	82.77%
2. Information Seeking	78.04%
3. Pastime	69.93
4. Social Interaction	69.59%
5. Expression of Opinions	64.86%
6. Information Sharing	49.32%
7. Convenience Utility	39.53%
8. Surveillance/Knowledge about Others	38.18%
9. Communication Utility	35.14%
10. Relaxation	29.73%
11. Other	4.73%

Figure 2. Kelley's Top 10 Uses & Gratifications Themes.

The focus group questions were later created based on the top five responses above: entertainment (82.8%), information seeking (78%), pastime (69.9%), social interaction (69.6%), expression of opinions (64.9%) and information sharing (49.3%).

The next survey question focused on whom the respondents follow on Twitter and again allowed them to check all that apply. Almost all respondents (90.9%) reported following friends on Twitter. Nearly 70% reported that they follow news sources. Approximately two-thirds of respondents said they follow musicians, classmates/co-workers and actors/actresses. More than half (54.7%) follow businesses and brands. Nearly half (49%) reported following journalists while 43.9% follow politicians or other public officials. Approximately 40% follow sports figures and family on Twitter. About a third (32.8%) of respondents follow political commentators and 11% reported following an entity other than those listed (*see Table 3*).

Table 3. Who Respondents Are Following on Twitter.

Twitter Accounts	%
Friends	90.9%
News sources	69.3%
Musicians	67.6%
Classmates/Coworkers	66.6%
Actors/actresses	66.6%
Businesses/brands	54.7%
Journalists	49%
Politicians or other public officials	43.9%
Sports figures	41.2%
Family	40.9%
Political commentators	32.8%
Other	11.1%

While the goal of the survey was to collect data on Twitter users, it also asked those who identified as non-Twitter users why they do not currently use the social networking site before leading them to the thank-you page. Several participants responded that they used Twitter in the past but have moved on to other social networking sites. One respondent found Twitter to be a "waste of time." Another mentioned deleting the app because she was afraid her tweets would stop her from getting accepted into graduate school. Finally, one respondent had the following to say about social media in general:

> I'm not a huge proponent of social media. I feel it is a big part of everything wrong with my generation and I refuse to indulge in it.

As a follow-up question, the survey asked non-Twitter users where they get their news. Most (75%) reported getting their news from online news sites while 67.9% reported getting their news from Facebook. Fifty percent cited family/friends as a source of their

news. Television was a source for 39.3% of non-Twitter users with radio not far behind at 32.1%. Not surprisingly for the millennial generation, newspaper was cited the least at 10.7% (*Table 4*).

Table 4. News Sources for Non-Twitter Users.	
News Source	%
Online news sites	75%
Facebook	67.9%
Family/Friends	50%
Television	39.3%
Radio	32.1%
Other	14.3%
Newspaper	10.7%

The survey helped lay the foundation for the next section of this research, the focus groups. Again, the results outlined above guided and influenced the questions that were asked in both focus groups.

Phase 2: Focus Groups

In order to recruit focus-group participants, the survey asked respondents to provide their contact information if they were interested in participating in a 45-60 minute discussion with other black millennial women. While more than 40 young women were interested and provided their information, due to scheduling conflicts, location, etc., 13 participants were able to attend two focus groups held in October 2016. The demographics of the participants were as follows:

- All participants were women.
- All participants identified as Black.
- All identified as millennials between the ages of 21-34.

- All identified as Twitter users (although usage varied amongst participants).

- Average number of years on Twitter was 5.5 (range of 2 -7 years).

All focus groups began with the following questions:

- How long have you been on Twitter?

- How has your Twitter use changed from when you first started using it?

- How are you using Twitter now?

Based on the responses to these questions, two main themes emerged: Twitter use has evolved since participants first began using the platform and many participants often feel pressure to tweet.

Twitter use then and now. Most participants reported that their Twitter use had changed in some way since they began using the social media site. The majority of participants identified as seasoned Twitter users who have been active on the social networking site for 5+ years, while a few others were relatively new to the platform. One of the newer Twitter users reported that she started using Twitter "exclusively for work" before discovering that Twitter was a way to "voice [her] thoughts and get opinions on like TV shows and pop culture events." She added that since she is relatively new to the platform, her usage patterns have stayed relatively consistent. However, the Twitter veterans had plenty to say about how their usage has evolved. They reported getting a Twitter profile in high school or college because their friends had one and it was a way to interact with them. One participant said, "I first downloaded it because all my college friends had it and it was pure entertainment." Another participant reported following a lot fewer people when she started using Twitter and that they were mostly friends and people who were "very close to [her]."

Several respondents reported that during their early days on Twitter, they were not as careful about what they tweeted as they are now (mostly due to the nature of their jobs). One of the younger focus group participants reported that she does not retweet as many things as she used to because she believes it could be "risky" for her profile. She added that she is "more strategic with [her] Twitter now than [she] used to be." One participant added to this topic saying: "I was real reckless, I said whatever I wanted to say, I was childish and now I feel like I've grown just a smidge."

Political discussions and entertainment (specifically live tweeting) were cited as other ways participants are using Twitter which set the stage for the rest of the focus-group discussion.

Pressure to tweet. Due to the highly political nature of Twitter (especially during the time period in which these focus groups were conducted), the pressure to tweet about certain topics came up amongst one group of participants. Both the Charlotte protests and the Black Lives Matter Movement were mentioned as issues that participants felt pressure to comment on. One participant who is from North Carolina said that she feels "guilty" if she does not comment because the rest of her timeline is talking about it. She stated that she does not want people to think she moved to Texas and "what's going on back home doesn't matter to [her]." Another participant stated that not only is there pressure to tweet about social and political issues but even people's birthdays at times. She described this pressure as "silly" and "annoying." In regards to the Black Lives Matter Movement, she also said that while she does connect to the movement, she does not always participate in the conversation on Twitter.

Another participant spoke on the pressure to tweet about certain issues, but noted that she tries not to succumb to that pressure. However, she admitted that she does like to "give people a sense of where [she] stands on certain things" so if she does see something that speaks to how she feels, she will retweet it. This participant believes a retweet is enough to let people know how she feels, and several other participants agreed.

Entertainment/Pastime. This portion of the focus groups explored how these young women are using Twitter for entertainment and pastime purposes. A short questionnaire distributed to participants before the focus groups began asked what entertainment news sources they follow. *Table 5* below outlines these responses.

Table 5. Entertainment News Sources Followed.	
Baller Alert	The Shade Room (3)
Complex (2)	Buzz Feed (4)
ABC	AMC
Black Girl Nerds	DIY Network
Fader (2)	Jezebel
TMZ	Perez Hilton
World Star Hip Hop	E Online (2)
Us Weekly	Blavity
Giant Noise	Infatuation
Celebrity News	Localeur

The following question was asked of participants: "How do you use Twitter for entertainment purposes?" and elicited immediate responses and extensive conversation. Three major themes emerged through this discussion.

The Use of Twitter to Follow Celebrities. All 13 respondents reported following television shows, celebrities or politicians on Twitter. *Table 6* below lists those named during the focus groups.

Table 6. Television Shows/Celebrities/Authors/Sports Figures Followed.	
Scandal	How to Get Away with Murder
President Barack Obama	Kerry Washington
Shonda Rhimes	Power
The Walking Dead	Hillary Clinton
Bernie Sanders	Wendy Davis
Taraji P. Hinson	Empire
TGIT	

Focus group discussions support the survey finding that the vast majority (82%) of participants use Twitter for entertainment purposes.

The Use of Twitter for Live Tweeting. All 13 participants reported using Twitter to live tweet. According to Oxford Dictionaries, live tweeting is the act of posting comments about an event on Twitter while the event is taking place. While there was agreement about the activity as a whole, participants had slightly different live tweeting habits. There was general agreement that there were certain events that must be live tweeted. Examples included the Grammy Awards (especially if Beyoncé was present according to one participant), the Oscars, the Olympics and the presidential debates. However, television shows such as Power, Empire, Scandal and How to Get Away with Murder were often missed without as much distress. While one respondent admitted to putting her phone up higher so she can scroll through Twitter and watch the show simultaneously, others said they do not like to multi-task in that way because they will miss something, either the show or what is being said on Twitter. One said that she will

"tweet during commercials" because it's the only time she can catch up on what people have been saying.

The majority of participants did report using Twitter to live tweet; however, for a few participants this meant consuming content only. One participant noted that she uses Twitter to "lurk" during live events. One participant said that if she misses the "live action," she will get on Twitter afterwards to "catch the aftermath" of memes and commentary. Another participant who does not use Twitter to live tweet admitted that she just "can't focus on more than one thing at once." One other respondent noted that while she does watch the same programs, she does not tweet because she knows that someone else has probably said what she is thinking.

The use of hashtags seems to be intertwined with the topic of entertainment. The group noted that some shows have two separate hashtags, one that is sponsored by the show (ex. #Scandal, #Power, etc.) and another that is started by "black Twitter". One participant provided the following example:

> With certain shows I'll participate in two hashtags for the show so basically it's like there's the regular one that's like promoted by the show itself that, you know, everybody of all ethnicities are on and then there's one that's kind of specifically geared towards black people so for How To Get Away with Murder it's like #HTGAWM and then there's a separate hashtag that's #DatMurda that's for black people…and then with the Walking Dead you have #TheWalkingDead and then there's another one that's #DeyWalkin.

Participants noted that often times these second, unofficial hashtags become so popular that they trend, which appears to speak to the power and number of black Twitter users.

Finally, live tweeting seems to generate a sense of community from those who participate. This idea was also supported by one participant who said the following: "I would prefer to watch it live and live tweet it at the same time because I feel like that's the best way to watch a Lifetime movie. The movie is probably going to be terrible but like it adds to it." This seems to suggest that one aspect of the entertainment use is the gratification that comes with being a part of community of live tweeters.

The Entertainment vs. Pastime Debate. Both entertainment and pastime appeared in the top five uses and gratifications based on the survey results. However, these two uses seem to be very similar in nature. Participants were asked the following question: Is there a difference between entertainment and pastime, and if so, what is it? "I think they're the same thing…that's how I'm entertaining myself, how I'm passing my time and keeping myself engaged. I think it's a fine line," said one participant. Another participant believes "entertainment is merging with pastime but it can still be a separate thing." A few participants noted that often they get on Twitter with the intent to pastime and find themselves entertained by their newsfeed. One example a participant gave was scrolling through Twitter while you wait in a doctor's office but finding yourself entertained. "Interchangeable" is how one participant described her usage. She mused:

> I may just be on there for like a pastime purpose but I end up finding entertainment in it because there's so much that will pop up on my timeline so I can't even really separate the two. In a way, if I'm engaged and stimulated am I not entertained?

Another participant suggested that pastime is more of a passive activity, such as pulling out her phone when she's in bed at 2 a.m. but can't sleep, but that entertainment is

intentional. She defined entertainment as when she is going to Twitter with the intention to "catch up on things."

Overall, the majority agreed that the two are very similar in nature.

Information Seeking.

> I feel like over time, because there are more social media platforms and they all have their niche uses, Twitter is finally taking on what it was intended to be. It was intended to be a news source, an RSS feed…people didn't realize it's to share information and news and I feel like as people have seen how it can be used for big events or crisis situations and things like that…people have finally started using Twitter for what it's supposed to be used for…news.

The quote above sums up the conversation on information seeking and Twitter. Information seeking is a very important use of the social networking site, and this participant argues, its intended use. Participants generally agreed that Twitter is their primary source for daily and breaking news. Several participants reported that Twitter is one of the first apps they open each day. One participant reported that Twitter is where she goes to find out what "shit…Donald Trump said today."

Table 7 shows the results of the question "What news sources do you follow?" that appeared on the "Additional Questions" form distributed before the focus group was conducted. In addition to participants writing their answers to this question, it was also discussed during the focus group. *CNN* was written down by more than half of the focus group participants. The *Austin American Statesman*, *Huffington Post* and *BBC* were mentioned by several participants as well. POTUS (a Twitter handle that stands for President of the United States) was mentioned as a news source by 3 participants;

however, during the focus group discussion all participants reported that they follow this handle. Interestingly, no "conservative" news sources were mentioned during the conversation amongst these young women.

Table 7. News Sources Followed.	
BBC News (3)	BBC Breaking News
KVUE (2)	KXAN (2)
The White House (3)	CNN Breaking News
Reuters	Al Jazeera English (2)
POTUS (4)	FLOTUS (2)
The Washington Post (2)	Huffington Post (4)
Austin American Statesman (4)	CNN (7)
Buzz Feed (2)	Social Media Examiner
The Chicago Tribune	Google News
MSNBC (2)	The Young Turks
The Economist	Study Breaks
Essence	The University Star
KTSW News	Huffington Post Black Voices
The Dallas Morning News	The Root
Yahoo News	Blavity (2)
Mashable (2)	The Skimm
Sports Center	ESPN (2)
WFAA Dallas	USA Today
Breaking News	Associated Press
Business Insider	

Additionally, most participants said that they seek information more than they share it. There was general agreement that they will only retweet something that resonated with them or included a "great message."

One final take away from the discussion around information seeking is that people often search hashtags when they are looking for news quickly. "I search it in Twitter then I'll look at it on all the different news feeds," one participant said. "I'll go to their page to see what their talking about but I don't follow them long term." Most focus group participants agreed that Twitter is where they go to learn about breaking news.

Trustworthiness of news sources and political figures. When asked whether participants find the news sources they follow to be trustworthy, most answered yes. However, when asked about politicians, participants responded differently. Most agreed that President Obama and Michelle Obama are credible and trustworthy sources. However, they also agreed that they only tweet approved messages and this did not come as a surprise, nor make them less credible or trustworthy. "By no means do I feel like Barack Obama is sending out unapproved messages," one participant said. "Someone took a peek at it," she added. Participants found this practice to be acceptable and "expected." The general consensus was that due to the "pressure" placed on these politicians and celebrities, these kinds of checks are necessary.

Donald Trump's tweets came up during this discussion. One participant said that Donald Trump was probably one of the most "credible" politicians on Twitter since it is obvious that he tweets for himself. She added: "He's credible at the time that he feels that way but you know it's going to change." These comments highlighted the contrast between the approved messages of Barack Obama and the sporadic tweeting of Donald Trump.

Social Interaction.

Keeping up with friends. The consensus amongst participants was that while Twitter is a place where you can interact with friends, social interaction is no longer its primary use. Instead, participants reported using Facebook and Snapchat to keep up with their friends on a daily basis. Participants again said they were more likely to use Twitter for entertainment, which was consistent with the survey findings. Only a few participants mentioned that they use Twitter to keep up with friends. One participant stated that she uses Twitter to discuss "pop culture and politics" with her friends. Another added that since she can use Twitter to keep up with people, "it makes [her] feel like people never left [Austin]" because it is so easy to stay in touch. It is important to note, however, that this same gratification could apply to most social media channels.

Unfriending/Unfollowing. One major topic of discussion during the second focus group specifically was unfollowing people on Twitter and the actions that led up to that decision. It is important to note that participants also reported hiding posts or unfriending people on Facebook, therefore, the discussion below touches on both channels.

Participants cited the following as reasons they unfollowed or unfriended someone on social media:

- Negative comments about President Obama
- Negative comments about the Black Lives Matter Movement
- Comments showing support for Donald Trump
- Misogynistic views

Most participants reported that they will unfollow or unfriend someone without telling them that they are doing so. Based on the focus group discussion, it was clear that most participants did not expect the person to notice. However, two participants reported that they had a conversation about why they unfollowed or unfriended someone with the

individual afterwards. During those conversations, both participants were able to explain their views and beliefs to the person they unfriended or unfollowed. Another participant noted that it is all about "try[ing] to understand." "If you're not going to try to understand then I'm not going to try to tell you," she noted. Another participant who reported being from a "very interracial family," noted that she has unfollowed members of her step-dad's side of the family, which she described as very "white hillbilly." She admitted that sometimes it is hard, however, she will unfollow and not talk to them if they say things she finds to be offensive.

Another participant shared her "three strike rule" with the group. If she sees one "questionable" comment, she will go to the user's page and see if they've "messed up a couple more times" before deciding to unfriend or unfollow.

There was only one participant who had not unfollowed or unfriended people whose views were different than hers. She explained that she is "nosey" and wants to know what is happening in their lives. Additionally, she said that she doesn't like to "burn bridges" but will probably never interact with them.

The comments included above appear to speak to how divided social media became during the time leading up to the 2016 presidential election. However, the silver lining appears to be that the opportunity arose for some participants to engage in constructive conversations with their friends and followers about sensitive topics and share their opinions.

Expression of Opinions

Censorship. The question "Do you feel that you have to censor yourself on Twitter?" elicited mixed responses from the group. While all the respondents agreed that

it is important to be mindful about what you say on Twitter, about a third said they mainly use their Twitter for work related things and try to stay away from sensitive topics such as religion and politics. One respondent brought up the fact that people can still get fired for what is said on Twitter. Of the respondents on this side of the argument, one works in public relations, one in advertising, one is a current undergraduate student and one is a government employee. The other half of the group, however, was of the opinion that Twitter is a safe space and that if someone gets mad about something they've said that's not their concern. One respondent on this side of the discussion reported having two Twitter accounts, one personal and one for work. She had the following to say in regards to this topic:

> I think that on my actual personal one I'm like I do some real serious stuff on here that people should be able to retweet but at the same time I think about my long term goals, etc. who knows…I may actually want to run for office one day and I'm like I need to be thinking about this but at the same time I'm hoping that since we live in a generation where everyone has social media and has probably said something problematic or something that someone is upset with that in the future when this pops up I'll be like look Joe you also have did this…we all did it. I apologize for it but can we focus on right now.

Another respondent who works in the field of social media had an interesting take on the issue because she is followed by some "higher-ups" at her company. She reported that while she does not feel comfortable posting "controversial" things, she is able to post silly memes and articles without feeling "guilty." However, interestingly, this same respondent said that she has tweeted something along the lines of "Donald Trump is an idiot." It appears that the line of what is political and what is not might be a bit blurry

because many of the other respondents quickly agreed that they too had tweeted similar sentiments about the then Republican candidate.

One participant noted that Twitter is the one place she feels she can go to say what she wants. "I feel like people don't know me on there…I feel like I can be whoever and kind of be anonymous in a way," she said. She added that she does not think anyone really cares about what she is saying on Twitter, and if they do, she does not care.

One participant who works for a government entity reported that she censors herself for her "long term goals." She added that being an educated black woman is enough reason for people to be "intimidated" by her so she tries not to go on Twitter and talk about how much she hates Donald Trump because most of her coworkers might be voting for him.

There were two participants who felt very strongly about this topic on both sides of the argument. Their comments can be seen below:

> I'm very proud of my political views…I never feel the need to censor myself. Even on my professional [Twitter] I will say, "I can't believe people are voting for #DonaldTrump." I will actually do it because I don't care and I work in a department where I'm pretty sure 99.9% of people actually despise him so I don't care about things like that but what does concern me…there is a particular image that I feel that people have of me…and I think it would absolutely shock the hell out of some people if they were to see [my raunchy behavior on Twitter] and that's the only thing that I would be concerned about…Sometimes I cuss quite a bit on my Twitter account but that's not how I am in public with just anybody so that's the only part of me that would be like somewhat concerned with

areas like that where people are like whoa I can't allow my kids to see this or hear this. But with my political views you can actually suck my dick.

For the most part I don't really participate in political discussions just because that's not really my style either I like to talk about those things in person. I don't feel like I need to broadcast my every thought and move for everybody to see even if my account is private or whatever, I mean it's not but, I feel like some discussions are better to have in person and can be misinterpreted through text only so for the most part I don't discuss religion or politics or anything that's considered taboo…I keep it light.

Professional image and future goals seemed to highly influence whether a respondent felt the need to censor themselves or not.

Walled Gardens. In 2014, Yamamoto and Kushin presented the idea of social networking sites as "walled gardens," in which people surround themselves with content that supports their existing ideas. Boyd (2008) used the term "echo chambers" to describe a similar idea. She said the following in "Can social network sites enable political action?":

Politically engaged people typically know other politically engaged people, and social network sites create cavernous echo chambers as people reiterate what their friends posted. Given the typical friend overlap in most networks, many within those networks hear the same thing over and over until they believe it to be true…Echo chambers are problematic because they give the impression that activists have spread a message further than they have.

In order to explore whether the focus group participants were existing in "walled gardens," the following two questions were asked:

- What percentage of the people you follow on Twitter would you say also identify as Black?

- Do you think that most of your followers (the people who follow you) agree or disagree with your opinions?
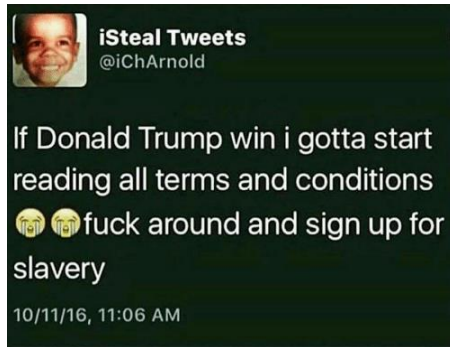
In regards to the first question, out of 13 participants, one responded that she could not even guess because she follows so many news sources, brands and companies, and another responded that less than 20% perfect of her followers were Black. The other 11 participants reported that at least 50% of the people they follow are Black. Six participants reported that more than 90% of the people they follow are Black.

Only one person reported that her followers disagree with their opinions. This comment elicited many questions from the other participants. "Ooooh…how is that?" one participant asked. The participant responded that she is from a small, affluent town where many have a "backwoods" mindset. "You can't date outside your race and stuff," she explained. Since she started using Twitter while she was in high school, the majority of her followers are from her hometown.

Overall, the responses to these two questions, seem to show support for the idea that social media does allow us to create "walled gardens."

2016 Presidential Election. It is important to note that the presidential election was initially not the main focus of this research. However, due to the time period in which this research was conducted and the unique nature of the 2016 presidential election, it did become a focal point, because this topic was one that people frequently expressed opinions about online. Based on the conversations that took place in both focus group discussions, it became obvious that the participants found Donald Trump's rhetoric to be offensive and his Twitter behavior to be unprecedented.

One participant specifically brought up the tweet below:

iSteal Tweets
@iChArnold

If Donald Trump win i gotta start reading all terms and conditions 😭😭fuck around and sign up for slavery

10/11/16, 11:06 AM

Most participants knew what she was talking about because they had seen it on Twitter or Instagram. They laughed and one participant asked jokingly "Who wants to go back to slavery?" The laughter in the room suggested that no one actually thought that Donald Trump would succeed Barack Obama.

See a few additional comments below:

> It's nuts but it's kind of interesting to see though because I think this is the first time social media has been this influence on anything this political. Like I know Obama and Hillary kind of used it whenever they were going against each other but not as much as this. This is nuts.

> To me, I feel like speaking out about Donald trump is not this big crazy political statement…to me it's like common sense. I'm thankful that I don't think I know any Trump supporters, white or black, so if I'm tweeting out that he's a fool or retweeting some foolishness I don't think its offensive and someone gets mad about that I don't care.

Phase 3: Content Analysis

To conduct a content analysis, the researcher looked at the focus group participants' tweets during the week leading up to the election on Tuesday, November 10th. In order to capture reactions to the results of the election, the researcher also looked
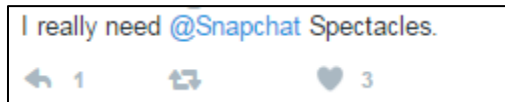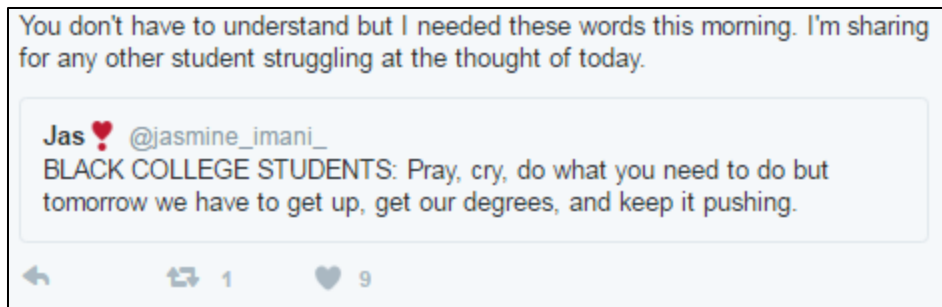
at tweets on Wednesday, November 11th. It was the researcher's intention to analyze all the tweets from all respondents during this time period; however, due to changes in Twitter's search functionality, this was not possible. According to Twitter's Help Center, "Twitter filters search results for quality Tweets and accounts." While this might be helpful in some cases, it is very inconvenient for a researcher hoping to easily find all the tweets from a specific date range. Due to these restrictions, the content analysis was performed using only those tweets that appeared in the Advanced Search.

An intercoder reliability of 100% was achieved by two coders reviewing each tweet and deciding on their category. A total of 130 tweets were analyzed. Each was coded as one or more of the following uses:
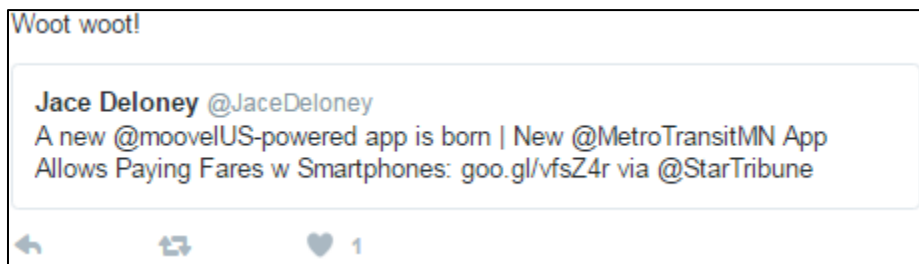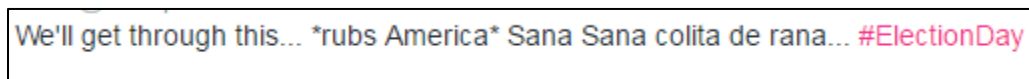
- Social Interaction
- Expression of Opinions
- Relaxation/Pastime
- Entertainment
- Information Sharing
- Information Seeking

These categories were chosen based on the uses/gratifications from the survey.
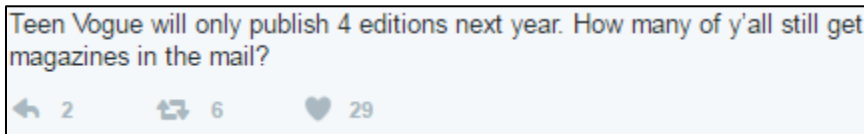
Tweets that were coded as *social interaction* were defined as those that mentioned other accounts. This could be as simple as mentioning a friend's account or responding to their tweet. Another example is a retweet in which they are continuing a conversation based on the original tweet. If a tweet mentioned a company, it was coded as social interaction as well. Examples below.

You don't have to understand but I needed these words this morning. I'm sharing for any other student struggling at the thought of today.

Jas ❣ @jasmine_imani_
BLACK COLLEGE STUDENTS: Pray, cry, do what you need to do but tomorrow we have to get up, get our degrees, and keep it pushing.

↩   ⇄ 1   ♥ 9

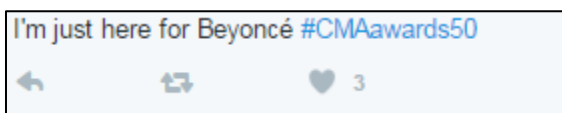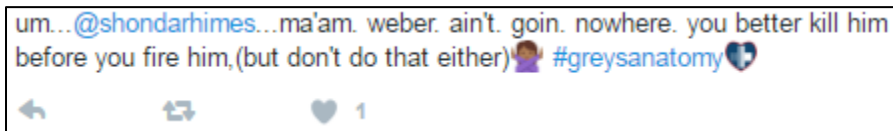I really need @Snapchat Spectacles.

↩ 1   ⇄   ♥ 3

Tweets that *expressed opinions* came in many forms. Those that included emojis were often coded as expression of opinions because they added emotion and additional context to tweets. Retweeting a news source and adding a comment is another example of tweets that express an opinion. See below for several examples:

We'll get through this... *rubs America* Sana Sana colita de rana... #ElectionDay

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Woot woot!

Jace Deloney @JaceDeloney
A new @moovelUS-powered app is born | New @MetroTransitMN App
Allows Paying Fares w Smartphones: goo.gl/vfsZ4r via @StarTribune

↩   ⇄   ♥ 1

🔥 🔥 🔥

Austin Statesman @statesman
BREAKING: Austin transportation bond passes with 59.1 percent of the vote atxne.ws/2eKLKtO #atxelections #ElectionNight
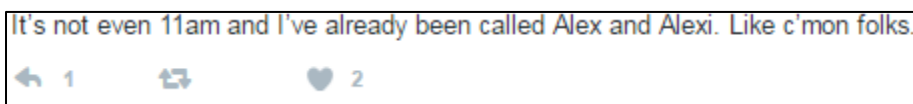
Retweets of news sources without a comment were coded as *information sharing*. Tweets about events around town or those that offered random facts were also coded as information sharing. *Information seeking* tweets were defined as those that asked their followers a question. The following is another example of both information sharing and information seeking:

Teen Vogue will only publish 4 editions next year. How many of y'all still get magazines in the mail?
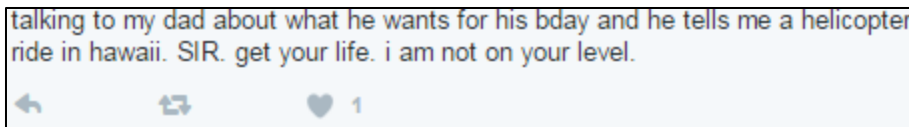
↩ 2   ↻ 6   ♥ 29

Tweets that mentioned television shows, award shows or sports games were coded as *entertainment*. The 2016 Country Music Awards was one event that several participants were live tweeting during the time period in which the content analysis was conducted. The following are examples tweets that were coded as entertainment:

um...@shondarhimes...ma'am. weber. ain't. goin. nowhere. you better kill him before you fire him,(but don't do that either)👩🏾 #greysanatomy🛡

↩   ↻   ♥ 1

I'm just here for Beyoncé #CMAawards50

↩   ↻   ♥ 3

Finally, random tweets about life were coded as *relaxation/pastime*. Two examples have been included below:

It's not even 11am and I've already been called Alex and Alexi. Like c'mon folks.

↩ 1   ↻   ♥ 2

talking to my dad about what he wants for his bday and he tells me a helicopter ride in hawaii. SIR. get your life. i am not on your level.

It is important to note that tweets could be coded as one or more use. Very few tweets were coded as only one use; most fell into two or three categories.

Figure 3 below shows the frequency of each tweet type.
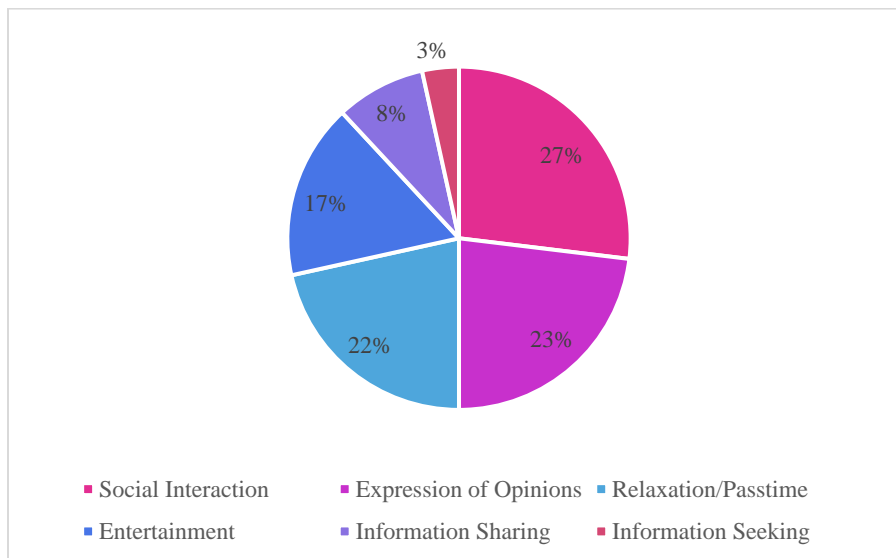
Figure 3. Tweet Type Results from Nov 1- Nov 11.

Of the 130 tweets that were coded, nearly 30% fell into the social interaction category. Almost one-fourth (23%) of the tweets coded expressed an opinion of some kind. Relaxation and pastime tweets appeared 22% of the time. Seventeen percent of tweets were coded as entertainment. Information and information seeking were the least frequently coded.

V: DISCUSSION

This research sheds light on the ways in which millennial Black women were using Twitter in the months leading up to the 2016 presidential election. While these results cannot be generalized to the entire population, this study provides a good sense of how other millennial Black women might be using Twitter and the topics they may be discussing. The survey results helped to answer RQ1 which asked how this demographic was using Twitter based on the uses and gratifications suggested by Whiting and Williams (2013). Entertainment, information seeking, social interaction, pastime and expression of opinions were the top five uses and gratifications of this sample. These findings are similar to the findings of Whiting and Williams, however, wntertainment and expression of opinions were found to be more common among this demographic.

The focus group discussion supported the survey findings and suggested that Twitter is where this demographic is 1) receiving its news, 2) connecting with others for entertainment purposes and 3) expressing its opinions to varying degrees. While nearly all of the focus group participants were college graduates and young professionals, there were other clear differences among the group. Some participants were from a small town, while others were from larger cities. Several worked in what could be called more creative work environments, while others worked in more typical 9-5 work environments. However, despite their differences, they were all able to share valuable insights about the community they are a part of on Twitter. On Twitter, memes television shows, awards shows and political happenings bring them together. Twitter allows these women a place to be themselves, whatever that looks like. For some it is bold and fearless, while for others it is more reserved and professional. But no matter their style, the community

created by Black Twitter will always be one they can connect with through the simple search of a hashtag. These results seem to echo the findings of Murthy, Gross and Pensavalle (2016) who said Twitter is a place where Black people can create community and be vocal. This research suggests that "vocal" looks different depending on many factors, including personality, profession and future goals.

The content analysis suggests that social interaction, expression of opinions and relaxation/pastime were the primary uses, which is in line with the findings above. This section of the research is the only place that information seeking did not appear as a top use. However, since the only tweets that were coded as information seeking were those that asked a question, it was difficult to get a clear picture of how often information seeking was truly the intent. In short, a content analysis does not accurately account for the time users might spend information seeking, which includes reading news articles, etc. To get a more accurate picture of the amount of time users may spend information seeking, they would have to self-report this activity.

Based on the content analysis of tweets from November 9, the day after the election, for those who participated in the focus groups, the outcome was shocking. At the time the focus groups were conducted, the participants did not see Donald Trump as a viable candidate for the presidency. One reason for this shock could be that those they follow on Twitter (news sources, friends, family, influencers), were not taking his candidacy seriously. Several focus group participants admitted to unfollowing and unfriending people on their social media channels due to their differing opinions. This action (however valid) undermines one of the greatest opportunities that social media allows us and that is the opportunity to engage with people who do not look like us, who

believe differently than us, who have had different experiences than us, etc. Focus group participants also said that Donald Trump could never win the election. "There's no way," they said. "No one will vote for him," said others. They wanted to believe it so they did. They retweeted it, but they were sharing it with likeminded individuals who also wanted to believe it.

However, Donald Trump is the 45th President of the United States of America and the shock in the tweets from November 9 seem to provide further support for the idea of "walled gardens." Without their knowledge, participants allowed walled gardens to entrap them and echo chambers to build up around them. The echoes of tweets from likeminded individuals painted a distorted picture of reality. Like many other Americans, they woke up and realized that maybe they missed something. They realized that they'd ignored an entire demographic who was frustrated and looking for something different. This disregarded demographic played a major part in electing Donald Trump.

Significance

This research demonstrates that the uses and gratifications theory is highly relevant to social media research. Specifically, the theory helps provide insights into how people are using Twitter and why. However, this research suggests that Black women use Twitter in their own distinct way which is not accounted for in the theory. While the theory does say that people consume media for different reasons, it does not account for any differences between demographics or media platforms. While the theory does not need to be revised to account for these new platforms, it is important to keep in mind that when applied to these new media platforms, results may look different. Additionally, instead of comparing current results to older uses and gratifications findings, it will be

important to compare to research that looked at new media, such as the Internet, Facebook, etc.

One of the biggest implications of this research is further support for the importance of Black Twitter as an influential group. One practical implication is that these insights will prove valuable for marketers, politicians and other influencers who may be interested in reaching this audience on Twitter. One theoretical implication is that this research contributes to the growing body of research on the uses and gratifications of social media, specifically Twitter. In the age of digital media, this theory can be applied to many new media, including the various social media channels.

As expected with any research endeavor, there were limitations that need to be addressed and one day overcome. One limitation of this research was the sample size. Further research should be conducted with a large random sample of Twitter users from this demographic. While this sample might be representative of millennial Black women in large southern cities, future research should aim to be representative of Black women in America. Additional insights could be uncovered through focus groups with more young Black women.

As mentioned above, a second limitation presented itself during the content analysis due to the nature of the Advanced Search function on Twitter. While these results may suggest that Black women are using Twitter to interact with their friends and express opinions, a different search may yield completely different results based on what is displayed in the Twitter search. Future research should ensure that all data is captured in real time to ensure the most accurate content analysis possible. To achieve this, a researcher would have to go to each user's page to ensure they capture complete and

reliable data. Finally, future researchers should consider coding for valence to gain

insights into the feelings surrounding particular events. For example, based on this

content analysis, one could easily assume the tone surrounding the election was negative,

while the tone surrounding Beyoncé on the Country Music Awards was positive.

Finally, further research on members of this demographic's Twitter use should be

conducted in a less political time period. It would be interesting to compare these results

with a time when a presidential election is not taking place to see if the results are similar.

However, it is interesting to consider whether such a time will ever exist.

Despite its limitations, this study is important as it appears to be the first research

study focused specifically how millennial Black women are using Twitter to engage

politically and otherwise. Additionally, this research offers both quantitative and

qualitative insights which provides a more comprehensive story of how millennial Black

women are using Twitter right now. This is important because social media is forever

changing and how Twitter is being used now might be different than how it is being used

in six months. As a researcher who is a Black woman, part of this demographic, the hope

is that further research is conducted and that this body of research grows. These findings

lay the foundation for deeper future research focusing on this demographic.

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