

Digital Movement of Opinion #BLACKLIVESMATTER in Creating Public Opinion About Black Lives Matter

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Abstract

#BlackLivesMatter is still used by netizens to express opinions about the Black Lives Matter movement which is still developing today. In April 2021, the court ruled for Derek Chauvin, the police officer who shot George Floyd. In addition, there are still many shootings of black citizens in the United States and various other countries. This study aims to determine the spread of #BlackLivesMatter and public opinion on Twitter during 20 – 27 April 2021 regarding Black Lives Matter. This research uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative method is used to see the distribution of 2,500 sample tweets using Netlytic.org and Gephi. The qualitative method is conducted to analyze public opinion about Black Lives Matter. The theory used is Computer-Mediated Communication, Public Space, and Critical Discourse Analysis. The results showed that opinions were dominated by positive opinions with 71.76%, negative opinions with 13.08% and irrelevant opinions with 15.16%. The positive opinions are dominant because they have succeeded in creating empathy, anger, and criticism, have political interests, and are voiced by political elite accounts, media, NGOs, and celebrities. Negative opinions are voiced by two main political elites and Twitter users who are not well known so they are considered personal opinions. Irrelevant opinions are voiced by Twitter users in more private spaces and are used to attract public attention.

Keywords: Black Lives Matter; Computer-Mediated Communication; Digital Movement of Opinion; Public Opinion; Social Network Analysis

Introduction

Black Lives Matter first appeared in 2013, following the acquittal of a white police officer named George Zimmerman who shot and killed Trayvon Martin, a black man. Black Lives Matter then developed and was voiced by netizens using #BlackLivesMatter on various social media. #BlackLivesMatter reached its peak in May 2020 when George Floyd, a 46-year-old black man was killed by Derek Chauvin, a white police officer in Minneapolis,

Minnesota on May 25, 2020. At that time #BlackLivesMatter was uploaded by 47.8 million on Twitter or an average of 3.7 million per day from May 26 to June 7.

Protests demanding justice for Floyd spread across the United States and several other countries, followed by an increase in the use of #BlackLivesMatter which reached one million tweets on May 27, 2020. On May 28, nearly 8.8 million tweets contained #BlackLivesMatter—making it the use of

#BlackLivesMatter highest for this hashtag in a day since Twitter started tracking its use (Anderson et al., 2020). The use of the hashtag made the Black Lives Matter movement get public attention. Some parties give their support but some give negative comments about the movement.

A study shows that Black Lives Matter has been largely managed online via Twitter and other social media platforms (Bordonaro & Willits, 2018). Guillard in Storer & Rodriguez (2020) state that campaigns using social media have the potential to increase individual awareness and knowledge about social problems. One way to increase campaigns on social media is to use hashtags. According to Eriyanto (2019), hashtags have an important position in the Digital Movement of Opinion (DMO). According to Airoidi et al. (2019), DMO is a form of public opinion and social movement by voicing messages for or against a policy.

#BlackLivesMatter was back on Twitter on April 20 to 27, 2021, when Derek Chauvin was found guilty of what he did to Floyd and a black girl named Ma'khia Bryant was shot by a white cop named Nicholas Reardon. The public was busy voicing their opinions using #BlackLivesMatter on Twitter, creating a digital opinion movement during this period. The opinions formed are positive (supporting BLM), negative (against BLM), or even have nothing to do with the movement.

Research on the digital opinion movement has been conducted by Eriyanto (2019) with the title *Hashtags and Digital Movement of Opinion Mobilization: A Social Network Analysis/SNA Study on #BubarkanKPAI vs #KamiBersamaKPAI Hashtags*. The results of this study indicate that #BubarkanKPAI is better able to create opinion mobilization when compared to #KamiBersamaKPAI because it is more emotional, has a clear frame, and can create narrative imagination.

Research on the digital opinion movement was conducted by Prihantoro et al. (2021) with the title *Digital Movement of Opinion Mobilization: A SNA Study on #Dirumahaja Vs #Pakaimasker*. The research shows that #Dirumahaja is better able to create opinion mobilization when compared to #Pakaimasker because it can reach more actors to give their opinions regarding health campaigns during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In addition, research on the digital opinion movement was also conducted by Rakhman et al. (2021) (2021) entitled *#Indonesiaterserah Digital Opinion Movement on Twitter Social Media during the Covid-19 Pandemic*. The result of this research shows that #IndonesiaTerserah succeeded in creating opinion mobilization which was dominated by the opinion of disappointment to the public 32%, to the government 21%, to both 11% and interpreted differently by 36%.

Based on the explanation above, researchers conducted a study entitled "Digital Movement of Opinion #BLACKLIVESMATTER in Creating Public Opinion About Black Lives Matter" to find out the #BlackLivesMatter digital opinion movement in creating public opinion that was created on April 20-27 2021 on Twitter. This research focuses on global issues using the well-known hashtag, #BlackLivesMatter. This research also focuses on knowing public opinion about Black Lives Matter by looking at its digital movements of opinion on Twitter.

Theoretical Framework

Eriyanto (2019) states that the digital opinion movement was born as a manifestation of technological development, especially social media which ultimately creates a virtual network between users. Prihantoro et al (2021) state that social media plays an important role in expressing opinions and increasing public participation in a movement. The digital opinion movement on social media tends to be spontaneous and becomes a channel of expression for social media users (Tjahyana, 2019). Moreover, the opinion in the digital opinion movement is only temporary and is often triggered by an emotional response.

The digital opinion movement consists of various spontaneous online movements from the general public which later turn into an active public. Barisione & Ceron (2017) mention several characteristics of the digital opinion movement, namely: (1) Not politically divided. Opinions formed are usually positive or negative; (2) Not categorized socially. Opinion movements are carried out across sectors, all social groups can be involved; (3) Not formally organized; (4) Not sustainable, only lasts a short time.

Public Opinion

Public opinion is the totality of individual attitudes or beliefs held by a population (e.g. city or country) (Syahputra, 2018). According to James Bryces, public opinion is a collection of opinions about issues that can influence and attract public interest or attention in a particular area. Meanwhile, according to William G. Summer in Tosepu (2018), public opinion is defined as the power that exists in society. This definition emphasizes that if an opinion is held by many people then that opinion is assumed to be true. An opinion is said to be public opinion when people voice their opinion otherwise it will only be a personal opinion. Public opinion is conveyed in a public space that has the following requirements (Syahputra, 2018): (1) The formation of public opinion; (2) All citizens have access; (3) There is freedom of assembly, association, expression, and expression; (4) Open space for debate over general rules.

Social Network Analysis

Rafita in Prihantoro et al. (2021) defines SNA as a method used to visualize activity and connection strength and identify interactions that are formed in a social network. According to Tjahyana (2019), SNA is a method used to analyze and describe the structure of social networks. Nooy et al., (2018) stated that SNA studies social relationships between actors to detect and interpret patterns that occur. Tsvetovat and Kouznetsov in Setatama & Tricahyono (2017) state that SNA is a science that studies the relationship between entities with the help of graph theory.

Based on some of the definitions above, simply SNA can be interpreted as a method to find out the relationship between actors in a social network. The network can simply be defined as a set of actors who have relationships with other actors in certain types of relationships (Eriyanto, 2014). Actors (nodes) are not always individuals but can also be an organization, a country, an institution, or a company. The actors have a relationship called a link (edge) which is represented in the form of a line.

Theory of Computer-Mediated Communication

Littlejohn & Foss (2009) define computer-mediated communication (CMC) as all forms of communication mediated using digital technology. A telephone call can be said

to be CMC if it is converted into digital codes which are then disseminated to the public. Phone calls can be spread, deleted, and forwarded to anyone which will have an impact on how much and how long a person uses them. CMC emphasizes the word communication so that what is in the spotlight is digital communication that is formed between two or more people. This communication creates interactivity or interactivity between the people involved.

Public Space Theory

According to Sari & Siahainenia (2015), public space can be defined as an open social space so that people can build opinions and express themselves without any pressure or coercion. A similar definition is expressed by Simarmata (2014) who defines public space as a vehicle for citizens to express opinions to each other to achieve mutual understanding and interests. Habermas in Nasrullah (2012) states several criteria that are owned by the public sphere. The first criterion is the neglect of status or disregard of status in which the public sphere does not question the difference in status with the ruling authority. The second criterion is that the public sphere focuses on the domain of common concern. The third criterion is the existence of inclusivity regardless of the exclusivity of the public. The ideas discussed in particular do not become the absolute property of members of the public. The idea is disseminated through public media so that it can be accessed by anyone.

The existence of new media creates a virtual public space which is an artificial 'imaginary space' or 'virtual' so that the public can do anything in a new way. Sari & Siahainenia (2015) mention several interesting things possessed by virtual public spaces, namely: (1) Hidden actor identities; (2) Political issues spread widely, quickly, without boundaries of space and time; (3) People finally develop their lives through networks.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used to analyze the contents of 2,500 samples of #BlackLivesMatter tweets. Dijk in Syukri et al. (2020) states that critical discourse analysis is used to analyze several topics such as politics, race, and social class. Fairclough in Simanjuntak (2018) states that the purpose of critical discourse analysis is to explore the

relationship of victims to events, culture, and various other topics. To find out the meaning of the text as a whole, Dijk in Syukri et al. (2020) divides the text into three levels, namely macrostructure (general meaning related to culture, politics, and other elements), superstructure (text structure related to the context of the text) and microstructure (text analysis through words, sentences or phrases used).

Material and Methodology

This study uses a mixed method by combining quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative method is used to see the distribution of 2,500 tweet samples using Netlytic.org to find out which tweets need to be researched. Qualitative method is conducted to analyze public opinion about the Black Lives Matter movement using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The paradigm of this research is positivistic. According to Samsu (2017), the positivistic paradigm pays attention to events on the surface, providing operational meaning that aims to predict based on certainty.

This study uses a descriptive type which aims to describe the facts contained in the research subject in a systematic, factual, and accurate manner. This research approach is Social Network Analysis (SNA) which is used to visualize the connections that occur in a social network. The subjects of this research are 2,500 tweets and Twitter users who use #BlackLivesMatter on 20-27 April 2021. The object of this research is the public opinion of account owners who uploaded

#BlackLivesMatter tweets in the period 20-27 April 2021.

Result and Discussion

The public uses Twitter to express opinions through the tweets they upload. Researchers have taken 2,500 tweets that are used as samples to find out public opinion created through the use of #BlackLivesMatter during the period of 20-27 April 2021. Researchers divide tweets into three categories, namely: (1) Supporting the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement or positive opinion; (2) Opposing the BLM movement or negative opinion; (3) Irrelevant to the BLM movement.

These three categories are based on the previous research conducted by Prihantoro et al. (2021) which divides opinion into supporting (positive opinion), not supporting (negative opinion), and others (irrelevant opinion).

Based on the analysis of #BlackLivesMatter, 1,794 tweets, or 71.76% contain positive opinions, 327 tweets or 13.08% contain negative opinions, and 379 tweets, or 15.16% are not related to the new social movement BLM. This positive opinion contains opinions demanding justice for the black community, condemning the police, anti-racism messages, and asking for justice for the People of Color (POC) and other communications. Negative opinions contain opinions that doubt the attitude of BLM leaders, assessing BLM as a failed organization and a terrorist organization. Irrelevant Opinion contains deleted, irrelevant opinions, and #BlackLivesMatter is used as the format.

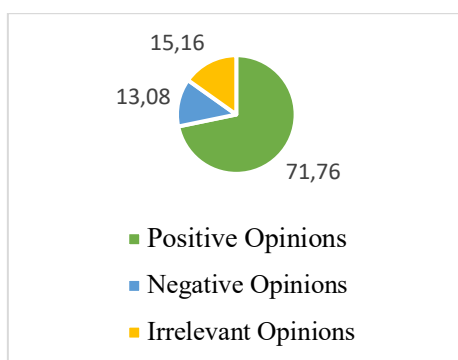


Figure 1. Percentage of Opinion Using #BlackLivesMatter Period 20 – 27 April 2021
Source: Research Results (2021)

Positive Opinions Related to Black Lives Matter

Positive opinions using #BlackLivesMatter dominated public opinion created in the period of 20 – 27 April 2021 on Twitter with 71.76%. This figure shows that the public gave a positive response and considered #BlackLivesMatter, the new social movement Black Lives Matter, to be a movement that could bring changes. The public is taking

advantage of the existence of #BlackLivesMatter to demand justice for the victims and other communities. In addition, they also use #BlackLivesMatter to attack the police. Other issues are also linked to #BlackLivesMatter relating to public liberties, anti-racism, and anti-discrimination. The hashtag is often used in tweets with political overtones between Democrats and Republicans.

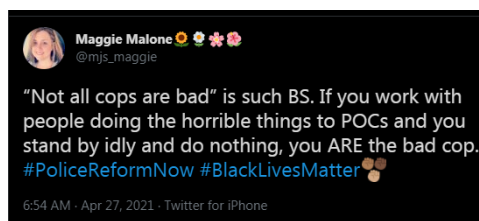


Figure 2. Positive Opinions Related to Black Lives Matter
Source: Twitter.com (2021)

Positive opinions managed to dominate the opinions created during this period because based on the spread of hashtags, four of the five actors who had the highest degree of centrality were actors who uploaded positive opinions. Actors with the highest degree of centrality show that these actors have a high level of interaction. The actors uploaded a positive opinion related to Black Lives Matter which was then liked, retweeted, and retweeted quotes which could eventually spread positive opinion more widely.

In addition, positive opinions using #BlackLivesMatter contain emotional opinions uploaded by Twitter users. This emotional opinion is a continuation of the opinion period of May 17 – June 3, 2021, when the public wrote emotional tweets related to Floyd's death. The emotional opinion contains an empathetic opinion for the black community who were victims of the shooting. In addition to the black community, the empathetic opinion is also addressed to other communities that experience racism and discrimination. Tweets are also dominated by anger and criticism from netizens against the police or other parties who often carry out racism and discrimination against the black community and other communities.

Airoldi et al. (2019) state that the Digital Movement of Opinion (DMO) is influenced by emotions in the form of empathy or anger. The existence of this emotional opinion will bring a

hashtag to be discussed often and prevent different opinions in the digital public space. Positive opinions using #BlackLivesMatter show a lot of emotional opinions so that they are successful in attracting public attention, making them dominant opinions. However, Airoldi et al. (2019) also explain that the emotional side makes DMO last relatively short. #BlackLivesMatter lasts a short time, demanding justice for the victims but doesn't last long because there will be new victims so opinions can last a long time, only changes or shifts in issues occur. The existence of the Black Lives Matter movement which demonstrates by voicing positive opinions has made it long-lasting as a digital opinion movement.

Airoldi et al. (2019) stated there are several prerequisites for the existence of a DMO, including issues that contain emotion, public interest, and political relevance, and succeed in attracting the media to cover. These prerequisites are owned by #BlackLivesMatter which is dominated by emotional opinions of several parties, contains the public interest, especially for communities that experience discrimination, and relates to American politics where the Black Lives Matter movement has the support of Democrats and is opposed by Republicans and Black Lives Matter is often covered by the media, especially if killings or shootings of black communities and other

communities. So, #BlackLivesMatter is a digital opinion movement that is used to show positive opinions regarding the new social movement Black Lives Matter.

Positive opinions that support Black Lives Matter can become public opinion because of the influence of Twitter users who voice their opinions. Twitter users consisting of political elites, media, politicians, NGOs, celebrities, and ordinary netizens flocked to their opinions to ask for justice for the black community, criticizing the police, and various other positive issues. NGOs are actors who quite often voice positive opinions about BLM. Many official and unofficial NGOs are using Twitter to voice their opinions as part of the new social movement Black Lives Matter. In addition, several celebrities also have opinions that are then retweeted or liked by their millions of followers. Some political elites and anti-mainstream media also take advantage of the existence of #BlackLivesMatter to describe their political positions and in-depth investigations into the movement.

Negative Opinions Related to Black Lives Matter

Although #BlackLivesMatter from April 20 – 27 was dominated by opinions in favor of the movement, there were some votes against and against BLM with 13.08%. This figure is the smallest among the two other categories.

Although the figure is small, the existence of counter opinions should not be ignored. Twitter users who write contra opinions regarding BLM use Twitter as an opinion space even though their opinions are against the dominant public opinion. When expressing opinion, there were many rejections but many people also agreed and finally doubted the Black Lives Matter movement.

The presence of Black Lives Matter has raised pros and cons from the start. The public considers the movement to be exclusive because it only voices rights for the black community and does not voice the same rights for other communities. So, came #AllLivesMatter as a counter to #BlackLivesMatter, #AllLivesMatter was created to represent the voice of all communities that they too want to be treated fairly. The public then judged that Black Lives Matter was part of the racism that only focused on one race and ignored other races. The Black Lives Matter activists then responded that they formed the BLM not to ignore other communities but rather to the fact that the black community is often the victim of racism and that they require a special movement. This opinion finally influenced the opinion on Twitter during the period of 20 – 27 April which judged BLM as an exclusive, failed, and terrorist organization, and doubted its leadership role.



Figure 3. Negative Opinions Related to Black Lives Matter
Source: Twitter.com (2021)

The existence of negative opinion, even if it is of little value, shows that the new social movement Black Lives Matter is still not seen as a perfect movement. Some negative opinions managed to get quite a lot of likes, retweets, and quote retweets because they were echoed by two prominent political elites, namely @JeanMessiha and @JLPtalk. Even

@JeanMessiha is the actor with the highest degree of centrality, which means that many Twitter users interact with the account. @JeanMessiha and @JLPtalk are political figures who have enough supporters so that their opinions are often liked, retweeted, and retweeted quotes.

Unlike @JeanMessiha and @JLPtalk, some other negative opinions come from small accounts that don't have many followers so they don't have a strong enough echo. Because the account is not too big, the public thinks that negative opinions are just unreasonable personal opinions so they don't get many likes, retweets, and retweets quotes from other Twitter users.

Irrelevant Opinion Related to Black Lives Matter

Opinions are not relevant to BLM since #BlackLivesMatter is only used as a format, the uploaded tweet has no relationship with or is not relevant to BLM, the tweet has been deleted and cannot be accessed because the account has been suspended or is locked so that researchers

cannot analyze the tweets uploaded. Irrelevant Tweets have a greater value than negative opinions with 15.06%. Deleted opinions and inaccessible opinions mean they want to be hidden from the public for personal reasons. One of the reasons is the fact that Black Lives Matter is a sensitive issue because it is directly related to racial and political issues. Twitter users finally tweeted #BlackLivesMatter in a more private scope or even deleted it after uploading the tweet. Twitter users do not want to risk endorsements or overreactions from other publics that do not match the tweets they are tweeting. In addition, Twitter users take advantage of #BlackLivesMatter to attract the attention of a wider public so that they can promote their accounts or products.

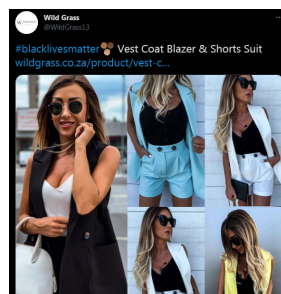


Figure 4. Irrelevant Opinions Related to Black Lives Matter
Source: Twitter.com (2021)

Public Opinion #BlackLivesMatter in the Perspective of Computer-Mediated Communication Theory and Public Space Theory

Twitter users interact with each other through devices and create communication with computer media to create positive, negative, or irrelevant opinions about Black Lives Matter. The interactivity created among Twitter users using #BlackLivesMatter is following Computer-Mediated Communication Theory. The interactivity created is indicated by a reply or quote tweet that allows Twitter users to give their response about #BlackLivesMatter. This interactivity can be synchronous or asynchronous, depending on when Twitter users interact with each other. If they use #BlackLivesMatter to interact directly, the interactivity created is synchronous communication.

The responses given can produce different opinions in the form of positive,

negative, or irrelevant opinions. These different responses will have an impact on public opinion created in the digital public space. According to Baym in Littlejohn & Foss (2009), this difference occurs due to several factors, namely: 1) the external context, 2) the temporal structure of the group, 3) the infrastructure of the computer, 4) the purpose of using CMC and 5) the characteristics of the parties involved.

The external context consists of language, accent, and location. #BlackLivesMatter first appeared in the United States and was tweeted in English. The United States is a country that is often directly related to Black Lives Matter because many black communities experience discrimination there. The public sees Black Lives Matter as an effort to seek justice in the United States, so that they flock to give positive opinions and justice for the black community can be realized. Opinions are written in English, which is the global language, making it easier for Twitter users in

other countries to understand the meaning of #BlackLivesMatter and thus support the movement. If #BlackLivesMatter did not happen in America and did not use English, the meaning of the hashtag might not be conveyed properly and would not receive a positive response from the public.

The second factor is the temporal structure of the group consisting of synchronous or asynchronous communication. Opinions formed in the period of 20–27 April 2021 using #BlackLivesMatter consist of tweets that receive a direct response (synchronous communication) and are dominated by indirect responses (asynchronous communication).

Asynchronous communication allows opinions to be created not only from tweets for the 20-27 April period but tweets outside that period are only tweeted for the 20-27 April 2021 period. This response was mostly given by the public who retweeted old tweets of celebrities who support BLM. Even the tweets tweeted by @BTS_twt in June 2020 were still frequently retweeted in the 20–27 April 2021 period. The existence of old opinions from celebrities who support Black Lives Matter made the public finally give a positive reaction to the movement.

The third factor is computer infrastructure such as internet speed and existing technology. #BlackLivesMatter is voiced by people from all walks of life who want to speak out for justice for the black community and other communities. To convey this opinion on Twitter, the public must have a qualified infrastructure such as good internet speed. Based on a survey conducted by Civis Analytics, the public who supports BLM through demonstrations is dominated by people aged below 35 years with an income of USD 150,000. This shows that the issue of BLM is widely voiced by people who have good income so that they can be assumed to have a good computer infrastructure. Hence, the public or Twitter users can voice their positive opinions about Black Lives Matter on Twitter regularly or periodically.

The fourth factor is the purpose of using computer-mediated communication (CMC). The use of computers or digital media in DMO is to spread public opinion widely and quickly. The presence of digital media that makes it possible to reach the public in various regions at the same time allows them to voice their opinions to each other. Thus, when a Twitter

user who voices a positive opinion about Black Lives Matter uses Twitter (digital media) to reach out to the public widely, then they will have the same opinion as him. This positive opinion is finally liked, retweeted, or retweeted by other Twitter users, redistributed by their followers and then spread again by their other followers and so on to create positive opinions about Black Lives. Matter.

The fifth factor is the characteristics of Twitter users who tweeted #BlackLivesMatter consisting of various economic, political, educational, occupational, and social status backgrounds. Many positive opinions using #BlackLivesMatter are voiced by accounts that have a good educational background such as those of political elites, NGOs, and the media. By assuming that they are smart people, their opinion is correct and the public finally consider Black Lives Matter to be a positive movement. In addition, #BlackLivesMatter is not a light and sensitive issue so that Twitter users do not carelessly tweet opinions related to the hashtag. They will try to show their position by voicing an argument that can be accepted by the public so that it can be assumed that they have a piece of fairly good background knowledge. But some accounts only use #BlackLivesMatter for irrelevant issues or retweet the hashtag just to show their position without any particular reason.

In their opinion, Twitter users use Twitter as a public space to express opinions and discuss them with one another other without any pressure from the government or other parties. Twitter users express opinions or opinions about #Blac through uploaded tweets. Apart from tweets, their opinions can also be seen from retweets, quote tweets, and likes in tweets of other actors related to #BlackLivesMatter. Opinions formed using these hashtags can influence the government in making and executing policies. Habermas in Nasrullah (2012) states that the criteria of the public sphere are neglect of status, focus on the domain of common concern, and inclusiveness. Based on these criteria, Twitter is rightly a public space to voice #BlackLivesMatter

Conclusions

Opinions using #BlackLivesMatter in the period of 20 – 27 April 2021 were dominated by opinions supporting the new social movement Black Lives Matter or positive opinions with 1,794 tweets or 71.76%.

Positive opinion consists of various topics such as demanding justice for the black community, condemning the police, anti-racism messages, and asking for justice for the People of Color (POC) and other communities. Negative opinions consist of 327 tweets or 13.08% and contain opinions such as doubting the attitude of BLM leaders and assessing BLM as a failed organization and a terrorist organization. Opinions irrelevant to the new social movement Black Lives Matter comprised 379 tweets or 15.16% and consisted of opinions that were deleted, irrelevant, and #BlackLivesMatter was used as a format. The positive opinions are dominant because they have succeeded in creating emotions in the form of empathy, anger, and criticism of several parties, have political interests, and are voiced by political elite accounts, media, NGOs, and celebrities who provide support for Black Lives Matter. Negative opinions are only voiced by the two main political elites as well as Twitter users who are not well known so they are considered personal opinions. Irrelevant opinions are voiced by Twitter users in a more private space and are used to attract public attention.

Further research can examine #BlackLivesMatter using qualitative methods by conducting interviews with leaders or movers of the Black Lives Matter movement as well as using quantitative methods by distributing questionnaires to the public regarding their responses to BLM.

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