

In the short yet detrimental age of social media we find ourselves in, we as humans have become accustomed to the constant presence of being online. We are also accustomed to seeing world news play out in front of our eyes, whether it be on television, our computer screens, and more commonly now, on our cell phones. Events and movements such as Black Lives Matter, March for Our Lives, and even our most recent presidential campaign, the use of social media has skyrocketed the meaning of what it is to be connected to our world. Social media has transformed from a place of casual sharing to a socio-political entity that transcends beyond geographical borders and influences political outcomes. I will explore this theory using Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media*, among other sources to support this argument.

Before the advancement in social media, websites like MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter were places to share pictures, add friends, and write random things to share with friends. Today, that much is still true, but there has been a monumental shift in what it means to be on social media. As stated in our textbook, "definitions of media and audiences have dramatically changed... the dominance of mainstream media has been challenged by the rise of citizen journalism and web-based media produced by citizen-users" (Sturken/Cartwright). Our political climate over the past 10 years has shifted due in part to the role social media plays in our everyday lives. In 2012, when Trayvon Martin, an unarmed 17 year old black kid was shot by George Zimmerman, a volunteer neighborhood watchman. When Zimmerman was acquitted of murdering

Martin, the Black Lives Matter movement was founded and became a catalyst for black social justice. In the following years, many more unarmed black people were shot and killed by white perpetrators without proper justice. In more cases than not, the murderers were never acquitted or escaped jail time one way or another, only escalating the frustration among people online. The trending tag, #BlackLivesMatter infiltrated the social world making it impossible to miss no matter what social media website you found yourself on. In many of these black killings, bystander videos and police body-cam footage shows the brutality and trend of such events. In the case of the shooting of Walter Scott, an unarmed black man, we see the police man shooting Scott as he attempts to flee the scene. Pulled over for a broken taillight, Scott lost his life like many others in similar instances. The injustice doesn't end there, the police report contradicts the bystander video which set a movement questioning the credibility of police reporting of violent incidents. Becoming "citizen journalists", this live footage being captured has the power to influence justice for those being victimized. Our book eloquently presents this argument, "The vast evidence demonstrates the power of the image to incite deep emotional responses, social movements, and public engagement" (Sturken/Cartwright). It is somewhat engraved in us as humans of this 21st century to take out our phones and document our daily lives. We share our meals to Instagram, our parties to snapchat, our random thoughts to twitter, and police brutality to Facebook live. Much like the Black Lives Matter movement, the March for Our Lives movement has had the same effect but with different degrees of severity.

The Columbine shooting in 1999 was the catalyst of countless school shootings to terrorize the idea of safety on school campuses across our country. The idea that your child could die from being shot to death has become more and more prevalent today than ever before. It wasn't until the Stoneman Douglas school shooting in Florida that prompted the social movement, March for Our Lives, a student/survivor founded demonstration that called upon legislature to put an end to the sale and distribution of guns and weaponry. The demographic, both affected by and geared towards, are young teenagers in high school who are most affected by such events as Stoneman Douglas. This age group also happens to be the most socially savvy, as the March for Our Lives campaign was built on social media, and navigated the age group to act politically perhaps for the first time in this generation. Some student survivors of the shooting, Emma Gonzalez, David Hogg, and Cameron Kasky advocated on March 14, the national walk out for the movement, for students to walk out of school in protest of gun violence. To get the attention across nationally, several hashtags were created to get the movement trending. On that date alone, twitter users accumulated 3.6 million tweets with the hashtag #MarchForOurLives (Deng). The movement didn't stop online, co-founder, David Hogg called on companies who placed ads on conservative talk shows like Laura Ingraham on Fox News to pull their ads after she taunted him on twitter for being denied by several college applications. This all transpired over tweets within matter of hours, and the power that one students tweet had over an established news anchor only proves the power of social media and the its new power as "citizen

journalism". Its effect on our political arena even is found from our political leaders, using online resources for their own citizen journalism.

Ever since his announcement of running for president, Donald Trump has amped up his social media usage, more so than the typical teenage demographic as it would seem. With years of countless jabs against political foes and other famous people he deems as foes, Trump's activity on social media takes on a whole new meaning of understanding media. With freedom of speech on his side, and the adoration of many, Trump uses twitter to communicate with his base and occasionally discuss trade deals with foreign adversaries. Other than riling up his base of supporters and enablers, Trump's tweets often face several consequences. Delegitimizing news organizations such as MSNBC and CNN, deeming them to be "fake news" and "the enemy of the people", creates this false episteme amongst his loyalists. Such a direct connection to those who trust and believe in him are being fed what he believes, or does not believe, to be factual and the word of truth. With this, we are seeing a whole new landscape of media globalization, and what it means to be president. In an investigation conducted by The New York Times, they argue that, "Like no other modern president, Mr. Trump has publicly harangued businesses to advance his political goals and silence criticism, often with talk of government intervention" (Daniel). With over 5800 tweets since his election on personal attacks towards people, nations, etc., Trump has used his platform as president to also virtually shout foreign policies. In 2018 when a caravan of refugees from South America reached the US border, Trump tweeted, "If unable to do so I will call up the U.S. Military and CLOSE OUR

SOUTHERN BORDER!” (The New York Times). With such a hasty promise with no affirmation from anyone in his administration, Trump stirred the social pot and let it overflow. Even today, Trump still uses his online presence as an outlet to share policy which some may argue is a risk to our country’s safety. He is taking the use of Twitter for his own citizen journalism and with every tweet he creates political controversy. The idea that media serves social justice political movements is omnipresent in the presidents twitter feed.

It is evident that social media plays an important role in our lives, while sharing photos of our meals is one angle, using social media for its awareness and political gain has changed the way we communicate and view news. With so much power, comes even more responsibility, yet as we have seen, that message does not resonate with everyone. The book puts it best when it says, “we see the potential of social media to facilitate and support agency and control of visual dynamics by resistance movements... we have a complex interaction of individual agency and social media networking with broadcast and mass media venues” (Sturken/Cartwright).

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